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978-0-521-81919-0 - A Contested Nation: History, Memory and Nationalism in Switzerland, 1761–1891

Oliver Zimmer

Excerpt

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## *Introduction: History, memory, and the politics of national identity*

The Nation can have its BEING only at the price of being forever in search of itself.

Fernand Braudel<sup>1</sup>

While the study of nationalism has emerged as one of the major growth areas of scholarly inquiry, generating a series of stimulating conceptual debates, some historians have recently identified a widening of the gulf between abstract theorising and context-specific research. In the introduction to his innovative study of nation formation in Wilhelmine Germany, for example, Alon Confino has maintained that ‘in spite of the flourishing interest in nationalism, the sense of national belonging remains a puzzling problem. This is due, in part, to the paucity of studies exploring the ways in which theories of nationalism have worked in practice in distinct countries.’<sup>2</sup> Miroslav Hroch, whose three-phase model of European nation-building has acquired classic status, has argued in a similar vein, accusing some of the theorists of nationalism of impressionistic and selective use of historical evidence. As he continued his critical assessment of the state of affairs in the field: ‘Polemically, one might say that at the moment we have an overproduction of theories and a stagnation of comparative research on the topic.’<sup>3</sup>

Yet the proliferation of theoretical literature has also inspired further detailed research on the subject, with many of the most original contributions coming from historians. The rapid growth of historical research on nationalism and national identity seems indeed to suggest that historians are intent on striking back, challenging many of the notions and concepts that the theorists have advanced over recent years. Perhaps the most persuasive critique advanced by

<sup>1</sup> Fernand Braudel, *The Identity of France*, 2 vols. (London: Fontana Press, 1989), vol. I, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany and National Memory, 1871–1918* (Chapel Hill/London: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Miroslav Hroch, ‘From national movement to the fully-formed nation: the nation-building process in Europe’, in Gopal Balakrishnan (ed.), *Mapping the Nation* (London: Verso, 1996), p. 78.

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historians has been directed against the equation of nationalism with a process of administrative penetration and cultural diffusion, an assertion that is at the heart of the leading modernist theories of nationalism. Thus, according to Ernest Gellner and Karl W. Deutsch, people become nationals not out of voluntary adherence to a set of shared values and symbols but due to the structural requirements of modern, industrialised societies. From this perspective, acquiring a national identity is tantamount to becoming a skilled practitioner of the cultural codes of modern society. Those who oppose nationalisation on ideological grounds are bound to pay the price of economic hardship and social exclusion.<sup>4</sup> Historians such as Eric Hobsbawm and Eugen Weber have argued along similar lines, although they have concentrated on the deliberate action of the state rather than on anonymous structural forces. In his evocative book *Peasants into Frenchmen*, for example, Weber meticulously investigates the Third Republic's efforts to nationalise rural France – through the building of roads and railroads, state-induced history and language education, and through military conscription.<sup>5</sup>

While these authors have portrayed modern nation formation as a one-way street, new research suggests that it was in fact a road with many sideways and unexpected diversions. Drawing on material from Württemberg in the period 1871–1914, Alon Confino emphasised that the nation was effectively 'imagined' at the regional level; that it was above all in the German provinces that the fate of official nation-building efforts was determined. Thus, if we are to gain a better understanding of the protean and contested nature of national identity – this is Confino's methodological message – we ought to conceive of the nation as a 'local metaphor' and concentrate on regional responses

<sup>4</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983). See also Gellner's first elaboration of his theory of nationalism in *Thought and Change* (Chicago University Press, 1965), ch. 7. For critical assessments of Gellner's theory, see John A. Hall (ed.), *The State of the Nation: Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism* (Cambridge University Press, 1998). See also Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication*, 2nd edn (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1966).

<sup>5</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd edn (Cambridge University Press, 1993); Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), esp. introduction and ch. 7 by Hobsbawm; Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford University Press, 1976). A summary of Weber's argument can be found in his essay collection *My France: Politics, Culture, Myth* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press, 1991), pp. 159–88. For a political account of nationalism that emphasises the role of the modern state, see John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, 2nd edn (Manchester University Press, 1993). For good survey articles, see John A. Hall, 'Nationalism, classified and explained', in Sukumar Periwal (ed.), *Notions of Nationalism* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1995), pp. 8–33 and Stuart Woolf (ed.), *Nationalism in Europe Since 1815* (London/New York: Routledge, 1996), introduction by Woolf. For a succinct recent critique of the modernisation school of nation formation, see Eric van der Veer's introductory essay in Eric van der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann (eds.), *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia* (Princeton University Press, 1999).

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and perceptions rather than on the state's cultural policies. It would mean, moreover, that we give up the 'artificial dichotomy between nationalism from above and from below' and instead begin to explore 'nationhood as a process by which people from all walks of life redefine concepts of space, time, and kin'.<sup>6</sup>

Even in France, where the tradition of a strong centralist state lent added credence to the 'top-down' perspective of national sentiment, several historians, drawing on a variety of provincial examples, have questioned whether the metaphor of *Peasants into Frenchmen* was really adequate to describe nineteenth-century French society. James R. Lehning, for example, has recently concluded that historians should not attempt 'to find when and how peasants became French, but to discover the ways in which they served to define what being French meant, and the ways in which French culture defined what being a peasant meant'.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Caroline Ford, in her study of nationalism and regional identity in the Third Republic, has insisted that 'the creation of national identity is a process continually in the making rather than the imposition of a fixed set of values and beliefs'.<sup>8</sup>

The reinforced concern with the region has undoubtedly injected a welcome dose of empirical realism and historical refinement into the study of nationalism, and I shall therefore pay attention to regional responses and perceptions throughout the book. But regional contexts represent merely one factor that shapes the construction of national identities. Among the other elements that can potentially affect these processes, two will figure prominently in this book. One relates to the role of existing cultural vocabularies and historical memories in national identity discourse, particularly those that are broadly resonant and thus operate at the macro level rather than strictly confined to a particular region or group. Another concerns the conceptions of nationhood – 'voluntarist' and 'organic' – that social actors use in the political arena as they construct their national identities in the face of a changing domestic and international

<sup>6</sup> Confino, *Local Metaphor*, p. 4. See also Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), ch. 1. For a review of the literature on nation and region, see Celia Applegate, 'A Europe of regions: reflections on the historiography of sub-national places in modern times', *American Historical Review* 104 (October 1999), 1157–82. One major problem I see with Confino's and Applegate's highly innovative studies is that they tend to pay little attention to the normative pressure exerted by nationalism on the localities and regions. This pressure, which increased as states and other significant political actors began to embrace nationalist agendas and turned the nation from a minority creed into an ideological common sense, partly explains why the latter were increasingly compelled to justify their rival interests and agendas in 'national' terms.

<sup>7</sup> James R. Lehning, *Peasant and French: Cultural Contact in Rural France During the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Caroline Ford, *Creating the Nation in Provincial France: Religion and Political Identity in Brittany* (Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 5. See also Alan Forrest, 'Federalism', in Colin Lucas (ed.), *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, 2 vols. (Oxford University Press, 1988), vol. II, pp. 309–27.

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context. Relating our investigation to these factors can also help us to move beyond the recognition that the communities referred to as ‘nations’ are socially constructed. Not much is gained by reiterating this omnipresent truism. A more interesting line of inquiry, this book suggests, is to examine the cultural and political mechanisms that condition the definition of national identities at particular historical junctures.

### BACKWARD INTO BATTLE: THE ROLE OF HISTORICAL MEMORY

While scholars are agreed that nationalism, the ideological movement that first rose to prominence in the American and French Revolutions, had a crucial bearing on the formation of the modern nation-state, there still remains the question concerning the cultural factors that shape the construction of national identities. Are we to conceive of modern national identities as cultural constructions, even fabrications, the nature of which changes with time and circumstance, or are they firmly determined by antecedent historical memories? Why do some historical memories and associated definitions of nationhood appeal to the wider public, while others either fail to catch popular imagination or provoke outright resistance? And in the final analysis: to what extent are these constructions determined by the conditions set by the present, and to what degree are they shaped by antecedent cultural idioms? These broad themes have been hotly debated at a conceptual level, yet their systematic historical exploration is still in its beginnings.<sup>9</sup>

Hobsbawm’s seminal argument about the invented nature of national identities provides an appropriate point of reference from which to explore these questions. According to Hobsbawm, the invention of national traditions became historically significant in the latter half of the nineteenth century when rapid social change and the expansion of mass democracy posed a threat to the legitimacy of the traditional authorities. It was then that power elites throughout Europe began to recognise the need to historicise the present through the promotion of novel architectural styles and national mass ritual. Essentially, invented traditions ‘are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to

<sup>9</sup> For important contributions of a more theoretical nature, see Maurice Halbwachs, *La Mémoire Collective*, 2nd edn (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968); Pierre Nora, ‘Between memory and history’, in *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, under the direction of Pierre Nora, 3 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), vol. I: *Conflicts and Divisions*, pp. 1–20; Michael Schudson, ‘The present in the past versus the past in the present’, *Communication* 11 (1989), 105–13; Anthony D. Smith, ‘Gastronomy or geology? The role of nationalism in the reconstruction of nations’, *Nations and Nationalism* 1 (March 1995), 3–14. Important European case-studies include: Robert Gildea, *The Past in French History* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1994); Confino, *Local Metaphor*; Ian McBride (ed.), *History and Memory in Modern Ireland* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

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old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition'. This phenomenon, having made its first appearance in the American and French revolutionary festivals – 'a people worshipping themselves' (George L. Mosse) on the streets and squares of big cities and small towns – by the late nineteenth century had become an integral part of European political culture. While their popular appeal derives from their ability to 'structure at least some parts of social life' as 'unchanging and invariant', invented traditions are specifically useful to elites who are mainly responsible for their creation. Writing on the relationship between invented traditions and nationalism, Hobsbawm writes that the former: 'are highly relevant to that comparatively recent historical innovation, the "nation", with its associated phenomena: nationalism, the nation-state, national symbols, histories and the rest. All these rest on exercises in social engineering which are often deliberate and always innovative, if only because historical novelty implies innovation.'<sup>10</sup> Most historians working on nationalism have followed Hobsbawm's lead. In an attempt to debunk many of the essentialisms promoted by nationalists – for example that nations are natural and immemorial communities rooted in a continuous past; that they reflect the 'inner self' of their constituent groups – they have stressed the political role of nationalism and the invented character of national identities.<sup>11</sup> Given the wide currency of the myth of the perennial nation, these endeavours at ideological deconstruction have undoubtedly been conducive to the evolution of a more critical view of nations and nationalism.

But the 'invention of tradition' paradigm, despite its alluring plausibility as a general proposition, is rather inadequate as an analytical tool in coming to terms with the dynamics involved in public redefinitions of nationhood. To begin with, the scope for inventing nationhood is limited because political elites must construct their ideologies in such a way that they resonate with the public, which partly depends on their ability to connect, in a meaningful way, to pre-existing cultural and moral frameworks. More crucial still, popular resonance is bound up with political legitimacy. Written from a more theoretical point of view, Quentin Skinner's observations about the relationship of political thought and political action can help illuminate this point. Skinner's main argument is that political actors are constrained by the set of ideas, values and narratives that

<sup>10</sup> Hobsbawm and Ranger (eds.), *Invention of Tradition*, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> As Hobsbawm (in Hobsbawm and Ranger (eds.), *Invention of Tradition*, p. 3) puts it unmistakably: 'Nations, we now know . . . are not, as Bagehot thought, "as old as history". The modern sense of the word is no older than the eighteenth century.' For works that are written in the spirit of the 'invention of tradition', see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1992); John R. Gillis (ed.), *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton University Press, 1994). For critical assessments of this viewpoint, see Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford University Press, 1999); J. C. D. Clark, 'Protestantism, nationalism, and national identity, 1660–1832', *The Historical Journal* 43 (2000), 249–76.

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together make up the ‘prevailing morality’ of a particular society.<sup>12</sup> If a political programme sharply contradicts this morality, Skinner tells us, it is likely to be perceived as lacking in both plausibility and legitimacy. He sharpens this idea by using the political revolutionary as his example:

The point which perhaps needs to be emphasised is that, however revolutionary the ideologist concerned may be, he will nevertheless be committed, once he has accepted the need to legitimate his behavior, to attempting to show that some of the *existing* range of favorable evaluative-descriptive terms can somehow be applied as apt descriptions of his own apparently untoward actions. Every revolutionary is to this extent obliged to march backward into battle.<sup>13</sup>

What Skinner wrote about political ideologies applies with equal force to the myths, narratives and values that constitute the historical memory of a community aspiring to become a nation. Such historical memories form part of the prevailing morality of a society, and thus part of the overall framework that shapes political actors and their ideologies. With the rise of a modern public sphere from the later eighteenth century, the appeal of national ideologies came to depend crucially on their ability to resonate with the wider public. Historical arguments have played a vital part in improving the public resonance of political ideologies.<sup>14</sup>

The Swiss patriots of the late eighteenth century, for example, in their quest for closer national integration, justified their ambitions by explicitly referring to the founding legends and liberation myths that by the turn of the seventeenth century had gained popular currency (chapters 1 and 2). These supplied the stock of cultural idioms from which they fashioned their ideologies, thereby legitimising their programme and demonstrating its plausibility to the wider public. As a member of the Helvetic Society reminded his fellow compatriots about the pivotal role of historical memory in the forging of a Swiss national identity in the 1780s: ‘It is well known that to the people who live in free states their history is more sacred than their prayer books; and that, particularly in democratic states, patriotic history serves the purpose of retaining liberty and

<sup>12</sup> Quentin Skinner, ‘Some problems in the analysis of political thought and action’, *Political Theory* 2 (1974), 299. For critics of the constructivist approach to nationalism, see especially Smith, ‘Gastronomy or geology’; Alexander J. Motyl, ‘Inventing invention: the limits of national identity formation’, in Ronald G. Suny and Michael D. Kennedy (eds.), *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), pp. 57–75.

<sup>13</sup> Skinner, ‘Political thought and action’, 295–6. For an illuminating analysis of conflicts over the interpretation of the historical past and its significance for pre-revolutionary French politics, see Keith M. Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), chs. 2–4.

<sup>14</sup> Raphael Samuel has noted that ‘history’ – both as an academic discipline and as a form of popular narrative – ‘owed its appearance . . . to a rising concept of nationality’. Raphael Samuel, ‘Continuous national history’, in the collection edited by the same author: *Patriotism. The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, 3 vols. (London/New York: Routledge, 1989), vol. I, pp. 10–11.

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conserving the essential principles of the constitution.’<sup>15</sup> Even in the vitriolic polemics which accompanied the conflicts that erupted between the Helvetic Revolution of 1798 and the creation of the liberal state in 1848, the traditional historicist narrative provided the focus for both supporters and opponents of a modern nation-state (chapters 3 and 4). Although the conflicting parties rallied behind opposing conceptions of community and interpreted the core myths differently, both referred to the same constitutive narratives to advance their rival claims. Finally, in the late nineteenth century, the Swiss historian Karl Dändliker explained the particular significance of historical memories for Swiss national identity with the ethnocultural diversity of the country’s population: ‘To a greater degree than any other people, the Swiss feel attached to their history . . . In fact, the latter is an integral part of our national self-consciousness.’<sup>16</sup>

It is tempting to discard statements such as Dändliker’s as mere expressions of an elite-driven national rhetoric. Yet the evidence presented in this book will reveal that national historicism was an obsession that was shared across the boundaries of class and religious affiliation. Hence, instead of simply reducing such statements to manifestations of instrumental reasoning or taking them naively at face value, I think it would be more appropriate to ask, in keeping with Skinner, why elites cultivated such a markedly historicist discourse in the first place.

To emphasise the influence of cultural and historical antecedents is not to deny the role of present events and circumstances in shaping national ideologies. Nor is it to deny that nationalist activity presents a key to our understanding of how ideas about nationhood are deployed as devices in a political struggle. There can be little doubt that symbolic vocabularies and historical memories are only persistent if significant social groups continue to rely on them as ideological devices. Where they retain their place in the political arena over several generations, however, they sometimes acquire considerable normative and moral weight as cultural idioms that inspire and shape action. They then become part of the political culture within which national ideologues – the late-eighteenth-century patriots; the orators at the sharpshooting matches of the 1840s; the mass educators and official nation-builders of the late nineteenth century – have to operate. This does not mean that ideological innovation is impossible. What it suggests, however, is that innovation takes the form of novel combinations rather

<sup>15</sup> Karl Viktor von Bonstetten, ‘Über die Erziehung der Patrizischen Familien von Bern’, first published in *Schweizerisches Museum*. ii/iv (1785). Cited in *Bonstettiana*, vol. 1/2, p. 444. Johannes von Müller put it even more forcefully in a letter to the Zurich magistrate Johann Kaspar Fäsi on 24 December 1797: ‘We need to look for clamps in the fourteenth century for the ideas of our time. This will help us to fasten them and to ensure that the new does not lack the reverence inspired by the old. It will also facilitate matters.’ *Bonstettiana*, vol. VII/2, p. 752.

<sup>16</sup> Karl Dändliker, *Geschichte der Schweiz mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Entwicklung des Verfassungs- und Kulturlebens von den ältesten Zeiten bis zur Gegenwart*, 3 vols. (Zurich: Schulthess, 1884), vol. I, p. 20.

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than pure invention. To mix metaphors from Hobsbawm and Marx: people do invent traditions, but not in circumstances of their own choosing. Nationalists create new ideological syntheses from available cultural idioms, and these syntheses may again be refashioned and transformed in different social, political and regional contexts.<sup>17</sup>

## NATIONAL VISIONS: VOLUNTARIST AND ORGANIC

While one theme of the present book is the role of historical memory in national discourse, its second concern relates to how Swiss national identity was defined in the shifting social and political contexts of the present. Specifically, was national belonging primarily conceived in terms of a voluntary subscription to certain political values and institutions, or was it portrayed as something that is ultimately determined by nature? Unfortunately, as with the issue of historical memory, these questions have more often been taken up by theorists illustrating their arguments with a few selected examples than by historians investigating particular cases.

Civic nations, so the classic argument runs, derive their legitimacy and internal cohesion from their members' voluntary subscription to a set of political principles and institutions. In sharp contrast, ethnic nations are founded on a sense of self-identity determined by 'natural' factors such as language or ethnic descent. Consequently, civic nationhood is the outcome of deliberate human commitment, while ethnic nationhood results from long-term cultural and historical evolution. Political theorist Bernard Yack has juxtaposed the two conceptions in a critical analysis: 'The myth of the *ethnic* nation suggests that you have no choice at all in the making of your national identity: you are your cultural inheritance and nothing else. The myth of the *civic* nation, in contrast, suggests that your national identity is nothing but your choice: you are the political principles you share with other like-minded individuals.'<sup>18</sup> In its

<sup>17</sup> Here I draw on Theda Skocpol's distinction between 'ideology' and 'cultural idioms'. As she explains their relationship: 'Cultural idioms have a longer-term, more anonymous, and less partisan existence than ideologies. When political actors construct ideological arguments for particular action-related purposes, they invariably use or take account of available cultural idioms, and those idioms may structure their arguments in partially unintended ways.' Cited in Theda Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 204.

<sup>18</sup> Bernard Yack, 'The myth of the civic nation', *Critical Review* 10 (1996), 198. For other works that distinguish between two forms of nationalism, see, for instance, Friedrich Meinecke, *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat. Studien zur Genesis des deutschen Nationalstaates*, 3rd edn (Munich/Berlin: R. Oldenbourg, 1915); Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*, 2nd edn (New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1967); John Plamenatz, 'Two types of nationalism', in Eugene Kamenka (ed.), *Nationalism: The Nature and Evolution of an Idea* (London: Edward Arnold, 1976), pp. 22–36; Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991).



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scholarly guise, the civic–organic typology developed against the background of the polemic over Alsace that preoccupied the French and German publics in the immediate aftermath of the war of 1870/1. In 1882, the French scholar Ernest Renan argued against the insistence on language, blood and soil to justify his demand that Alsace return to France in accordance with the will of the majority of the province’s population. Whereas in the German Romantic tradition the nation represents an organic community – Johann Gottfried Herder wrote that nationality was ‘as much a plant of nature as a family, only with more branches’<sup>19</sup> – Renan argued that the nation was a voluntary community, a *plébiscite de tous les jours*. As such, it would not exist but for the civic commitment of its members: ‘Man is the slave neither of his race, his language, nor his religion; neither of the courses of the rivers, nor the mountain ranges. One great aggregate of men, of sound spirit and warm heart, creates a moral conscience that is called a nation.’<sup>20</sup>

While the analytical distinction between civic and organic forms of nationhood is eminently useful, the Swiss case suggests that it is difficult to distinguish as neatly as some historians of ideas in particular have done between civic (or political) and organic (or ethnic) nations.<sup>21</sup> In a sense, this is because nationalism is almost by necessity a blend of these two visions – the voluntarist and the deterministic – in accordance with its twofold aim of creating a new political community while at the same time circumscribing its cultural boundaries. Yet in some recent works of historical sociology, too, the distinction between civic and organic forms of nationhood is applied in terms of a scheme of classification rather than as a Weberian ideal-type. Liah Greenfeld, for example, ends up equating Germany with the ethnic type of nationalism, while she defines France as civic. Even Rogers Brubaker, although he takes great care in his comparison of German and French citizenship legislation to avoid turning ideal into

<sup>19</sup> Cited in Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country: An Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 123.

<sup>20</sup> Ernest Renan, ‘What is a nation?’, in Woolf (ed.), *Nationalism in Europe*, pp. 58–9. Admittedly, Renan’s definition of the nation also contains references to ‘common glories in the past’, a ‘common possession of a rich legacy of memories’ and even ‘the cult of ancestors’ (p. 58). Yet while Renan acknowledges the significance of these elements for modern national identities, it is important to emphasise that he conceives, for example, of a group’s past, expressed in a set of myths, memories and symbols, in voluntarist rather than organic terms. For Renan, cultures and pasts have been fostered and created. They only influence people’s thoughts and actions if the latter happen to make them a part of their personal and collective memories.

<sup>21</sup> Juxtaposing thinkers like Voltaire and Rousseau with Hamann and Herder, political theorist Maurizio Viroli writes in *For Love of Country* (pp. 93–4): ‘For the founders of nationalism the distinctive feature of the fatherland is the spiritual unity based on language. . . . The birth of the language of nationalism involved a change in the meaning of the concept of fatherland, which gradually became a non-political concept no longer centred on political and civil liberty, but on the cultural and spiritual unity of a people.’ Works that approach nationalism from an intellectual history perspective are legion. For a particularly influential example, see the following two works by Isaiah Berlin: *Vico and Herder. Two Studies in the History of Ideas* (London: Hogarth Press, 1976); *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 333–55.

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real types, comes up with a similarly clear-cut picture of a French civic and a German ethnic nation. What is more, all these works reveal a tendency of associating references to ‘cultural’ factors – particularly language or the pre-modern past – with the ethnic type, and those to ‘political’ factors – embodied in an emphasis on political values or the institutions of the modern state – with the civic type.<sup>22</sup>

The Swiss case is particularly well suited to bringing out the limitations of this typological approach, because within Switzerland claims to nationhood have had to be realised in a polyethnic environment. It is precisely this seemingly paradoxical constellation – the structurally imposed inability to conform to classic nationalism, which in turn triggered efforts aimed at defining national identity in ways that could satisfy its essential normative assumptions – which renders Switzerland such an intriguing case for the study of national ideology. Because its polyethnic composition deviated so obviously from the nationalist norm and had its legitimacy periodically contested both domestically and abroad, it was never self-evident but had to be constantly reasserted and redefined.

Thus, when modern nationalism began to spread across Europe, and above all with the rise of ethnolinguistic nationalism in the last third of the nineteenth century, Switzerland’s political class faced a particularly challenging task. Unlike their counterparts in countries such as Germany, France or England, Swiss would-be nation-makers could not refer to shared ethnicity, in the sense of shared ethnic descent or linguistic affiliation, to bolster their claims. This posed serious problems in terms of legitimacy and international recognition in a Europe where cultural homogeneity was regarded as the cornerstone of true and authentic nationhood. Yet, the national ideology they constructed out of this quandary was neither purely voluntarist nor purely organic. Rather, they responded to the challenge of ethnic nationalism by constructing a national identity that combined voluntarist and organic elements. While fervently embracing the rhetoric of civic exceptionalism, Switzerland’s political and cultural elites fostered an ideology of organic (rather than ethnic) nationhood. More specifically, they claimed that the Swiss nation was both a voluntary and a natural community – a *Willensnation* yet also a true *Wesensgemeinschaft*.<sup>23</sup>

What the Swiss case brings into sharp relief, then, is that particular definitions of national identity rise to prominence in particular historical situations where

<sup>22</sup> For more recent applications of the civic–ethnic typology, see in particular Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood*, introduction; Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, introduction; Smith, *National Identity*, ch. 1.

<sup>23</sup> *Willensnation* means ‘voluntary nation’. *Wesensgemeinschaft*, which can be translated as ‘community of character’, is close in meaning to what Otto Bauer called a ‘community of fate’ (*Schicksalsgemeinschaft*). Bauer’s essay on the nationality question in the Habsburg lands has been reprinted in Balakrishnan (ed.), *Mapping the Nation*, pp. 39–77.