1 INTRODUCTION: IS NATIONALISM RECENT AND SUPERFICIAL?

This book is the result of my deep dissatisfaction with the study of nations and nationalism as it is currently framed. Undergoing a spirited revival since the 1980s, the literature on the subject is marked by a great fault line which runs through the field. On one side of that line stand those who regard the nation as a creation of modernity. In their view, the nation emerged in Europe during the nineteenth century with the French and Industrial revolutions, or possibly sometime before, during the early modern period. For modernists, nations are a product of processes of social integration and political mobilization, which have welded together large populations hitherto scattered among parochial and loosely connected small rural communities spanning extensive territories. According to this perspective, it was only in the modern period, with the advent of print technology, wide-scale capitalist economies and, later, industrialization, urbanization, mass education, and mass political participation that such social integration and mobilization became possible, with active solicitation by the state. On the other side of the fault line stand those who defend, adapt, and develop the more traditionalist view of the nation (labeled "primordial" or "perennial"). They believe that nationhood, as a reality and a sentiment, is older, existed before modernity (even if not universally), perhaps as far back as antiquity, and not only in Europe but throughout the world.

This debate is further accentuated as it reverberates across the wider circles which have been drawn to the subject as it gained popularity. In the social sciences, history, philosophy, literature, and

cultural studies, scholars working on related subject matters cite fashionable theories of nationalism, all too often radicalizing them even beyond their original form. Furthermore, cohorts of undergraduate and graduate students of an impressionable age, who are particularly receptive to sweeping pronouncements and criticism of accepted assumptions, are regularly exposed to exciting theories of nationalism as part of their disciplinary socialization and professional initiation. In this process the rift between the modernist and traditionalist schools is constantly reproduced. False dichotomies and captivating hyperboles have become the norm in the study of nationalism, to the degree that they are barely recognized as such.

While fully acknowledging the tremendous growth of modern nationalism in response to the massive forces of transformation generated by modernity, I am closer to the view of those who criticize and reject the exclusive identification of the nation with modernity. Certainly, nations emerged at a certain (early) point in history, they form and disappear, and are therefore not "primordial" in this sense. Furthermore, the national phenomenon has evolved in history, so even the term "perennial" is insufficiently reflective of historical change. And yet, if one accepts modernist theorist Ernest Gellner's definition of the nation as a rough congruence between culture or ethnicity and state, then nations are not confined to modern times. Nor are they as sharply distinct from other highly potent forms of political ethnicity, as modernists would have it. Indeed, as this book suggests, the traditionalist position, although generally correct, is not sufficiently comprehensive. The existing debate needs to be transcended by a substantial broadening of perspective. The crucial question of what makes ethnicity and nationalism – be they old or new – such potent, indeed, explosive forces has scarcely been asked, let alone answered.

Nationalism is the elephant in the room whose huge presence has been consistently overlooked, unaccounted for, and downplayed by the major social theories of the modern period, such as liberalism and Marxism. As a result, scholars, media commentators, and the public in general are repeatedly surprised when its movements shake and often shatter the room. The cause of this recurring, systematic blindness recalls the ancient Indian tale of wisdom where blind men gather to examine an elephant. Each of them feels a different part of the animal and thus arrives at a different conclusion as to its nature and form,

depending on whether it is the trunk, tusk, ear, leg, belly, or tail that he examines. The phenomenon of nationhood must be perceived in its entirety. Otherwise, theory becomes an elephant in a china shop.

Ethnicity has always been political

Our point of departure is the following propositions: nationalism and ethnicity are closely associated; by and large, nationalism is one particular form of a broader phenomenon, that of political ethnicity; and ethnicity has always been highly political, ever since the emergence of the state and even before. *By ethnicity I mean a population of shared kinship (real or perceived) and culture* (for a more detailed discussion see "Concepts and definitions," below). Historical states are commonly classified into the following categories: petty-states, states, and empires. And in *all* of them ethnicity was a major factor.

As a rule, the people of petty-states, of either the rural or urban type (city-states), were ethnically related. They tended to belong to the same ethnic space, although encompassing only part of that wider ethnic space, which was usually divided among a multiplicity of petty-states. Conflict was commonplace among petty-states that shared ethnic traits. Yet, when threatened by a foreign enemy, more often than not they tended to cooperate against the outsider. When aliens lived in the petty-state and in those rare cases wherein the petty-state was home to more than one major ethnic group, this too tended to have political consequences, as we shall see.

A space inhabited by an ethnically related population was also conducive to the growth and expansion of larger states, facilitating a process of unification. Of course, the state, in turn, greatly reinforced the ethnic unity of its realm: by the reality of unification itself and through deliberate leveling and fusion efforts. Ethnicity made the state and the state made ethnicity, in a reciprocal and dialectical process. Indeed, *both* these threads of causation reveal how highly political ethnicity has always been. Why would the state strive to homogenize its realm where possible, were it not for the fact that a sense of common identity immeasurably fostered the people's loyalty? In those historical circumstances where the state roughly encompassed and remained largely confined to an entire generally distinct ethnic space, was identified with a particular *Staatsvolk*, the

result is known as a national state or nation-state.* For geopolitical and historical reasons explored later in the book, this particular template of political ethnicity was more prevalent and survived better in Europe. Furthermore, it has become a more typical (but far from the exclusive) form of modern political organization because of greater social integration and the empowerment of the masses. Still, the national state was also quite prevalent during premodern times and outside Europe. Nations and national states can be found wherever states emerged since the beginning of history. What sociologists have labeled territorial states (a rather meaningless concept, as all states have territory) or dynastic monarchies in fact tended to be *national* monarchies. This term has long been used by historians, and for good reasons given the close, non-accidental link between ethnos and state in most of these states and the significance of this link in shaping state boundaries and cohesion.

In yet other cases, different ethnic and national communities were forced into a larger state structure, either because they were coerced by a dominant ethnopolitical group, or because they were too weak to fend for themselves in a violent world and were therefore sheltered, or allied with other groups, within a larger multiethnic union (various combinations of the above processes were at work). Still, within such larger multiethnic unions – called empires when they were large enough – ethnic existence was also widely political, formally or informally, usually both. Informally, the more the state was dominated

* The difference between these two concepts in most usages is slight to non-existent. Charles Tilly has suggested that national states are "states governing multiple contiguous regions and their cities by means of centralized, differentiated, and autonomous structures," whereas a nation-state is "a state whose people share a strong linguistic, religious, and symbolic identity": Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1992*, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992, 2–3. However, the first category is not at all national but simply a state, which can be national or not. Furthermore, *contra* Tilly, I hold that his first category was not historically new, nor was the second category historically rare. S. E. Finer, *The History of Government from the Earliest Times*, vol. I, Oxford University Press, 1997, 4, makes more sense in calling fourteenth-century England and fifteenth-century France national states, while reserving the term nation-states to the modern breed, where "sovereignty is democratically exercised by the nation." The drawback in the latter part of this definition is that it seems to be restricted to democracies. To avoid this untenable restriction, many scholars regard popular sovereignty as the legitimizing principle and distinctive mark of the nation-state. Still, whether national state or nation-state, Finer clearly identifies the nation as the cornerstone of many premodern European states.

by a paramount ethnic community, the more power relations and benefit allocation were skewed in its favor, and the state's symbols of identity reflected its particular ethnicity. It was mainly this ethnic core upon which the state relied to establish its rule, because it was this ethnic core's loyalty that could be counted in a way that could scarcely be said for other ethnicities or peoples within the realm. Other ethnic communities within the state were well aware of, and more or less acquiesced to, their secondary or subordinate status, for the reasons mentioned above. It often helped that their status could incorporate some positive elements. Above all, their separate identity could be respected and protected to some degree. Their particular institutions and system of law were often recognized and retained within the larger state structure, and considerable cultural tolerance tended to prevail.

Historical sociologists of the modernist persuasion hold that premodern empires were elite power structures, wherein the ruling elite were indifferent to the ethnic composition of its subjects. Yet this widely held view is highly simplistic, for very few historical empires, if any, were so construed or were ethnically blind. This is one of many false dichotomies – misplaced either/or distinctions – that we encounter in the scholarly literature. In reality, empires were indeed elite power structures, yet, at the same time, nearly all of them were grounded in and relied upon a dominant ethnic nucleus. Thus, ethnicity has always been highly significant in determining identity, solidarity, and political organization within and between states. It is only that most ethnic communities were too small and weak to achieve and retain statehood, that is, national independence, whereas more powerful ethnic communities went on to conquer others, assuming a dominant position within a multiethnic state or empire. National states appeared only in those cases in which a rough congruence between an ethnos and a state occurred.

This must not be interpreted to mean that ethnicities were homogeneous or clear-cut, coming neatly sealed in distinct and fixed packages; far from it. We are dealing with populations that share a significant, albeit variable, number of kin–culture traits, giving rise to variably heterogeneous, "punctuated" continuums. Subpopulations within an ethnic space are variably distant from one another in terms of such traits. And these distances can produce intermediate, graduated, and compound ethnic affinities within a larger ethnos, as well as developing into more significant cleavages and even splits.

New similarities and differences continuously emerge, and processes of ethnic fusion and fission occur, shaping and reshaping group boundaries and identities.[1] However, greater internal similarities generally separate one ethnic population from its neighbor, as with the sometimes substantially different dialects of one lingual space, which are nonetheless much closer to one another than to a distinctly separate lingual space, again with considerable variation. The fact that there are no neatly fixed ethnic packages, where culture, kinship, and identity are wholly homogeneous and fully overlapping, does not mean that there are no such significant and quite enduring packages at all. The charge of "essentialism" has become the ultimate detraction in the humanities and social sciences, and for good reason, given the dangers of crude conceptualization. However, "family resemblance," relative distances within and between groups, and continuities versus change in temporal transformation are a perfectly valid, indeed indispensable, way of thinking about very genuine realities.

And yet notions such as ethnicity having been central in historical states and nationhood generally meaning statehood for a people predominantly defined in terms of a shared kin–culture identity have become largely out of step with the recent discourse on nationalism. Because of deep concern over the horrendously violent expressions of ethnicity and nationalism, there is a strong aversion toward the idea that ethnicity and the nation are intimately related. Nationalism and ethnicity are often studied as separate subjects, and from different books. Some scholars, such as Walker Connor, have protested that "a nation is a nation, is a state, is an ethnic group."[2] I diverge from Connor in some significant respects, as discussed in the section "Concepts and definitions," below. All the same, other leading modernist authors have also recognized the intimate connection between nationalism and ethnicity, a point lost on many of their followers. Karl Deutsch defined the nation as "the coming together of a state and a people," regarded in ethnic terms.[3] Ernest Gellner similarly and more famously referred to it as a congruence of culture or ethnicity (he used the terms intermittently) and state, a definition I generally share.[4] Of course, both men believed such a congruence to have emerged only with the advent of industrial society.

Gellner regarded ethnicity as synonymous with culture, although on occasions he also mentioned conspicuous genetic-biological traits that may create ethnonational distinctions.[5] But even

cultural attributes are widely rejected nowadays as inadmissible to the concept of the nation. "Civic nationalism," supposedly based solely on common citizenship and shared political institutions, is habitually contrasted to "ethnic nationalism," both historically and normatively. However, as quite a few scholars have noted, this distinction is greatly overdrawn.[6] Civic institutions have been variably central to the make up of nations. But there have been very few nations, if any, whose existence was divorced from ethnicity, that is, which did not share cultural and at least some kin affinities. In reality, civic nationalism too – indeed, civil nationalism *in particular* – generates assimilation into the ethnonational community, either as an explicit ("republican") requirement or as a tacit assumption. This applies not only to old ethnicities and nations, but also to new ones. These are born and formed all the time, most strikingly in immigrant state societies, through processes of integration, hybridization, and amalgamation. A more helpful distinction between "ethnic" and "civic" nationalism is that the former emphasizes descent and shared culture, while the latter emphasizes state territory and culture. It should be noted, however, that in many so-called civic nations a feeling of kinship is created with cultural integration and intergroup marriages even in the absence of a sense of common descent. Thus, both ethnic and civic nationalism incorporate elements of ethnicity, albeit with some significantly different emphases, *inter alia* between the twin elements of kinship and culture. In the absence of a shared cultural matrix and sense of kinship, there can be common citizenship in a multiethnic and multinational state; but there is very rarely a notion of common national identity, especially in free societies where people are given a choice in the matter. Ultimately, nationalism is a state of mind, a sense of shared communal-political identity, affinity, and destiny, a "daily plebiscite," as Ernest Renan called it.[7] Yet in reality, this state of mind is strongly associated with other shared contents of the minds involved, most notably a common culture and sense of kinship.

A most sensible pioneer of the modernist view, Carlton Hayes, very early rejected the conceptual confusion he saw developing between national affiliation and citizenship.[8] Similarly, Connor deplored the misconception which had gained currency in the 1950s and 1960s, under Deutsch's influence, that "state building" and "nation building"

were practically synonyms. This misconception gave rise to expectations that nations could easily be welded together in new states in Africa and Asia, irrespective of their ethnic heterogeneity. Indeed, Deutsch himself found it necessary to caution in the 1960s that such processes were inherently slow.[9] This crucial misconception, and its policy implications, are as much with us today as they were then.

All modernist writings can be regarded as footnotes to Hans Kohn's seminal work.† In his view, nationalism is an artificial historical construct, built in the nineteenth century on older and more natural feelings of love for one's place, language, and customs (remarkably Kohn does not mention one's people, though he later adds common descent).[10] Eric Hobsbawm holds a similar view. To the question of how such a powerful emotion like nationalism, which profoundly stirs people's souls, causes them to kill and be killed, could have suddenly emerged in the nineteenth century out of thin air, Hobsbawm replies that nationalism mobilized earlier, "protonational" sentiments, such as those of shared religion, language, and ethnicity.[11] If so, however, were ethnicity and nationalism two distinct and separate phenomena, one old and possibly more "natural" and the other new and artificial, as Kohn and Hobsbawm have it, or is this yet another false dichotomy, where in reality a deeper connection existed? Indeed, Kohn concedes in a brief remark in his introduction that a weaker national sentiment existed here and there before modernity.[12] Gellner mentions the same point in his conclusion.[13] And Hobsbawm, despite a great deal of forced argumentation, concludes that "a proto-national base may be desirable, perhaps even essential, for the formation of serious state-aspiring national movements."[14] After all, if nationalism was not grounded in ethnicity, why did it involve the disintegration of multiethnic empires as one of its most distinctive manifestations, rather than the creation of new "all-imperial" national states?

Thus, contrary to rhetoric and image, a narrower gulf than the one generally perceived separates modernists and more traditionalist critics with respect to the relationship between ethnicity and nationhood, and even regarding the existence of premodern (albeit weaker)

† The pioneering modernist theorists of nationalism from the 1930s on, Hans Kohn, Carlton Hayes, and Karl Deutsch, are currently overshadowed by the later exponents of modernism of the 1980s. But except for the fanfare, the latter added little that was new to their predecessors' work.

forms of the nation and nationalism. There is in effect only a short distance between the ideas cited above from Kohn, Deutsch, Gellner, and Hobsbawm (let alone Hayes, and, as we shall see, Tom Nairn) and those of one of the major exponents of the more traditionalist view, Anthony Smith, who has stressed the ethnic roots of nations. Modern nations, he maintains, usually did not crystallize *ex nihilo*. In most cases they emerged from earlier ethnic communities which shared traits such as language, traditions, memories, a belief in common descent, and a sense of collective identity which often reached far into the past.[15] In the absence of an accepted noun in English, Smith has suggested the adoption of the French term *ethnie*, derived from the Greek *ethnos*, to denote those ethnic entities from which nations emerge. All the same, while stressing the premodern ethnic roots of nations and the role of "ethno-symbolism" in national identity formation, Smith too was generally inclined to view the nation itself as a modern phenomenon. He has become more open to the possibility of premodern nations only in recent years.[16]

Smith was circumspect on this point because of his acceptance of the generally correct and significant modernist precept that it was only with the technological, economic, social, political, and legal developments of modernity that mass popular participation in the state increased momentously. The masses were integrated into and mobilized by the state. Popular sovereignty and equal citizenship, inaugurated by the French Revolution, were the hallmarks of this process, and they are regarded by many as necessary conditions for the formation of a true national community. According to the standard sociological depiction of premodern societies, most of their populations consisted of peasants. In large states these populations were scattered across the countryside in small rural communities, isolated from the outside world and from the politics of the state, except as subjects to its dictates. Kin, tribal, and local affiliations dominated their lives. They were mostly illiterate. They possessed inherently parochial cultures which formed a mosaic of local and regional "low cultures." These differed markedly from place to place and often had little in common with the "high culture" of the elite, especially that which dominated the capital and ran the state. A major element of this cultural heterogeneity was the diversity of mutually barely intelligible dialects that separated communities from one another and from the standard "high language" of the state. Class differences were rigid and deeply entrenched, with

the overwhelming majority of the population completely excluded from political participation. Given these pervasive divisions, argue the modernists, if there was any sense of shared identity, affinity and solidarity in premodern states, it was mainly confined to the elite (which according to Gellner, however, was cosmopolitan in outlook, closely tied by culture and interest with its peers across political boundaries). The common identity did not spread to encompass the masses. In this view, the elite hardly regarded the masses as part of a shared collective entity, nor did the masses feel part of, or affinity toward, such an entity. In fact, although never made explicit, what many modernists call into question is not merely premodern nationhood, but the existence of premodern *peoples*.

While there is a large grain of truth in the standard picture of premodern societies, it simplifies, omits, and distorts much of the historical reality. The fundamental question is two-pronged: to what degree there existed a broader array of common ethnic, kin–culture traits within many large states, which went far and deep enough to encompass the wider strata of the people, made them *a* people; and, in turn, to what degree the people felt affinity, identification, and solidarity with such states, in the ethnic attributes that they shared. Answering this question is particularly tricky, however, as a seemingly insurmountable empirical obstacle stands in the way, long recognized by students of nationalism.[17] As the masses were mostly illiterate, there exists almost no direct record of their thoughts and feelings, and precious little indirect evidence. The masses are barely represented in the premodern record. They have no voice. To make progress in our investigation, it is therefore necessary to find ways around this obstacle, to penetrate, if only a little, the veil of silence.

How deep did premodern ethnonational identity reach?

The question of how widespread was the diffusion of culture to the lowest levels of state-societies can be tested, for example, by examining the most significant of cultural attributes, language. Did states' official language in premodern societies invariably remain confined to the center and the elite, making little headway in displacing local dialects and indigenous languages? This is what sociological theorists posit, based on select European historical cases which have gained paradigmatic status.