

Introduction

Wars and nationalisms

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There is almost certainly a consensus in the general public that nationalism causes war. In an immediate sense this is, as both Michael Mann and Siniša Malešević point out in their contributions, quite wrong: wars had been fought for thousands of years before the advent of nationalism. Still, it is easy to see why nationalism is seen as likely to cause war once it gains salience in the historical record. If nationalism insists that one live with members of one's nation in a state free from alien rule, then avenues to violence open up immediately. Members of the nation left outside the state should be brought in and untrustworthy elements within expelled, with secession from imperial rule being all but mandatory. Europe's hideous twentieth century makes it only too easy to recognize these forces, all capable of leading to organized brutality. And at a more general level is it not simply the case that there is a link between the viciousness of modern war and the emergence of nationalism? Data on the causes of war in modern times collected by Kalevi Holsti and by Andreas Wimmer (whose contribution to this whole field, as we shall see, has been very great) certainly seem to show that the institutional change from empire to nation-state does a great deal to explain the incidence of war (Holsti 1991; Wimmer and Min 2006, 2009).

The essays in this volume, written by historians as well as social scientists, evaluate this claim and its corollaries, adding necessary complexities and seeking to specify mechanisms at work in different historical and geographical contexts. The purpose of this introduction is to specify the state of play within an intellectual field of great moral and political importance – one that is currently at the center of attention in social studies as a whole. That this specification involves commenting on the contributions of the participants of the volume is no accident; their chapters were solicited precisely to exemplify the condition of current scholarship, and thereby to crystallize understanding so as to set the agenda for future research.

The intellectual background

Traditional debates on the relationship between wars and nationalisms have generally focused on the question of causal direction. Is the proliferation of nationalist doctrines likely to cause war or is it the experience of warfare itself that leads to the development and expansion of nationalist feelings among the wider population? The rudimentary form of this debate was already present in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century social science. The “naturalists” saw inherent cultural and biological differences as the principal generators of war and violence. In contrast, the “situationists” identified specific violent social and historical contexts as crucial in fostering strong national identities. At the turn of the century the quasi Darwinian and Lamarckian views that emphasized the inevitability of “race struggle” (Kidd 1893), innately competing “syngenic ethnocentrism” (Gumpłowicz 1899), and the “pugnacious instincts” of the culturally diverse groups (McDougal 1915) clearly had the upper hand. The general assumption was that both nationalism and war are natural phenomena that could be traced back to time immemorial. More specifically the naturalists were adamant that, unless they are carefully checked, the strong nationalist feelings are bound to lead towards organized violence sooner or later.

Nevertheless, by the early to mid twentieth century and especially after the carnage of the Second World War, the naturalist interpretations lost much of their support and credibility. Since the early studies of Sumner (1906), Simmel 1955[1908], Mauss 1990[1922], and Coser (1956), researchers have shifted attention towards the integrative qualities of external threat, concentrating in particular on the ways in which conflict situations change group dynamics. Rather than seeing groups as generators of violent conflicts the focus moved towards seeing conflict as a social device for transforming the patterns of collective solidarity. For Sumner (1906: 12) external conflict was likely to lead towards internal homogenization: “the exigencies of war with outsiders are what makes peace inside.” In the aftermath of the Second World War the situationist paradigm became dominant and most social scientists were inclined to interpret the sentiments of intensive national solidarity through the prism of external threat and prolonged inter-group violence. Nevertheless, until the mid 1960s and 1970s there was little attempt to explain the origin and potency of nationalism; most scholars made no distinction between relatively universal psychological processes such as in-group favoritism or ethnocentrism and the historically specific phenomenon that is nationalism. It is only with the pioneering theories of Elie Kedourie (1960), Hans Kohn (1967), and most of all Ernest Gellner (1964) that nationalism

became a subject of serious scholarship. Rather than assuming that national identities are given and primordial, these new approaches emphasized the historical novelty, geographical contingency and socio-logical necessity of national identifications in modernity. Gellner in particular formulated an original account that identified nationalism and economic growth as the two central pillars of state legitimacy in the modern age. Instead of looking at psychology or biology the analytical gaze shifted to historical sociology; nationalism makes sense only where there is an elective affinity between the demands of an industrialized economy and cultural homogeneity. Nationalism can flourish, it was claimed, when it is reinforced by expanding educational systems, standardized high cultures, increasing literacy rates, and the centralization of administrative power. By the mid 1980s and 1990s nationalism studies became a distinct research field producing a plethora of diverse theories of nationalism, variously focusing on the role of economic (Hechter 1999; Laitin 2007; Nairn 1977), cultural (Armstrong 1982; Hutchinson 2000; Smith 1986) or political factors (Breuilly 1993; Hall 1995; Mann 1995; Tilly 1990).

In a similar vein the study of war has moved away from its traditional focus on strategy, logistics, security, and leadership towards historically and sociologically nuanced analyses of the complex relationships between warfare and society. War has been reconceptualized less as an omnipresent and inevitable natural force and more as a historically specific and contingent social and political institution. Building on advances in archeology and anthropology the new approaches emphasized the relative novelty of warfare and its growth in parallel with state development. For most of recorded history, human beings have lived as simple gatherers and scavengers who generally did not engage in violent conflicts, making warfare a novel development of only the last ten thousand years. More specifically the growth of protracted wars had to wait another seven thousand years: the expansion of warfare intensified only with the development of the first civilizations – Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt, the Indus Valley and ancient China (Ferrill 1985; Fry 2007; Otterbein 2004; Reid 1976).

In this field Raymon Aron's (1958, 1966) pioneering work was decisive not only in bringing together sociology and international relations but also in providing a new analytical framework to explore the impact of warfare on social development. What Gellner had done for the study of nations and nationalism was replicated by Aron for the sociological study of war. Rather than treating the institution of warfare as an aberration that periodically interferes in the normal growth of social orders, as traditionally viewed by mainstream social science, Aron interpreted war

as an integral component of social development. More specifically, Aron insisted that profound internal social changes can never be explained by focusing only on internal societal dynamics: rather, external geopolitical contexts often shape internal development. As the international order lacks the monopoly on the legitimate use of violence that characterizes sovereign states, the use of force remains normal. Under such historical conditions no peace is permanent and all pacified arrangements remain dependent on the interaction of states. In other words, the absence of warfare cannot be explained through reference to some internal developments such as economic growth, lack of class polarization, shared cultural values, or civilizational achievements. Instead it is geopolitical stability, regularly characterized by the dominance of powerful states, that often determines the direction of internal social development.

While Gellner and Aron have revolutionarized the study of nationalism and war respectively, they did not devote much attention to the study of their relationship. It is only recently that scholars have been able to draw on these pioneering ideas to explore the impact of warfare on nationalism and vice versa. Historians and historical sociologists (Mann 1988, 1993, 2005; Posen 1993; Tilly 1985, 1990) have begun to link the rise and spread of nationalism to the geopolitical competition of states. Tilly (1985), Mann (1993), and Posen (1993) interpret the increase in national homogenization as a historical outcome of military and geopolitical rivalry of state rulers. In this view, military and technological innovations in pre-modern Europe intensified warfare while also making it more expensive. To finance wars, rulers had to mobilize domestic financial support and military participation, and as a consequence were forced to make citizenship rights and national attachments much more inclusive. The direct effect of these policies was the greater fiscal coordination, better administrative organization and tighter territorial centralization of modern nation-states. These institutional changes helped dissolve old aristocratic hierarchies, paving the way for much greater social integration and eventually for the appearance of nationally cohesive populations. Nevertheless, arms proliferation and the general increase in military capabilities of some states often act not as a deterrent but as a threat to their neighbors. Rather than soothing animosities, militarization encourages further militarization, thus creating permanent “security dilemmas” (Posen 1993). It is these geopolitically induced state insecurities that foster and maintain nationalist homogenization. Therefore, nationalism not only emerges as a direct corollary of state competition, but its proliferation and intensity remain tied to the historical contingencies of geopolitical situations. In a nutshell, for Mann, Posen and Tilly strong national

identities were created in war through military means, and as such national cohesion remains first and foremost a potent military asset.

These historically grounded analyses have provoked an ongoing debate, with some scholars finding this realist approach too materialist, and others seeing it as not materialist enough. The culturalist approaches of Anthony Smith (1999, 2003) and John Hutchinson (2005, 2007) argue that to explain the impact of war on the rise of nationalist sentiments one needs to take seriously shared cultural understandings and especially collective myths, memories and symbols, most of which are linked to specific wars. For Smith and Hutchinson, war experience is decisive for the development of national consciousness as wars polarize distinct populations, strengthen stereotypical divides and enhance national self-perceptions. However, what really matters for Smith and Hutchinson is how particular wars are collectively remembered and commemorated. In this perspective nationalism entails celebration and collective remembrance of past wars which are interpreted through the prism of collective sacrifice. The monuments, cenotaphs and war memorials dedicated to the “glorious dead” lionize the war heroism of past soldiers in order to set the boundaries of normative obligation to present and future generations. In this context, for Smith and Hutchinson a nation is first and foremost a “sacred communion of citizens” and nationalism is a form of “surrogate political religion” (Smith 2010: 38). Wars are crucial for nationalism as their tragic experience creates shared collective meanings that bind diverse citizenry into a single nation. In the modern, secular context war memorials in particular emerge as potent collective symbols that define nations as moral communities. In this view nationalism is grounded in shared myths and memories of past wars as they provide a moral compass but also a sense of collective immortality where one’s nation is seen as a replacement for, or a supplement to, a deity.

An alternative strand of criticism has emerged from a revitalized evolutionary theory insisting on the biological foundations of both war and nationalism. These contemporary sociobiological approaches are generally dismissive of earlier nineteenth-century naturalism, seeing it as oscillating between metaphysics and racialism and lacking sound empirical foundations. These new approaches aim to ground analyses in extensive empirical research drawing on recent developments in genetics and zoology, with a view to explaining both nationalism and warfare as an upshot of inherent group solidarity. For sociobiologists (Gat 2006; Ridley 1997; Van der Dennen 1995; Van Hooff 1990) the link between warfare and nationalism is to be found in the same evolutionary processes: the organism’s proclivity towards self-reproduction. In this view both nationalism and war are social mechanisms through which

genes are able to continue their biological existence. The central point is that when an organism cannot procreate directly it will do so indirectly, favoring kin over non-kin and close kin over distant kin. Hence war is understood to be an optimal means for acquiring scarce resources, territory, and a limited number of potential mates: “the interconnected competition over resources and reproduction is the root cause of conflict and fighting in humans, as in all other animal species” (Gat 2006: 87). In a similar way nationalism is conceptualized as a form of extended kinship rooted in the genetic principle of “inclusive fitness.” Accordingly sociobiologists make no distinction between ethnocentrism and nationalism, arguing that such in-group sentiments “can be expected to arise whenever variance in inherited physical [and cultural] appearance is greater between groups than within groups” (Van den Berge 1995: 365). And the existence of strong ethno-national identities is understood to be one of the principal causes of warfare.

While the emergence of influential culturalist and biological approaches has made the debate on the relationship between war and nationalism lively, the intrinsic explanatory weaknesses of these two approaches have narrowed the scope of the debate. For one thing, both perspectives overemphasize the link between nationalism and violence: whereas evolutionary theorists wrongly assume that all violent action has group-based/biological underpinnings, the culturalists exaggerate the role of commemorations in maintaining the long-term intensity of nationalist solidarity (Malešević 2010: 182–90, 2011: 145–51). Instead of being an inevitable feature of culturally/biologically different groups, recent studies show that nationalist violence remains historically unusual, as most political conflicts are still settled by non-violent means (Brubaker and Laitin 1998; Laitin 2007). Laitin shows that even in Africa, normally viewed as the epicenter of ethnic conflicts, nationalism and wars, “the percentage of neighbouring ethnic groups that experienced violent communal incidents was infinitesimal – for any randomly chosen but neighbouring pair of ethnic groups, on average only five in ten thousand had a recorded violent conflict in any year” (2007: 4–5). Further, the culturalist view does not devote much attention to the manipulative role played by the various social actors in creating and maintaining the ritualistic practices associated with the commemorations of past wars. Rather than being a spontaneous process initiated by the nationalist public, most ritualistic commemorations, war memorials and other remembrance events regularly entail prolonged organizational and ideological work, which is often the exclusive prerogative of the state and para-state agencies. Then the culturalist approach assumption that nationalist

identification with past wars is automatic is belied by research showing that nationalist ideologies tend to spread unevenly among different social strata and different regions. All nationalisms wax and wane and they are unlikely to operate as a uniform and synchronized set of collective feelings. And even when individuals embrace nationalist rhetoric it is far from certain that this is not done for other, non-national, reasons (Kalyvas 2006). The simple fact, evidenced in most political crises and wars, that political leaders keep making repeated calls for national unity testifies to the fragility of social cohesion at the macro level. Rather than being a self-evident, automatic and habitual popular response under conditions of external threat, national solidarity is difficult to create and even more difficult to sustain.

This book aims to go beyond the existing debates by looking at the role of other social factors that have contributed towards the closer links between nationalism and warfare in modernity. Instead of focusing solely on the biological, cultural, economic, and political sources of this relationship, most chapters in the book chart a complex picture where the development of nationalism and warfare often goes hand in hand with broader historical and social transformations. Hence the authors explore the impact of imperial legacies, education, welfare regimes, bureaucracy, revolutions, the spread of popular ideologies, geopolitical changes, state breakdown, and other historical factors that have made the connection between war and nationalism much more apparent. Particular attention is paid to a central area of debate, namely that concerning the character of nationalism – not least as this remains an area of intense disagreement for many scholars. In a nutshell, the relation of nationalism to war has changed at various points in the historical record, thereby ruling out some of the simpler sentiments with which we began. But before discussing categories and the way in which they worked both in the era of the world wars and in the contemporary world, let us begin by considering a rather more discrete issue: one that allows rather clear conclusions to be reached.

Fighting for the nation?

It is often maintained that the emergence of nationalism changed the character of war, intensifying it as the people fought harder to extend or, more likely, to protect their nation. The image that best captures this is surely that of the French soldiers who apparently cried “Vive la nation” when counterattacking at the battle of Valmy in 1792. At a theoretical level, the issue was best laid out by Clausewitz, who in his teenage years had been part of the Prussian armies defeated by

Napoleon. Reflecting on this many years later he noted in his great *On War* (1976) that the emergence of the nationalist principle had changed the character of fighting:

a force appeared that beggared all imagination. Suddenly war again became the business of the people – a people of thirty millions, all of whom considered themselves to be citizens ... The people became a participant in war; instead of governments and armies as heretofore, the full weight of the nation was thrown into the balance. The resources and efforts now available for use surpassed all conventional limits: nothing now impeded the vigor with which war could be waged. (Clausewitz 1976: 591–92)

The claim is then that fighting for one's own nation is likely to increase the level of conflict simply because the level of commitment is likely to be greater than it ever had been for mercenary armies.

There is a mass of evidence suggesting skepticism about this claim. Randall Collins (and Michael Mann) claim that the actual experience of combat induces terror and hence great inefficiency in terms of fighting ability (c.f. Bourke 2000; Collins 2008; Grossman 1996). But there is a counterbalancing factor. Soldiers may well not care about large abstractions such as the nation, but they do care a very great deal about their immediate fellows, not least as their behavior might ensure their own survival. Collins claims that this is now well understood by the leaders of the armed forces of the United States, insisting as a consequence that its fighting capacity has improved markedly in recent years. There is a final point of great importance. Collins does not deny that wars have become more deadly, but he wishes to explain it in alternative terms. What matters in his view most of all is the increased kill capacity of modern weaponry.

This skepticism seems to be wholly justified – which is not to say that there have not been some exceptions in the historical record as a whole. Dominic Lieven (2010) notes that old-regime Russia was able to defeat Napoleon, although this does not lead him to dismiss Clausewitz out of hand. For he has in mind the fact that Confederate forces in the American Civil War fought long and hard, with high levels of participation, even though bereft of much logistical support (Lieven 2000). Still more important was the loyalty shown to Hitler by the Wehrmacht, which fought powerfully, literally to the bitter end. Nevertheless, as the pioneering study of Shils and Janowitz (1948) demonstrated, this stubborn resistance had more to do with the micro-group solidarity of platoons and loyalty to one's comrades and less with the Nazi doctrine itself.

A more general point needs to be added so as to place Collins's general point within a broader historical context, which thereby does a little to

dilute its force. Richard Lachmann's contribution does not deny the difficulties of actual combat. But he does note that modern states have the capacity to conscript very large numbers. It may be that the fighting efficiency of such conscripts was poor, but the ability of modern states, acting in the name of the nation, to send millions into the meat grinder of world war nonetheless increased its magnitude of conflict. And Lachmann insists on a further point. Conscription warfare has a decided, but not universal, link to the spread of welfare provision, with preparedness to die resulting in leaders being forced to talk, as did Lloyd George, of creating a land fit for heroes. So at this point there is support for the contention, discussed below, that war did something to enhance national unity. Beyond this, there is an interesting ambivalence about Lachmann's position. On the one hand, he applauds the unwillingness of modern Americans to die in war (although one might note that resistance to war has been a staple of the history of the United States), but his progressive leanings push him hard in exactly the opposite direction. Conscription war has been an avenue of social mobility for African-Americans. Will professionalized high-tech war diminish that and so remove the chance for a future Colin Powell to emerge? And there are two further considerations to be borne in mind. First, the latest military revolution may yet change the central relationship between war and nationalism by making the means of destruction so specialized and high-tech as to have no impact on civilian life, albeit to this point one notes how very "normal" has been the increase of nationalist reaction whenever invading troops, as in Iraq, come to be seen as "occupiers." Further, the ways in which wars end will always have a powerful impact of their own. A key finding of the recent work of Michael Mann, for instance, is that the military industrial complex that became so powerful in the United States after 1945 has played a significant role in *diminishing* rather than increasing welfare provision – that is, in turning the United States away from the radicalism of the New Deal years to a much more conservative set of social arrangements (Mann 2012).

Variable categories

If categories should never be used uncritically, this is particularly so when dealing with this intellectual field. This is immediately obvious when considering the nature of war. The normal practice amongst social scientists is to define war as a conflict which leads to one thousand battle deaths. One problem here is that the First and Second World Wars were of a different order of magnitude, the first in part a very great interstate war, the second the most massive of all inter-imperial conflicts. Both

wars altered the terms on which other states operated, the first causing revolutions that changed world politics, the second creating a division of the world that has but recently ended. A moment's reflection makes one turn to a crucial question. There have always been wars in the European multipolar sphere. Might it not simply be that nationalism is the language now used to articulate state competition, rather than an autonomous force? And there is of course a second general point to be made about war, justifying the use of the plural in the title used. Since 1945 few classical interstate wars have taken place. But organized violence has certainly continued, very often in the form of civil wars. There is a large literature spanning several disciplines which insists on the utter novelty of such conflicts. For example Kaldor (2001, 2007), Bauman (2001, 2002), Munkler (2004), and Duffield (2001) have argued that the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are characterized by a profoundly different type of war in which nationalism plays no significant role. These "new wars" are held to have a different organizing structure. Instead of the conventional militaries fighting on the battlefields most "new wars" are intra-state, asymmetric, low-intensity conflicts that target civilians. These violent conflicts tend to be dependent on external funding, making use of strategies that focus on the control of population rather than territory. Such conflicts are often fought by warlords in possession of private armies or criminal gangs, who employ guerrilla and terrorist tactics, rather than conscripts or professional militaries. Kaldor (2001) argues that these "new wars" are a direct product of globalized capitalism, which allegedly has weakened the power of states to control their territorial and economic sovereignty. In this context nationalism is understood to be insignificant as the new lines of polarization are conceptualized in economic terms. Traditional ideological and territorial cleavages have been "supplanted by an emerging cleavage between ... cosmopolitanism, based on inclusive, universalist multicultural values, and the politics of particularist identities" (2001: 6). In a similar vein Bauman explicitly rules out nationalism: "nation-building coupled with patriotic mobilization has ceased to be the principal instrument of social integration and states' self-assertion" (2002: 84). But these judgments have little empirical backing. As several influential empirical studies (Kalyvas 2001; Lacina and Gleditsch 2005; Melander et al. 2007; Newman 2004; Sollenberg 2007) have demonstrated, the contemporary civil wars show more similarity than difference with civil wars of the previous two centuries. The ratio of civilian and military deaths has been largely stable with some oscillation around the 50/50 percent axis. The levels of atrocity, the reliance on guerrilla tactics and the prevalence of warlordism have not significantly increased. There is also little concrete evidence that