

Modernity and Nationalism

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This review essay surveys scholarly work from the nineteenth century to the present concerning the relationship between modernity and nationalism and its effects on how scholars view the constitutive and causal significance of nationalism for international politics. The chapter outlines the interdisciplinary lineage of much contemporary International Relations (IR) work as connected to primordialist, modernist, and ethno-symbolic theories of nationalism. The position of each as to the pre-modern or modern etiology of nationalism has been one of the bases for paradigmatic organization. Although the fields of history, sociology, and anthropology continue to have vibrant and, in most cases, productive debates concerning the historical origins of nations and nationalism, contemporary IR scholars tend to rely on a relatively thin slice of a very diverse literature and generally accept the perspective of the “modernist” paradigm on the origins of nationalism. Much of the skepticism of theories positing the existence of pre-modern nations centers on the undeniable impact of modern social, economic, and political institutions. This wary eye is also due to the understandable postwar disaffection and unease of many academics towards belief in nationalism (Posen 1993: 80), as well as the dominance over the past half century of more economic approaches to the study of politics, which readily jell with the modernist approach. Yet this somewhat blinkered view of one of the most important and enduring subjects of interest in the social sciences

has a significant effect on how IR scholars approach a variety of puzzles and areas of interest. Broader incorporation of other schools in the study of nationalism may improve our understanding of a variety of subjects, including the ontological foundations of the state, the evolution of sovereignty, the comparative long-term performance of some of the Great Powers, the relative conflict propensity of systems as related to identity, the prospects and pitfalls of using findings from the new brain science in the study of identity formation, and the ongoing failure of numerous attempts to remake the world in the West's own image.

The chapter proceeds in three parts. The second section briefly examines the renewed interest in the role of nationalism in international politics and potential limitations inherent to the current near-exclusive focus on modernist conceptions of national collective identity. Next, a review of the literature past and present is provided. This exegesis emphasizes relatively consistent interdisciplinary connections with current IR scholarship over a long period of time, as well as a critical assessment of the analytical shortcomings and gaps revealed vis-à-vis the relationship between nationalism and modernity. The essay concludes with an evaluation of possible avenues for analytical exploration and further research.

I. Rediscovering Nationalism

Much ink has been spilt describing the renewal of interest among IR scholars in nationalism. The 1990s saw an enormous increase in analytical attention to identity in general and nationalism in particular (cf. Posen 1993; Kupchan 1995; Katzenstein 1996; Lake & Rothchild 1998; Cronin 1999; Hall 1999; Kaufman 2001; Hopf 2002; Fearon 1999 provides a useful survey). No doubt this shift in emphasis away from the field's

traditional focus on Balance of Power politics had much to do with the radically altered strategic environment following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Although ethnic conflict had been an important feature of the Cold War period (Ayres 2000), the unanticipated ethnic abattoirs of Yugoslavia and Rwanda served as archetypes through which IR scholars tried to understand the new environment. The extensive study of each helped reorient the analytical focus of IR. Other scholars have suggested the “decay of the Weberian state” creates a structurally permissive environment for such conflicts, an argument with a long lineage (Brubaker & Laitin 1998; Herz 1957). Some of this renewed interest also follows from the humanistic turn in IR theory in the mid to late 1980s, which drew from post-positivist ferment in the other social sciences (Onuf 1989: 10). As Friedrich Kratochwil described the state of affairs in an influential edited volume with Yosef Lapid, “we would expect that an interest in culture is particularly noticeable after large-scale dislocations occur that call into question the traditional ways of understanding social reality” (Kratochwil 1996: 202).

However, to the chagrin of some experienced scholars of nationalism, many researchers imported models willy-nilly from other branches of the political science tree, often with little reference to the considerable extant work on the subject (Brubaker 1998). In particular, the return of nationalism to IR came with little interest in theories that did not ascribe an exclusively late modern origin of nationalism. Yet disagreement over the age of nations and nationalism, a question Ernest Gellner famously reconstructed as “do nations have navels?” in a debate with his former student, Anthony Smith (1995), has been an important issue area as old as the study of nationalism (Calhoun 1993). Before the culture and identity renaissance of the 1980s revived interest in nationalism, over the

past century it was an important, if inconsistent, point of contention in much scholarly work in IR.

Since the formation of the discipline of political science and the sub-field of IR, scholars have been divided on the question of the historical origins of nationalism. In contrast to the consensus assumed by many students of international politics, the argument between those who claim nationalism is the product of the post-Enlightenment modern world and scholars who posit a deeper history to some nations has been a relative constant long prior to the latest wave of interest. There has been no interdisciplinary convergence among historians, sociologists, and anthropologists regarding the exact timeline of the emergence of nations and nationalism. Yet much contemporary IR and political science scholarship relating to nations proceeds from the assertion of a relatively simplistic “ancient hatreds/modernist” dichotomy with primordialists often lumped together with scholars who make very different kinds of claims (see for example Roeder 2007: 22).

Disagreement over the historical origins of nationalism influences both the ontological assumptions governing the nature of modernity and nations, as well as important epistemological implications as to how variables are selected and interpreted. How one responds to the modern/pre-modern question substantially affects not only the frame of analysis and the operationalization of variables, but also which variables are ascribed causal importance. As one of the most important scholars of nationalism has noted, where one stands on this issue is rather fundamental (Connor 2004). For example, emphasis on the role of new ideas defined Daniel Thomas’s (2001) evaluation of the “Helsinki Effect” and its role in the collapse of the USSR, while Jan Kubik (1994)

emphasized decidedly pre-modern Catholic symbology and the resonance of Solidarity in Poland to explain the unraveling of the communist regime in Poland. Similarly, Daniel Goldhagen (1996) became one of the most widely read political scientists of the 1990s with a book claiming that Germans were “pregnant with murder” long before the emergence of the Nazi regime. The subsequent controversy over the historical origins of the Holocaust revealed that fundamental fault lines remained in history and the social sciences concerning the relative roles of culture, modernization, and political ideology in genocide (Shandley 1998).

Beyond the salience of such issues in the study of more recent political events, IR scholars should be concerned about the existence of pre-modern nationalism for several additional reasons. First, the endurance of some nations may have had a formative influence on the constitutive components of the territorial state (Ringmar 1996; de Carvahalo 2006). Analysis of pre-modern nations could usefully compliment already insightful explorations of the historical foundations of the state (Spruyt 1994). Second, nationalism figured prominently in the erosion of dynastic territorial sovereignty. Were pre-modern nations to exist, the trans-systemic endurance of these identities may have further implications for future periods of profound systemic change, and the study of earlier such transitions can shed light on future such transformative moments (Cederman 1997; Spruyt 2002). In this context, the existence of pre-modern nations may serve to augment the core assumptions of classical realism concerning the propensity for international conflict as in least in part a function of human nature. Beyond the realist assertion that states are and have always been the primary actors in international politics, IR scholars should also reconsider transnational relationships that are not solely

dependent on the extensive institutional apparatus of the modern state. Instead, we may consider such additional foci as the path-dependent effects of pre-modern diasporas (Cohen 1997) or the study of “inter-human systems” (Buzan, Jones, & Little 1993: 30) and politics and evolving boundaries of political authority and identity in lieu the continued focus on the state as the primary unit of analysis (Ferguson and Mansbach 1996; Conversi 1999; Albert, Jacobson, and Lapid 2001). Certainly members of ENMISA have been on the front lines of promoting such a reorientation, as the essays in this volume attest. But state-centrism still remains the starting point of some of the most influential texts in IR across multiple paradigms (Wendt 1999; Ikenberry 2001; Mearsheimer 2001). Incorporation of a broader range of claims and concepts from scholars in other disciplines who study nationalism will help us better understand subjects of analytical interest from contemporary politics, historical and future systemic transformations, and the origins and structure of the state itself. If nationalism is as old as some scholars argue it is, then alongside the Balance of Power, sovereignty, and international integration it deserves pride of place as one of IR’s “master concepts,” as opposed to being reduced to just another subject of interest (Cederman 2002: 422).

II. From Whence Nations Come: Modernity, Nationalism, and Social Science

Since the establishment the core disciplines of social science, scholars have posited the existence of nations and nationalism long before their modern manifestation. Initially, historians, sociologists, and political scientists proposing the ancient ties of modern nations were themselves embedded in the politics of the nationalism they studied. The early nationalist scholarship of J.G. von Herder (1791), Heinrich von Treitschke (1896), and Ernest Renan (1882) was eventually succeeded beginning in the 1940s by more

scientific treatments of the subject by Hans Kohn (1944) and Karl Deutsch (1953; 1966). Led by Ernest Gellner (1983), Eric Hobsbawm (1983; 1990), and Benedict Anderson (1983), the subsequent modernist thesis that nationalism was an identity with a purely modern morphology has achieved near-consensus in post-Cold War IR scholarship, as well as political science writ large (cf. Soysal 1994; Campbell 1998; Cronin 1999; Hall 1999; Bukovansky 2002; Checkel 2007). Yet adherents of the ethno-symbolic and primordialist paradigms have consistently claimed pre-modern nations did exist and fundamentally shaped the political institutions and ideas that succeeded them. Other scholars skeptical of modernist arguments have pursued a more nuanced middle position, noting the influence of pre-modern ideas in the formation of national collective identity, but remaining unwilling to characterize these ideas as constituting nations per se. These two schools of thought have included influential scholars from multiple disciplines, including sociologists Edward Shils (1957), Pierre van der Berghe (1978; 1981), and Anthony Smith (1983; 1998; 2004); historians Johan Huizinga (1972), John Armstrong (1982), Susan Reynolds (1984), Adrian Hastings (1997), Philip Gorski (2000), Stephen Grosby (2002), and Aviel Roshwald (2006); political scientists John Stack (1986), Walker Connor (1994), and Stephen Van Evera (2001); and anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz (1963) and Francisco Gil-White (1999).

Before surveying the interdisciplinary connections between IR and other social sciences concerned with the central theme of the chapter, some terminological clarifications are in order. For purposes of this essay, modernity is defined as the set of political, economic, and social institutions established following the erosion of feudalism in Western Europe, a process that began roughly in the sixteenth century with the

Protestant Reformation and the Scientific Revolution, reaching its first complete articulation with the Enlightenment during the eighteenth century. The resultant delegitimation of universal Catholic Christendom and the emergence of science and bureaucratic rationalism wrought profound changes upon the organization of social life (Weber 1978). These changes culminated in the emergence of modern territorial state, which possesses legal rights as if it were a person, chief of which is juridical sovereignty. As John Ruggie notes, “the central attribute of modernity in international politics has been a peculiar and historically unique configuration of territorial space” with the consequent “modes of differentiation [constituting] nothing less than the epochal study of rule” (1993: 144, 152; Murphy 1996; Philpott 2001). The resultant intensification of the general pace of economic activity and the extractive powers of the state created enormous increases in both labor productivity and state military power (Tilly 1975; 1990; Mann 1986; Giddens 1990). Following the tumult of the early modern period, marked by the Thirty Years War so familiar to IR scholars, the modern bureaucratic state achieved its archetypical elaboration during the absolutist period of the eighteenth century, with considerable increase in its size, scope, and power in the centuries that followed.

A relatively uncontroversial definition of nationalism would characterize it as a form of collective identity whose believers are aware of membership in a larger community through a varied combination of shared literature, customs, myths, language, and monuments. Nations are also conscious of a territorial homeland, actual or putative, and are socialized through a combination of shared institutional and cultural experiences, i.e. educational or service in the military; leadership by a self-conscious intellectual, political, or social elite; ritual and ceremony; and socioeconomic processes, such as

industrialization (Weber 1978: 921-926; Anderson 1983: 6-7; Gellner 1983: 1-7; Hobsbawm 1990: 9-12; Greenfeld 1992: 7). Ethnic identities are similarly self-conscious of membership in a collectivity and often may feed into or otherwise support national collective identity, but they are not necessarily equivalent (Gellner 1973; Smith 1986; Barrington 1997). Ethnic groups are marked by a patterns of “affinity/disaffinity,” which Weber noted often have little “objective” basis, but nevertheless carry with them a racialist overtone as “blood communities” (Weber 1978: 388, 394). Nations are also differentiated from ethnic groups in that they contain an endogenous theory of political legitimacy—“the nation is the source of all political power...and national loyalty overrides all other allegiances” (Cederman 2002: 411; Wolff 2007: 32-4).

In the review of the literature that follows, the various accounts will be broken down along the terminology typically used in sociology and history, specifically the primordialist, modernist, and ethno-symbolic paradigms. The purpose of this analytical scheme is twofold. First, it reflects the self-conscious organization of most of the people who study nationalism, of which IR researchers constitute a small, though growing minority. Second, it serves to highlight the relative paucity of IR work referencing non-modernist accounts of nationalism that abound in the other social sciences. Other recent reviews of this literature have employed methodological criteria to demarcate the various arguments in the admittedly chaotic, disconnected literatures on nationalism, ethnicity, and violence (Brubaker & Laitin 1998). Yet the methodological choices made by different scholars are often predicated upon unproblematized background assumptions regarding the relative causal role of modern institutions, such as the state, and the temporality of nations. Thus an analytical structure that puts such issues at the fore makes

these assumptions more transparent, thereby complementing accounts that emphasize methodological choices and criticisms.

In his superb review of the IR nationalism and ethnicity literature, Lars Erik Cederman (2002) chose to distinguish arguments based on their ontological foundations. He divided scholars of nationalism into two camps based upon the ontological status of nations—“essentialists” or “constructivists,” that is, identities either do not vary over time or they are in a constant state of social construction. While on the surface an astute generalization, this division tends to obscure a good deal of the variation within the essentialist camp, as well as perhaps exaggerate the degree to which many conventional constructivist accounts of nationalism are really “constructed.” For example, essentialists include both those scholars who impute an unvarying, primordial status to nationalism based upon biology, as most prominently exemplified by van den Berghe (1981), as well as scholars who suggest that *nations are socially constructed* based upon the emotional attachment to their myths and rituals, but that the requirements for this “usable past” to be stable severely limits the number of potential nations in the world (Smith 1986; 1998; 2004). Several rational choice theorists are also included in the essentialist ontological category (Gagnon 1994/95; Hardin 1995; Kaufman 1996; Fearon & Laitin 1999). Yet the positions taken on the role of human nature by those imputing biology, the historical role of path dependence, or the stability of preferences are distinct—they understand the ontological foundations of social action rather differently from one another. This would seem to be too broad or inclusive of an analytical category to justify abandoning extant ways of understanding the literature.

Simply using the contemporary framework provided by sociologists both addresses the “coding biases” of perceptions (Brubaker & Laitin 1998: 428) and helps unravel the ontological status of nations and nationalism beyond the somewhat misleading essentialist/constructivist dichotomy (Cederman 2002). It also maintains an element of consistency across an interdisciplinary literature that is rapidly growing too large to manage. Finally, such a scheme also highlights the surprising amount of agreement within the modernist paradigm concerning the role of institutions, particularly state institutions, across IR paradigms that typically provide radically different explanations.

Modernists

Much as was the case with IR’s “Second Debate” (Bull 1966; Kaplan 1966), the dividing line between the contemporary and historical literatures is usefully established with the onset of the behavioral revolution in the 1950s and its subsequent effect on IR scholarship. While certainly scholars such as Weber, Durkheim, and Simmel provided extraordinary insight into the subjects they studied and operationalized their variables with great precision, as with the behavioral revolution writ large scholarship on nationalism from the 1950s on generally attempted to increase the level of analytical rigor through empirically testable propositions and greater definitional clarity. Thus even amidst the bedeviling complexity of the subject matter, we see a marked decline in imprecise or inconsistent language. For example, no less of a scholar as Heinz Eulau (1944) attempted to analyze “Soviet nationalism” without differentiating between patriotism and the national interest with the identity called “nationalism,” to say nothing of the dubious plausibility of referring the Stalinist “dictatorship of the proletariat” in

“nationalist” terms. While never entirely disappearing, such analytical improbabilities declined markedly among scholars ascribing to the modernist view of nationalism.

Consequently, several patterns emerge over time within the modernist tradition, although individual scholars may weigh each differently. First and most significant, all modernists argue that nationalism is the product of the specific effects of the modern age, dating roughly to the late Enlightenment or the French Revolution specifically (Kohn 1944). Thus Normal Angell (1930: 70) summarized the view that nation “historically speaking, [nationalism is] quite a new idea,” as “for thousands of years man lived in an organized society in which it did not exist.” Consistent with this thesis, according to one of the most prominent scholars of nationalism, Ernest Gellner (1983), the process of modernization itself creates a “high culture” that must be accessed by the masses of a polity in order to fulfill the functional prerequisites of a modern society. Such culture is transmitted through the power of modern compulsory secondary education and universities. In a brilliant turn of phrase, Gellner argued “At the base of modern social order stands not the executioner but the professor. Not the guillotine, but the (aptly named) *doctorat d’état* is the main tool and symbol of state power. The monopoly of legitimate education is now more important, more central than is the monopoly of legitimate violence” (1983: 34). Demonstrating interdisciplinary continuity across the modernist paradigm, the relative importance of schooling in making the nation was previously argued by both historians and political scientists (Bromage 1941; Pierce 1934).

In much the same vein, one of the foremost IR scholars of nationalism, Karl Deutsch (1953; 1966), anticipated Gellner’s observations concerning the functional fit of

nationalism with modernization. Deutsch argued that nationalism derived from the “complementarity” (1966: 96-98) of the bases for social communication, similar individual preferences deriving from increased social and economic mobility, and the emergence of modern capitalism. Tied to “regional centers” of mobilization (cities), these processes created the social conditions for group identification among the formerly politically disenfranchised lower and middle classes. Thus, much as both Carl Friedrich (1937) and Hans Kohn (1944) had previously suggested concerning the particularly “emotional nationalism” afflicting German rural society, variation in the modernizing pattern determines the specific constellation of nationalist beliefs, elaborated upon to great affect by Liah Greenfeld (1992). Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm (1983; 1990) made a similar argument throughout his prolific career, tying the enormous social dislocation and intensification of state power that came with capitalist industrialization with the eagerness of the bourgeoisie to create political conditions by which all members of society would aspire to their now national values. For each scholar, the resultant socialization of the masses was without historical precedent—thus making the modern age truly the age of nationalism. Finally, IR scholars have noted that varying levels of modernization contribute significantly to patterns of what is usually identified as ethnic conflict, but is in fact the result of the social displacement engendered by neoliberal institutional reforms (Crawford & Lipschutz 1998).

In addition to the macro-process of modernization itself, many modernists emphasize the unprecedented ability of institutions—particularly state institutions—to produce citizens, thus compelling the internalization of elite beliefs in the form of national collective identity. As Ronald Grigor Suny argues (1993: 28), “access to state

institutions or isolation from them profoundly influences the generation of identities.” Similarly, sociologist Rogers Brubaker (1992) suggests that patterns of citizenship laws determine forms of nationalism and resultant relative tolerance. French *jus soli* policy (citizenship by territory of birth) permits admission to the nation and produces relatively greater social harmony, while the German *jus sanguinis* (citizenship by descent) is by definition more exclusionist. IR scholars have argued that militaries have the potential to use their unique ability to impose beliefs upon recruits to either increase their state’s combat power (Posen 1993; though see Krebs 2004). For some modernists, nationalism is purely the efflux of the state (Breuilly 1982; Hobsbawm 1990; Tilly 1990), characterized by Ernst Haas (1993) as part and parcel of the “rationalization of societies” via the political mobilizing power of the state (see also Delanty & O’Mahoney 2002: 28-33). Demonstrating the flexibility of the modernist conceptualization of state and society interactions, some constructivists have employed the institutionalist template of the modernist story of nationalism to explain variation in strategic cultures (Kier 1997) or the endogenous emergence of “Europeans” out of interactions between bureaucrats and diplomats in Brussels and Strasbourg (Checkel 2007).

Other modernists have emphasized the particular effects of modern media on society. Thus French nationalism is in no small part due to bourgeois pamphlets producing the *catéchisme national* (Shafer 1938), while the “vulgar Romanticism” of Hitler and extreme nationalism of his supporters is largely the result of the use of modern media to facilitate emotional reactions to his outrageous claims (Hale 1934; Gurian 1945). Emphasis on the role of different media in the constitution of nationalist beliefs dovetails well with perhaps the most influential study of nationalism, Benedict

Anderson's oft cited (1983) argument concerning the "imagined community" of nationalism, the origins of which lie primarily with the emergence of modern print capitalism. Elite manipulation of the media has also been emphasized by several IR scholars as one of the constitutive elements of national and ethnic identity (Gagnon 1994/95; Kaufman 1996). Similarly, Michael Shapiro (2001) has described the emergence of national collective identity as part of the pattern of homogenization and resistance to state-led musical initiatives in nineteenth century Europe.

Other modernists of an IR bent have emphasized the role of the international system in the forging of national identity. E.H. Carr (1945) analyzed nationalism as it corresponded to three periods in international relations: the first resulting from the erosion of the universalist aspirations following the establishment of the Westphalian system, the second deriving from the aspirations and excesses of the French Revolution, and the third relating to the enormous global expansion of nationalist aspirations during the period from German unification to the Second World War. Throughout, Carr particularly emphasized nationalism's negative historical role in undermining the former role of "the good faith of sovereigns" (29) and impeding the future hope of an internationalism based upon respect for individuals regardless "of national affinity or affiliation" (44). James Mayall (1990: 30) similarly ascribed the role of nationalism as fundamentally eroding the bases of the "war compact" upon which princes had conducted international politics. Much like Carr, Mayall is extremely ambivalent about the role of nationalism in international society. While it has increased the breadth and scope of the institutional and ideological foundations necessary for international society, nationalism has simultaneously bred conditions that have impeded international cooperation. More

recently, some scholars have employed the “double-constructivism” (Cederman 2002) of the simultaneous social construction of nationalism via both domestic forces and the downward push of ideas and pressures from the international system. The global spread of liberal values is strongly related to the American Revolution and the nationalism it spawned (Bukovansky 2002), while nationalist ideas have also served to both legitimate further imperialist expansion and spawn violent nationalist resistance in response (Low 1916; Spykman 1926; Arendt 1953; Hall 1999).

For modernists, nationalism has also paradoxically promoted liberal values and international integration. Much as Marxists viewed capitalism as a necessary evil in the teleological march towards communism, many modernists view nationalism as a force for transnational integration, with the social construction of security communities between former adversaries (Cronin 1999). Others have viewed nationalism in the context of a long march towards cosmopolitan internationalism (Paish 1934), an often-problematic relationship examined in depth by Craig Calhoun (2007).

Critique

Given the confidence of modernists in the fixed temporality of the nation, they are often loath to revisit the possible significance of pre-modern nations. As Umut Özkirimli (2005: 44) argues, “the question of origins is not as important as some scholars would have us believe...the question of whether ancient nations existed in pre-modern times may be interesting from an intellectual or academic point of view, but it is not clear how the existence of such forerunners contributes to our understanding of modern nations.” Yet the modernist account of the genesis of nationalism often leaves significant empirical and conceptual gaps. Despite enormous elaboration of the processes of modernization

and the generative effect of modern institutions and media, tying such activities to specific cases reveals the frequent departure far from the ideal type present in specific cases. As Anthony Smith (1998; 2004) has noted, Benedict Anderson asserts that print capitalism is fundamentally important in the emergence of nationalism, despite the fact that many states develop national consciousness in its absence, such as Ukrainian nationalism in the early twentieth century—and of most concern for Anderson’s argument—in Latin America during the period in which Anderson rather oddly identifies as the time and place in which nationalism was created (see Eastwood 2006). As Adrian Hastings (1997: 6) argues, “Benedict Anderson’s astonishing claim that the English nation was only emerging at the heart of its empire in the later years of the nineteenth century not only goes in the teeth of the evidence but is totally implausible.”

Empirical problems for modernists are not limited to England or Latin America. For example, Danish nationalism was clearly evident by the middle of the eighteenth century—not surprising given the frequent attribution of Enlightenment Europe as being the seedbed. Yet despite possessing all of the attributes of nationalism employed by Gellner (1983) and Deutsch (1953), specifically a high culture that was widely distributed through disaggregated, relatively unplanned modes of mass communication, in contrast with Gellner’s argument considering the functional fit of nationalism with modern industrial society, Denmark remained a stubbornly rural, agricultural society for more than a century after nationalist ideas and attitudes were clearly evident (Barton 1986; Jespersen 1987). Finally, the modernist emphasis on the state and modern mass media as purveyors of national collective identity also ignores historical cases in which mass socialization of populations was effected in the absence of print capitalism, as was the

case in the Roman Empire for example (Zanker 1990; Habinek & Schiesaro 1997; MacMullen 2000). Mass socialization in the absence of the emergence of nationalism suggests the modernist alchemy of national collective identity may require different emphasis beyond the role of state homogenization efforts.

There is an additional normative component to the arguments made by modernists concerning the origins of nationalism that presents potential problems for the study of nationalism and collective identity in general. Modernists often dismiss the content of nationalism because of its frequent xenophobic or hostile character, or the imputed near universal “falseness” of its claims (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983; Anderson 1983). One scholar finds the reification of ethnic, religious, and other cultural groups so profound as to advocate abandoning the use of the term “nation” (Tishkov 2000). At worst, nationalism is depicted as a kind of collective social pathology, a “madness” (Zamoyski 1999). But as Patrick Thaddeus Jackson (2006: 10) points out regarding this type of analysis, “identity is abandoned as a relevant category for the analysis of human social experience, and the myriad struggles to define ourselves and our relationship to others—so recently restored to the social-scientific lexicon—disappear from view.” Implying significant majorities of most extant states are somehow deluded because they believe in a collectivity in which many contemporary academics in liberal states do not is both an analytically and morally dubious position. With some exceptions, modernists generally refuse to recognize the historical importance of nationalism in the development of liberal democracy (Tamir 1993; Yack 2003; Calhoun 2007). Liberal democracy is viewed as a kind of antidote for nationalism, with liberal cosmopolitanism the ultimate goal. But reproduction of the teleological tendencies inherent to liberal and what Ned Lebow terms

constructivist arguments of a more “structural liberal” bent (Lebow 2008: 3, fn. 7; Steele 2006) leaves adherents easily blind-sided by events. Anthony Smith (1992; 1993) argued long in advance of contemporary recognition of the limits to European integration conditioned by a resilient nationalism. As Ulf Hedetoft and Mette Hjort (2002: xviii) have similarly noted, “Europeanness is not an emotionally convincing substitute for nationality, no matter how intellectually or morally appealing such wider identifications might be.” The recent resurgence of religion in even the secularized societies of contemporary Europe (Byrnes & Katzenstein 2007) is inexplicable for most adherents of a paradigm that view such beliefs as having been driven out by the secular religion of nationalism, to be gradually replaced by a more enlightened form of cosmopolitanism. In light of the prevalence of other approaches to the study of nationalism in other disciplines, the almost exclusive adherence to the modernist thesis regarding the emergence of nationalism and its relative role in international politics is worth further circumspection.

Primordialists

The principle analytical adversary of modernism has long been primordialism. Emphasizing the comparative lack of biological or cultural change over millennia, primordialists impute a great degree of finality to human relations—the status quo level of cooperation and conflict is relatively the same as it has always been because of the unchanging character of human nature. Inspired initially by the humanistic approach of Herder (1791) who despite ascribing fixed social qualities to people derived from their natural environment was ill-disposed to European domination of the native peoples of North and South America, primordialism quickly became the provenance of extreme

nationalists—often academics themselves—who made demands for the territorial alteration of the international system based upon the imputed “Gallic” or “Germanic” character of the land. Even though Ernest Renan (1882) was willing to acknowledge a more fundamental collectivity—humanity—upon which rested “the genuine education of the human spirit,” students of nationalism during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who approached the nation as an unchanging, racially determined phenomenon became quickly enmeshed in political advocacy of these same ideas. With his claims of the social irreconcilability of Christian Germans and Jews based upon the imputed racial superiority of “Teutons,” Treitschke (1896) in particular laid the groundwork for the origins of Nazism. Other researchers subsequently argued that physiognomy was one of the chief determinants in nationalism (Handman 1921: 113).

Following the extraordinary violence of World War II and the Holocaust, the overtly racist tenor of primordialist scholarship radically changed. Contrary to the frequent pillorying of the most prominent primordialist argument offered by the journalist Robert Kaplan (1993), contemporary primordialist arguments often rely on a rather more sophisticated analytical framework than one reducible to racism or “ancient hatreds.” Sociologist Pierre van der Berghe (1978; 1981) in particular has offered a consistent, rigorous argument as to the roots of nationalism in ethnic, tribal, and ultimately familial relations. Van der Berghe argued that as humans evolved, there were strong pressures to form larger social groups to more efficiently procure food and defense. Over time, groups with higher solidarity tend to do better—thus strong kinship bonds are functionally advantageous while weaker groups tend to be selected out. Thus, modern ethnic groups and nations are in reality “super kinship” groups that have endured over time. More

recently, some political scientists have noted that the “state rests on an ethnic base” (Enloe 1986; Cohen 1999).

Although very few political scientists now pursue or test primordialist hypotheses, primordialist arguments have recently been revisited from the perspective of social psychology and IR. In a widely read article, Jonathan Mercer (1995) drew on experimental research that suggested the primacy of the in/out group structure in determining small group interactions among ostensibly less nationalistic liberal Europeans. Drawing on links between psychology and realism, Mercer argued that the degree of competition and the immediacy of its assertion suggested that constructivist hypotheses concerning the mutability of anarchy may be mistaken. But his argument has broader implications for modernity and nationalism as well, for if the structure of small group dynamics is fixed in terms of in and out groups, this condition would seem to reflect precisely the relationship of modern nations and their Others. That such behaviors may be part of the basic psychological make-up of human beings is evidence that supports the primordialist argument concerning the nature of nationalism, particularly the extension of small group dynamics to macro-level interaction.

While this approach may make some scholars seeking to rekindle interest in classical realism rather uncomfortable (Williams 2007), if true this would seem to validate much of what a good part of the realist canon has been insisting all along concerning the fundamentally conflictual, tragic nature of the human condition. Despite a brief flirtation with evolutionary biology (Modelski 1988; Thayer 2000), IR and political science in general have tended to ignore such primordialist approaches to understanding the origins of group identity, particularly nationalism. Recently, however, several articles

have appeared in influential political science journals that purport to demonstrate linkages between genetics, beliefs, and political behavior (Fowler, Baker, & Dawes 2008; Charney 2008). Despite the paucity of attention accorded to the primordialist perspective by political scientists over the past half century, if true these findings could profoundly change our understanding not only of the origins of nationalism, but also how the deep attributes of human nature have determined the pattern of conflict and cooperation in international and domestic politics.

Though moving away from a psycho-biological perspective, with great aplomb Stephen Van Evera forcefully asserted in his essay “Primordialism Lives!” (2001) ethno-national identities harden with the appearance of mass literacy, a phenomenon that does not always correlate neatly with the modernist thesis. Once deeply embedded in a society, the relative rigidity of national identity makes changing these beliefs extremely difficult. Sociologist Francisco Gil-White (1999) similarly noted that if ethnic actors’ beliefs are primordialist in nature, despite their “invention” as Hobsbawm and others would have it, the existence and inflexibility of these beliefs would seem to validate the primordialist approach.

Critique

Regardless of its relative marginalization in IR, primordialist arguments can be made in a rigorous, analytically relevant manner relatively free from the racist historical baggage of early proponents of the paradigm. Moreover, if true they might cause IR scholars to fundamentally re-think both the origins of political institutions and inter and intra-state conflict. Nevertheless, primordialism remains vulnerable to a host of criticisms.

First, as Waltz (1954) noted more than half a century ago first image explanations have the basic problem of explaining variation in outcomes from an invariate cause—human nature. While the latest advances in genetics, brain science, evolutionary biology, and psychology may impart to us considerable improvement in our grasp of the constitutive characteristics of the human condition, such knowledge does not readily translate into causal mechanisms for explaining collective social action. Second, applying the primordialist perspective to explaining the origins of nationalism and its effects on international politics brings with it the additional challenge of primordialism’s “fail to distinguish between cultural identity and politically relevant cultural identity (Crawford & Lipschutz 1998: 11). Some cultural characteristics may be static because of links to biological dispositions. Yet it is hardly clear how one moves from these factors to an identity that mobilizes much larger social groups. Finally, for primordialism there is basic problem that, to borrow an expression from Robert Keohane concerning the world historical importance of the collapse of the Eastern bloc, modernity is reduced as a concept to the status of mere “data point.” Given the demonstrable enormous changes in human culture over the past four odd centuries, this seems to be a breathtaking claim.

All of the above problems point to something rather more fundamental—an under-theorized connection of contemporary realism to nationalism. In a paradigm dominated by arguments concerning the Balance of Power and anarchy, nationalism would seem to have little to no role, for what people believe about themselves is irrelevant when confronted by the structural facts of anarchy (Waltz 1979; Mearsheimer 2001). Nevertheless, nationalism has been invoked by realists as a kind of Burkean caution against nation-building (Mearsheimer 2005) and trotted out as an explanation for

ethnic conflict (van Evera 1994). However, power-seeking behavior and belief in the great collective are not equivalent. Moreover, when realists do take nationalism seriously, the thorny question of modernization and institutional development is juxtaposed against the core neorealist claim of a relatively unchanging territorial state (see Posen 1993). Realists appear stuck between primordialism and the causal role of modern institutions in the formation of nationalism. One cannot have it both ways. Clarifying where realists stand on primordialism versus modernity would go a long way towards sharpening the relevance of the core arguments of the paradigm for contemporary events.

Ethno-Symbolists

The final and most recent addition to the study of nationalism is ethno-symbolism. Although frequently associated with Anthony Smith, the recently retired sociology professor from the London School of Economics who coined the term, social scientists have been making ethno-symbolic arguments for nearly a century. Much like primordialism, however, it remains a comparatively marginalized approach among IR scholars. This is unfortunate, for despite problems some constructivists might have with the ethno-symbolists stance on modernity and nationalism, they should feel an affinity for the core variables of the paradigm.

Ethno-symbolists tend to distinguish between nations as cultural groups with an ancient lineage and nationalism as a political ideology with primarily modern origins. For example, Elviken (1931) argued that Norwegian nationalism of eighteenth century melded with a pre-existing Norwegian nationalism in the push for independence from Sweden. More recently, Anthony Smith (1986; 1998; 2004) argues that nations are the products of historically prior “*ethnies*,” defined as ethnic groups with definable territory

or homeland, sacred places, and a set of myths and symbols—the “myth-symbol complex”—that create a “usable past” for elites to spread among a broader swathe of a given polity. Not all ethnic groups develop into *ethnies*, and thus not all ethnic groups eventually become nations. In noting the inter-relation between ethnic groups and nationalism, Smith’s work in large part proceeded along parallel lines with one of the foremost intellects in the history of the study of nationalism, Walker Connor (1994). Although Connor (2004) would disagree with Smith and others regarding the relative endurance over time of the constitutive ideas forming nations and the probability of pre-modern nations, by noting the role of the ethnic group in the social construction of the nation, hence his term “ethno-nationalism,” Connor seems to fit best within the framework of the ethno-symbolists, to the extent one can categorize a scholar whose varied and complex work makes such pigeon-holing difficult.

Other ethno-symbolists have been more assertive than Smith in noting the pre-modern origins of the nation. While Smith (1986; 2004) seems unwilling to accept the possibility of all but perhaps a few pre-modern nations, such as the Greeks for example, historian Adrian Hastings (1997) tended to emphasize the emergence of nationalism from religious origins. Noting the only word in the Bible that did not vary in meaning over several centuries was “nation,” Hastings famously argued that England was a nation possibly as early as the twelfth or thirteenth century by which time mass socialization had been effected via the oral didactic and literate grasp of the Bible. John Armstrong (1982) went even further, arguing that “*mythomoteurs*,” legitimating ideas that have sustained polities over time, much like *ethnies* suggest that the ethnic, symbolic core of nations were present long before modernity. This thesis has been recently echoed by Georgetown

University historian Aviel Roshwald (2006), who notes the conflictual binarism so endemic to modern nationalism has its roots in the Jewish and Greek nations of antiquity and that both nations claimed distinct territories and had mechanisms for the mass transmission of ideas. Sixty years prior, Albert Beavin (1934) made much the same argument concerning Old Testament nationalism the modern tensions between religion and nationalism.

Despite the important influence of a political scientist on the paradigm, Walker Connor, much like primordialism ethno-symbolism has far fewer adherents among IR scholars than the modernist paradigm. In their innovative work *Polities*, Richard Mansbach and Yale Ferguson (1996) demonstrate a strong affinity for the ethno-symbolic approach. Stuart Kaufman's outstanding text *Modern Hatreds* (2001) has rightfully garnered considerable attention and offers an ethno-symbolic approach to the study of ethnic conflict and nationalism, even if Kaufman emphasizes the falsity of many of the extreme claims made by radical nationalists rather than the relative historical continuity of the discursive forms and symbolic content of the beliefs. Given the strength of Connor, Mansbach and Ferguson, and Kaufman's work, it is somewhat surprising more IR scholars have not pursued the ethno-symbolism. Such an approach might have real analytical payoffs, particularly for constructivists who wish to move beyond the cognitive bent of early constructivism (Ross 2006) as well as those scholars interested in systems change and continuity, a core area of research in constructivism.

For example, with the turbulence and rapid change of political integration and globalization over the past three decades, much attention has been given to the emergent "neomedieval" character of international politics (Bull 1977; Diebert 1997; Rengger

2000). Yet rather than the reintroduction of heteronomous, cross-cutting loyalties, we may see the strengthening of nationalism. If previous transitions may act as a referent guide, several scholars have noted the relation between medieval institutions and the “regnal nationalism” (Reynolds 1984) of pre-modern feudal sovereigns. Coulton (1935), for example found that despite the prevalence of Catholic universalism, national differences determined the structure of many political quarrels. Similarly, Keeney (1947) noted that although there were clearly multiple sources of identity, both particularist local/regional and Christian universalist, English nationalism probably existed as partially the result of military service in the late thirteenth century.

Critique

While ethno-symbolists do much to distinguish themselves from primordialists, one central criticism stems from the sometimes murky relationship between ethnicity and nationalism. As van den Berghe (2004) noted in an exchange with Anthony Smith, the ethnic core of nations suggests an even deeper, primordial relation with more fundamental groups, such as tribe and family. From the opposite perspective, modernists may note the potential conceptual confusion introduced by attempting to separate out a real entity, a nation, from a constructed, more recent ideology that makes said nation self-aware. In particular, modernist Liah Greenfeld (1992) offers a sophisticated view of how this process occurs via the transformation of the public into the nation. However, ethno-symbolists tend to de-emphasize such transformative processes in favor of analysis of the substantive beliefs of nations. How one reconciles two positions with considerable empirical support is an ontological, methodological, and epistemological conundrum that makes it difficult to determine the veracity of the ethno-symbolic thesis.

III. Conclusion: Issues and Avenues for the Future Study of Nationalism and International Politics

In one sense the study of nationalism by political scientists and IR scholars reached a sort of dead-end by the early 1970s. Karl Deutsch retained a lasting influence, particularly as he trained gifted and extremely influential IR scholars, particularly Peter Katzenstein and the late Hayward Alker. Despite maintaining a consistent publication record with top journals and presses, much like his loosely affiliated paradigm Walker Connor did not receive comparable attention, despite the fact that in large part he was in large part correct in insisting on the endurance of nationalism, particularly in the Eastern bloc. The resultant analytical division and privileging of the modernist assessment of the origins and effects of nationalism versus the ethno-symbolic version in fact represents nothing particularly unique in social science history. Many of the claims made by leading historical sociologists and then imported *tout court* into IR during the 1980s and '90s are not new. Nor are the continued claims by modernists that the discipline was once dominated by primordialists, which, as evidenced by the long-term diversity of opinion in the above literature, it was not.

The predominant contemporary view of the enterprise of political science emphasizes the basic behaviorist premise of continued progress through cumulation of verifiable hypotheses. Yet contrary to the underlying assumptions of much contemporary work, the basic analytical boundaries of the study of nationalism have remained largely the same over the past century. This suggests a possible payoff both for re-reading classical texts on the subject (Lebow 2007) and significantly broadening our analytical

horizons beyond the excellent, though incessantly cited work of Anderson, Gellner, and Hobsbawm.

Are modern nations more conflict prone than their more aged ethnic counterparts? Have structural changes in the international system since the end of the Cold War opened a window of opportunity for irredentist claims for nascent nations? Alternatively, were these claims a background constant over the past two centuries, in uni, bi and multipolar systems alike? What are the general implications for IR theory of these questions? Does this reveal further shortcomings for neorealists and neoliberal institutionalists—that emotional ties will tend to overwhelm rational interest calculation? Will this herald a return to the classical realist thinking or provide even further impetus to the burgeoning constructivists research progra? These are only some of the questions that may be meaningfully engaged by evaluating a larger literature beyond the modernist corpus.

As part of the potential integration of social science with evolutionary biology and cutting-edge brain science, the biological elements of the primordialist thesis require much more scientific application, which paradoxically may lead to further refutation of the paradigm. In contrast, if the substantive claims of ethno-symbolism are verified IR scholars should fundamentally reconsider the history of states and international relations. Underlying the changing pre-Westphalian to contemporary institutional structure have been several enduring identities that have substantially shaped the composition of the state, sovereignty, and conceptions of citizenship. The stability of these identities may continue to affect the further institutional development of international politics. Thus we should shift to more frequent use of *longue durée* analysis. If instead institutions are independently causal as modernists would have it—that is, collective memories can be

turned on and off with the flick of a switch via education, mass media, and elite manipulation—then the specifics of the historical origins of nationalism don't matter much. It would seem more productive to answer such questions through empirical study, rather than methodological fiat or sins of omission. To do so requires IR scholars to pay much more attention to the interdisciplinary paradigmatic diversity in the study of nationalism that is theirs for the taking.

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Online Resources

Association for Research on Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Americas (ARENA), Richard Walker Institute for International Studies, University of South Carolina <http://www.cas.sc.edu/arena/>, accessed on 5 February 2008.

Affiliated with the Richard Walker Institute of International Studies at the University of South Carolina, ARENA publishes books, runs a lecture series, and sponsors conferences.

Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism, London School of Economics <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/ASEN/>, accessed on 7 February 2008.

ASEN's website includes links to its journals, upcoming seminars and conferences, and the Dominique Berdal paper prize for young scholars.

Association for the Study of Nationalities (ASN), Harriman Institute, Columbia University, <http://www.nationalities.org/>, accessed on 5 February 2008.

ASN's website is a clearinghouse for its book series and affiliated journals, scholarly awards, and upcoming conventions related to the study of nationalism.

Committee on Identity, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

<http://web.mit.edu/polisci/research/ethnicity.html>, accessed on 5 February 2008.

This site is run by a standing committee of MIT scholars who study identity. It sponsors a working group, speaker series, and conferences.

The Ernest Gellner Resource Site, London School of Economics

<http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/gellner/index.htm>, accessed on 5 February 2008.

This website focuses on one of the foremost scholars of nationalism. It includes a collection of his papers, important interviews and debates, and transcripts of the annual Ernest Gellner lecture given at the London School of Economics.

Humanities Net (H-Net), Nationalism Discussion Network

<http://www.h-net.org/~national/>, accessed on 7 February 2008.

H-Net is an interdisciplinary online forum for the discussion of academic ideas and issues related to nationalism.

The Nationalism Project, Nationalism Studies Information Clearinghouse

<http://www.nationalismproject.org/>, accessed on 7 February 2008.

This website provides a large bibliography on nationalism, a list of links to related websites, calls for papers, and information on upcoming conferences.

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