

General Introduction

THE EDITORS

Since the early 1980s, the study of nationalism has been revived as a distinct subject of enquiry in its own right.¹ The seminal works of Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm, and Anthony D. Smith, published in the 1980s and 1990s and now classics, have contributed to radically changing our reading of nationalism, offering paradigms for both its deeper understanding and radical deconstruction.² Crucially, these scholars set the main terms of a debate that is still ongoing today. The major distinctions among the advocates of perennialism³ (fewer and fewer), the so-called modernists (still the predominant school), and Anthony Smith's ethno-symbolists (ever growing in number), have remained largely intact to this day, more than thirty years later. Central to the discussion was the issue of the nation's origins and whether or not premodern structures of community, tradition, and identity were or were not important in shaping the seemingly "modern" phenomenon of nationalism – whether or not, to use Gellner's humorously dismissive expression that has become common currency in the field, it matters if

¹ Earlier works include: Lord Acton's 1862 essay, "Nationality," in John Emerich Edward Dalberg-Acton, *The History of Freedom and Other Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1919); Ernest Renan's 1882 lecture, "What is a Nation?" trans. Martin Thom, in Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds.), *Becoming National: A Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Carlton Hayes, *The Historical Evolution of Modern Nationalism* (New York: R. R. Smith, 1931); the many works by Hans Kohn, such as *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origins and Background* (New York: Macmillan, 1948); Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality* (Cambridge, MA: Technology Press of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1953).

² See in particular Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983); Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

³ The work of Adrian Hastings is often seen as belonging within this category; see, for example, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

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“nations have navels.”⁴ Largely, the discussion hinged on the problem of whether nations were invented, or were, rather, more organic social and historical constructions. Although the genealogical dimension was clearly pivotal to it, the debate was at the time dominated by sociologists, political theorists, anthropologists, and philosophers. One of the few historians who did play an important role, Hobsbawm, famously defined the nation as an “invented tradition,” that is, as a series of practices of a ritual or symbolic character meant to inculcate specific views that implied a continuity with the past. Within the nationalist discourse, he argued, history was essentially a “legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion.”⁵ National histories were artifacts of historical fabrication by his reckoning. It was a view that was in some respects illuminating, but could also – and partly did – lead to a pervasive devaluation of the premodern past and its study in the understanding of nationalism.

Over the years, historians have been influenced (implicitly or explicitly) by these paradigms even as social scientists have, in turn, drawn upon their work in the course of their ongoing theoretical controversies. But, although the theoretical debate among modernists and their critics continues, it has grown somewhat stale and repetitious. Moreover, some of the positions in that debate are themselves premised on historical assumptions that are increasingly contested among historians: e.g. the sharpness of division between premodernity and modernity, the triumph of secularism in modern history, a variety of other Eurocentric assumptions about the nature and trajectory of modernity, the exclusively Western origins of nationalism, etc. Hence, rather than simply rehashing and reengaging in the existing theoretical debate, what we have attempted in these volumes is to step outside its confines by doing what, as historians, we think we can do best: looking empirically and comparatively at the linked phenomena of “politicized ethnicity,”⁶ national

⁴ Ernest Gellner first used this image shortly before his untimely death, during a debate with his former student Anthony D. Smith at Warwick University in 1995. That debate is reproduced at www.lse.ac.uk/researchAndExpertise/units/gellner/Warwick.html (accessed 13 September 2020). Their presentations were published in the following year as Anthony D. Smith, “Opening Statement: Nations and their Pasts,” *Nations and Nationalism*, 2/3 (November 1996), 358–365; Ernest Gellner, “Reply: Do Nations have Navels?” *Nations and Nationalism*, 2/3 (November 1996), 366–370.

⁵ Eric Hobsbawm. “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 12.

⁶ Victor Lieberman introduced the term “politicized ethnicity” in his two-volume magnum opus, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c.800–1830*, 2 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003–2009). Azar Gat coined the term “political ethnicity”

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consciousness, and nationalism across a range of cases that are not limited to the modern era and not confined to the Western world.

It is, after all, through the accumulation of new evidence that does not fit existing paradigms that paradigm shifts happen. As historians, we don't set out to articulate a new social-scientific model, but we do refuse to be confined by existing ones. What our approach does assume is the formation and evolution of nationhood as a complex set of historical processes stemming from a superimposition of several successive layers of social representations, the later ones readapting in complex, unpredictable, and often conflicting ways the previous ones. Although nationalism is no more static than any other historical phenomenon, it draws on and adapts sentiments of kin-culture affinity that appear quasi-universal. If we are to understand the workings and distinguishing dynamics of modern nationalism – above all, its mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion and the roots of its emotional strength – we must study how nations are gradually constructed and continuously reconstructed in ways that both draw upon and reshape preexisting mentalities, sentiments, traditions, and practices.

In many collections on the history of nationalism, the perspective adopted is clearly and firmly the modernist one. The seemingly indisputable starting point of the history of nationalism is the French Revolution, and the emphasis tends to be placed on discontinuities with earlier feelings of communality and solidarity. Our aim, by contrast, has been to consider continuities as much as discontinuities, engaging critically and analytically with sweeping assertions about the primordial nature of kinship and ethnotypes without disdaining, a priori, *longue durée* analysis; this all in acknowledging the distinctive features of modern nationalism. By the same token, we aim to explore nationalism's relationships with, manifestations in, and impacts upon a variety of cultural practices and social institutions – in addition to the phenomenon's crucial political dimensions. The aim is to broaden and enrich the debate, not by offering a new, overarching theory of the nation and of nationalism, but by introducing new and more holistic perspectives to the phenomenon by approaching the history of nationalism through the prisms of other – intimately related – categories of conceptual and historical analysis. Indeed, one of the central concerns animating *The Cambridge History of*

in Azar Gat with Alexander Yakobson, *Nations: The Long History and Deep Roots of Political Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). For a concise version of Lieberman's argument about how ethnic and political identities could overlap in precolonial Southeast Asia, see Victor B. Lieberman, "Ethnic Politics in Eighteenth-Century Burma," *Modern Asian Studies*, 12/3 (1978), 455–482.

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Nationhood and Nationalism is the need to break the “internalistic” frame of reference that still largely informs many studies of nationalism. It is a matter that sociologists have long debated, following Ulrich Beck’s famous indictment of “methodological nationalism”⁷: the tendency to consider society as coincident with, and coextensive to, the nation. It is, importantly, an assumption that has led many scholars to search for the causes of the workings of nationalism from within the nation itself, thus ignoring the crucial importance of cultural transfers and overarching geopolitical forces. It is a fault that much historiography still suffers from today. Even when looking at the curricula of universities worldwide, the study of the past is still largely organized around single nations.

Although an entirely transnational history of nationalism might be, at best, problematic – not least because of the historical weight of the principle of nationality, which has so strongly tied the nation to bounded forms of political sovereignty – there remains a pressing need to escape the perspectival trap associated with the internalist view of nationalism. There are at least two reasons for this. First, because, as Anne-Marie Thiesse cogently argued some time ago, nationalism emerges always in confrontation with other groups. If we are to accept that “there is nothing more international than the creation of national identities,” then we must recognize that internalism can lead to serious misconceptions and misunderstandings.⁸ The second reason is that methodological nationalism causes knowledge, a specific form of knowledge, to continuously reproduce itself – and its faults and merits – rather than to evolve and change in response to new research needs. Moreover, we seek paths beyond, not just the empirical internalism of the nation-by-nation case study, but the conceptual internalism of studying nationalism in isolation from the multiple other frameworks of identity, power, and behavior with which, historically, its development has been so intimately connected.

Against the practices of historiographical and theoretical internalism, many of the chapters in these volumes adopt a comparative as well as a transnational approach that sheds new light on the history of nationalism(s). Thus, rather than having a series of case studies on individual nations, we have included chapters that look at the history of peoplehood across a cross-section of societies within any given era. In some sections, contributors

⁷ Ulrich Beck, “The Cosmopolitan Condition: Why Methodological Nationalism Fails,” *Theory, Culture and Society*, 24/7–8(2007), 286–290.

⁸ Anne-Marie Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales: Europe, XVIII^e–XX^e siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1999), 11.

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explore the history of nationalism in the context, not of ethnic groups and nation-states, but of religions and of empires (be they territorially contiguous polities or overseas colonial enterprises). The final part includes chapters on the intertwined relationship between nationalism and a variety of sociocultural, political, and institutional practices, ranging from war and violence to tourism.

A second aim of *The Cambridge History of Nationhood and Nationalism* is a global engagement with the history of nationhoods and nationalism. It is a truism that modern nationalism acquired many of its traits within the European setting and that it has then been adopted and readapted in other contexts which, in turn, have deeply influenced its shape(s). Yet, for all the truth in truisms, they can become analytical traps. Amidst all the talk, in recent years, of globalizing the study of history, much of the historical (as well as theoretical) study of nationalism has remained overwhelmingly Eurocentric; either it has focused explicitly and exclusively on the Euro-Atlantic sphere, or it has assumed that national identities outside that sphere can only be explained and understood as byproducts of, and responses to, Western imperialism. The attention to the various and complex forms of cultural and ideological hybridization deriving from contact with or domination by European nationalities and empires has, on the one hand, led to the assumption that there are no significant indigenous antecedents to nationalism in the non-European parts of the world, a view only recently contested, and, on the other, produced the belief that the nation was the sole possible way of organizing political spaces and communities in the modern age.

We face, then, the paradox that nationalism is widely viewed as a Western export, even as it has been celebrated as the primary means of resistance to the West in many cases. The effort to wrestle with this seeming contradiction in terms continues to play out in the historiography of nationalism, as reflected in the idea of multiple modernities, the Subaltern Studies school's indictment of Indian nationalism as a form of internal colonialism, the recent efforts by some historians to find proto-nationalisms in the precolonial histories of South and East Asia, etc.⁹ By the same token, the relationship between the nation and the world is an ever contested issue within each of the Western great powers themselves (Little Englanders vs. Imperial

⁹ See, for instance, Atsuko Ichijo, *Nationalism and Multiple Modernities: Europe and Beyond* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995); Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*.

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Unionists, American isolationists vs. liberal internationalists, etc.). The Janus-faced nature of the nation is, of course, a well-known issue to scholars of neo- and postcolonialism – and an ironic conundrum for many of them. But the implicit theoretical concern that should interest us, here, is the need to grasp, through comparison, differences and similarities between European and extra-European nation-building experiences in order to comprehend not only how different histories have interacted and merged, but how they may have both paralleled one another in precolonial times and how they may diverge in our own ever more connected world. It is a crucial concern in this era of globalization, in which the autonomy and sovereignty of every single nation is constantly challenged, amidst the persistence of nationalism itself – a phenomenon that, notwithstanding periodic rumors of its imminent demise, is still far from defunct.

Plan of Organization

The two volumes are divided into five major parts, as follows:

Volume 1: Patterns and Trajectories over the Longue Durée

Part I: The Politics of Ethnicity, Nationhood, and Belonging in the Settings of Classical Civilizations

The chapters under this heading investigate images of community and practices of inclusion and exclusion in the ancient world and up to the sixteenth century. Taking into account a variety of geographical regions throughout several centuries, the authors consider continuities and discontinuities in feelings of solidarity and interaction across different civilizations and societies. These chapters try to create a framework for analytical comparison and for the dissection of continuities and discontinuities across space and time, without becoming stuck in the binary trap of arguing over whether any given case does or does not merit the label of “nationalism.” The aim is to create the basis for more substantive and informed discussions about the evolution of cultural and political identities, and the relationship between universalistic and particularistic conceptions of community, over the *longue durée* of history.

Part II: Paradigm Shifts and Turning Points
in the Era of Globalization, 1500 to the Present

This part examines the evolution of ethnocultural, ethnopolitical, and/or national identities from the sixteenth century onwards. Each chapter

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considers a global turning point or a specific era from a transnational perspective. Particular attention is given to cross-cultural practices in the definition of otherness and to patterns of convergence and divergence in the evolution of ethnic and national identities in an era when networks of cultural and economic exchange and patterns of domination, conquest, collaboration, and resistance were becoming steadily more global in scope.

Volume 11: Nationalism's Fields of Interaction

Part I: Imperial and Postcolonial Settings

Empires are commonly thought of as, in some sense, the opposite of nations and nation-states. In fact, as recent scholarship has highlighted, imperial elites both fostered and provoked the crystallization of national identities in a variety of forms, even as they struggled to contain various manifestations of popular nationalism. This part once again steps outside the bounded analytical framework of the nation-state, looking at the development of national identities, movements, and politics from the perspective of imperial, colonial, and postcolonial history.

Part II: Transnational and Religious Missions and Identities

Nationalism has shaped, and been shaped by, a variety of internationalist and universalistic forces and ideologies, the study of which has all too often been siloed away from that of nationalism. It is the interaction among these fields of national, transnational, civilizational, and cosmopolitan identity, loyalty, and conflict that concerns us in this part.

Part III: Intersections: National(ist) Synergies and Tensions with Other Social, Economic, Political, and Cultural Categories, Identities, and Practices

How does nationalism permeate everyday life? How does nationalism interact with and shape diverse activities, behavior patterns, and cultural practices in the modern world? Conversely, to what extent do these practices in turn influence the ever-evolving forms and expressions of national identity? In this part, we examine some of the principal ways that national identity is experienced, with particular emphasis on its intersection with other social and political identities and practices. In so doing, we also hope to bring the historical and the contemporary together by looking at the effects of politics, the internet, social media, sport, and other cultural practices on historically evolving nationalisms.

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Excerpt
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As this book was about to go to press, we were deeply saddened to learn of the passing in 2022 of one of the co-authors of this work, Professor Jaime E. Rodríguez O. We are grateful he was able to contribute to these volumes with a chapter which is a distillation of his years of outstanding scholarship in his field.