Symbols of Defeat in the Construction of National Identity

If nationalism is the assertion of legitimacy for a nation and its effectiveness as a political entity, why do many nations emphasize images of their own defeat in understanding their history? Using Israel, Serbia, France, Greece, and Ghana as examples, the author argues that this phenomenon exposes the ambivalence that lurks behind the passions nationalism evokes. Symbols of defeat glorify a nation’s ancient past, while reenacting the destruction of that past as a necessary step in constructing a functioning modern society. As a result, these symbols often assume a foundational role in national mythology. Threats to such symbols are perceived as threats to the nation itself and consequently are met with desperation difficult for outsiders to understand.

Steven J. Mock is colead researcher in the Balsillie School of International Affairs Ideational Conflict Project and teaches courses on nationalism, ethnic conflict, and power sharing in the Political Science Department of the University of Waterloo. Mock is a past chair of the Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism and a former editor and current member of the international advisory board for the journal *Nations and Nationalism*. Working on issues related to racism, ethnic conflict, and genocide and traveling extensively in Europe, the Balkans, and the Middle East piqued his interest in methods and theories for modeling symbols of identity and the emotions they evoke in conflict situations.
Symbols of Defeat in the Construction of National Identity

STEVEN J. MOCK
Balsillie School of International Affairs
Contents

Acknowledgments page vii

Introduction 1

1 Theories of Nations and Nationalism 13

Modernism and Ernest Gellner 13
The Limits of Modernism 18
Ethnosymbolism and Anthony Smith 23
The Limits of Ethnosymbolism 27
Symbols of Defeat: Authenticity and Modernity 31
The Nation as a Surrogate Religion 44

2 Totem Sacrifice and National Identity 50

Totem Violence and Social Order 51
The Function of Sacrificial Ritual and Myth 62
Religion, Nation, and State 68
Theories of Nations and Nationalism Revisited 74
Symbols of Defeat and National Totem Sacrifice 82

3 Symbols of Defeat in National Monument and Ritual 92

Focal Points in National History 100
“Axis natio” 105
Negotiating the Transition from the Universal to the National 122
Unity, Diversity, and Contestation 142

4 The Defeat Narrative in National Myth and Symbol 155

The Kosovo Covenant 157
The Savior 162
The Prince’s Supper 171
The Hero 173
The National Eschatology 184
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Sacred Executioner</strong></td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The National Theodicy and the Not-So-Golden Age</strong></td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Traitor</strong></td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Without death there is no resurrection”</strong></td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5 Implications to Politics and Diplomacy</strong></td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Defending the Totem: Defeat Monuments as Axis Points</strong></td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Heroes and Saviors and the Autocratic Democrat: The Career of Slobodan Milošević</strong></td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enemies and Traitors: Defining Insider– Outsider Boundaries</strong></td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6 Exceptions</strong></td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Imperial Nations</strong></td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nations Without States</strong></td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusions</strong></td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bibliography</strong></td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Index</strong></td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgments

A work such as this, so many years in the making, naturally incurs a large debt of gratitude. I would like to thank, first of all, my family: my father, David Mock; my mother, Karen Mock (who also gave the proofs a final inspection); my brother, Dan, and his wife, Ashley, for always surrounding me in an environment that combined critical thought with a passion for social justice and tolerance, along with models of hard work and creative energy. I am grateful for the intellectual contribution and support of John Breuilly, Montserrat Guibernau, John Hutchinson, Dominic Lieven, and Anthony D. Smith, as well as my colleagues at the Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism (ASEN): primarily, my perennial co-chair, conference co-organiser, and co-author, Daphne Halikiopoulou; Harcourt Fuller, for helping me locate sources on Ghana; and Gordana Uzelac, for feeding me plum brandy while challenging me to defend the intellectual value of functionalism. The depth and breadth of this work benefitted greatly from the various conferences, debates, and seminars organized by ASEN, affording me opportunities to converse about these ideas with scholars such as Michael Billig, Michael Hechter, Krishan Kumar, Carolyn Marvin, Aviel Roshwald, and many others. The input of the (formerly) anonymous reviewers for Cambridge University Press (Eric Kaufmann and Siniša Malešević), along with the help of my editors, was also of great value.

Thanks go as well to Thomas Homer-Dixon and David Welch, both for preparing me in the early stages of my career with the necessary background in multiple interacting models and paradigms of international relations and peace and conflict studies, and more recently for helping me to secure a base at the Balsillie School of International Affairs (BSIA),
from which I completed the final stages of this book. Some of the early research for this work was undertaken at the University of Toronto under the supervision of Thomas McIntire, while Peter Beyer was there to introduce me to the sociology and politics of religion in the modern world. This work could not have been completed without the financial and institutional support of the London School of Economics, Government Department, and the Morrison Fellowship in Peace and Conflict Studies at the BSIA.

Needless to say, all errors and misjudgments are entirely my own.

Steven J. Mock
Balsillie School of International Affairs
Waterloo, ON
September 2011