

# Conclusion

## Nations and nationalism. Past and future

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The questions of how to define the terms 'nation' and 'nationalism', when nations first appeared and how nations and nationalism developed, permeate the study of nations and nationalism. The core debate focusses on the moment of birth of nations and nationalism. While the modernist school considers nations as entirely modern and constructed, the primordialists (or perennialists) believe that nations are not exclusive modern phenomena. They see 'ethnies' or 'proto-nations' as the prototypes of the modern nations. According to this school, nations are considerably old and have taken on different forms in the course of history. This on going debate is clearly present in the papers presented in this book.

Rees Davies, a medieval historian, finds himself in a tricky position when there is any discussion of nations and national identities. He argues that medieval people knew and used the concepts of 'natio' (nation) and 'gens' (people). Medieval historians wrote down the history of 'nations' and 'peoples'. These 'nations' and 'peoples' had identities based on common (historical) myths and memories, common laws and customs and a 'patria' or fatherland. This is clearly illustrated by the case of English medieval history. The evidence provided by Davies shows us the ingredients involved in the creating and inventing of a nation and of national identity in medieval England.

Joep Leerssen also struggles with the debates on 'nations' and 'nationalism'. He believes that much confusion could be avoided by clearly defining the concepts 'national' and 'nationalism'. A proper historical approach, taking into account the conceptual, ideological and political shifts in the course of centuries, is necessary. Leerssen uses the case of language politics in the region between Liège and Maastricht to illustrate his theory. He distinguishes language activism in its horizontal and vertical dimensions (and their complex interactions). Modernists should recognize that not all language arguments and linguistic apprehensions expressed in modern-day Europe are actuated by nationalism or nationalist xenophobia, but that they reflect an older, heter-

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onomist reflex, whose present-day continuation is federalism rather than nationalism. In this respect Leerssen clearly chooses the primordialist or perennialist approach.

The contextualists or modernists consider nations and nationalism as modern phenomena, closely linked with capitalism, industry, bureaucracy, urbanization and secularization. They believe that in medieval and pre-modern times there was no need for nationalism because there was no need to bring the elite and the common people together. In many theories material conditions or communication are considered as very important constitutional elements for nationalism.

Michael Hechter can be considered as a modernist in the nationalism debate. He argues that class politics receded in advanced capitalist societies during the last century, while cultural politics increased. This shift can be explained by looking at social and political institutions. Whereas indirect rule tends to promote class politics, direct rule favors cultural politics. Rapid expansion of direct rule since the 1960s has muted class politics and increased cultural politics. This relationship is not deterministic, however; other institutions can mitigate the effects of direct rule on the social bases of politics.

According to Miroslav Hroch, also a modernist, the success of national movements in Europe depends on the presence of patriots who start the national action and on the mass-support for this action. With respect to the first factor there are three preconditions for national agitation: the impact of traditional, religiously inspired values on baroque patriotism, the crisis of old identities and the heritage of enlightened patriotism. The preconditions regarding the second factor are sufficient social communication (incl. literacy, market relations, social mobility) and the possibility to transform the conflict of interests into a national conflict. So-called external factors, like political regime and international conditions dominated by the interests of the super-powers, can also be of some importance.

Montserrat Guibernau focusses on nation formation and national identity in a globalized world. Globalization is changing the context within which political action takes place. The nation-state as the unique centre of governance and authority is threatened and its territory is steadily losing its relevance as a frame for political, economic, social and cultural life. One of the nation-state's greatest challenges concerns the urgency to redefine national identity. Guibernau argues that European states need to construct a more 'pluralist'

national identity in order to avoid a radicalization of state nationalism as a backlash against mounting pressure to tolerate and recognize national and ethnic diversity. The post-traditional nation-state has to accept the consolidation and the emergence of multiple identities expressing regional as well as supranational allegiances.

Ulf Hedetoft considers the different phases and different logics of nationalism and globality at two turns of century. He argues that the interface between nationalism and globality in the late 19th century differs from what is happening now. The dimension of unevenness and asymmetry sets mass/elite interactions today apart from the late 19th-century nexus. Whereas European nationalism round the turn of the 19th century was a *weapon* in the struggle over global resources, today it has largely turned into a *bulwark* against the encroachments of globality on the framework investing it with symbolic meaning: the nation-state.

Are nations old or modern? Do nations have navels or not? As the reader will notice, the debate continues. The famous Warwick debate never ended. It is important, however, that medieval and Ancien Régime *historians* joined the debate. They try to provide us with a properly historical analysis of the development of nationalism in Europe, based on primary sources and combined with the use of sociological concepts. Another important issue is the question whether nations have a future in a globalizing world. The rise of ethnic nationalist movements forces us to consider the way in which the modern nation-state should approach this problem. In this case, studying nations and nationalism in the past, can provide answers for today's problems.