The SAGE Handbook
of Political Geography

Nation-States and National Identity

[p. 271 ↓]

Chapter 16: Nation-States and National Identity

Introduction

Given that the discipline of geography is primarily concerned with territory and the diverse forms of power associated with it, it is surprising that geographers have had so little influence on theories related to the most dominant geopolitical unit the world has ever known — the nation-state. Geographers have had surprisingly little impact on understandings of either its core concept of nation or its progenitive ideology of nationalism (cf. Knight, 1982; Mikesell, 1983: 257; Johnson, 1995: 53). With some notable exceptions (e.g. Williams and Smith, 1983; Anderson, 1986; MacLaughlin, 1986; Johnston et al., 1988; Agnew, 1994; Johnson, 1995, 2002; Penrose, 1995, 2002; Smith, 1996; Marden, 1997; Withers, 2001), the tendency has been to rely on nations, states and nation-states as units of analysis — as a *context* for, rather than a *subject* of, intellectual inquiry. These efforts have produced some outstanding work; yet, it is because geographers have so much to offer that it is important for them to intensify their engagement with ongoing interdisciplinary debates about the conceptualization of nations, the relationship between nations and nation-states, and the personal and collective identities that both kinds of entities inspire.

This chapter offers a platform for extending geographical contributions to these debates by providing a synthesis of ideas that are fundamental to the study of nations, nationalism and national identity. Accordingly, we begin by providing an overview of theories about the formation of nations and the ideology of nationalism. The nationalist belief that the boundaries of nations and states should coincide is then shown to be instrumental in the emergence of nation-states and their rise to prominence in the global geopolitical order. This discussion makes it clear that there are two main ways of pursuing the convergence of nation and state boundaries, both of which involve active

human engagement in nation-state building activities. After outlining these activities, we show how they have helped to shape the construction, experience and performance of national identities.

Consideration of the form and function of national identities marks a shift in the focus of the chapter towards an argument about the contemporary relevance of nationalism and nation-states. More specifically, we suggest that the capacity for nations to legitimize states is undermined in a world where pluralism is, increasingly, the defining characteristic of most states. We build this argument by showing how the role of hegemonic groups in the formulation of national identity reveals internal divisions within nations. These divisions are manifested in the unequal positions that individuals and groups occupy within both the nation and the nation-state and in terms of their access to material and symbolic resources. This evidence that nations are not uniform introduces some of the fundamental problems that have emanated from attempts to use this concept as the basis for allocating legitimate political power in the form of nation-states. Finally, we identify and evaluate solutions that have been advanced to deal with these problems by examining European Union and post-communist responses to recent pressures for both increased international integration and the **[p. 272 ↓]** reassertion of national distinctiveness. In showing how the concept of nation and the ideology of nationalism restrict ability to adapt to changing political realities, the importance of geographical input about the flexibility of spatial political constructs (in both time and place) and their mutual constitution with a wide range of social and cultural groups becomes clear.

Theories of Nation Formation

While the study of nations has generated hundreds of books and articles, there is still no established consensus on the definition, origins or future of this concept. All theories of nation formation rely on different definitions of the nation, the main axes of debate being whether the nation is essential or constructed, ancient or modern, political or cultural. These debates have spawned three main bodies of nationalism theory, commonly understood as (1) primordialist/perennialist, (2) ethno-symbolist and (3) modernist/ instrumentalist (Ozkirimli, 2000, 2005; Day and Thompson, 2004; Lawrence, 2005; Hearn, 2006).

When most people first come across nations, the explanation that is usually given for their existence is the primordial argument, as this is the approach taken by many nationalists themselves. Given that nationalists use the existence of *their* nation as the basis for claims to an independent state, it is not surprising that many of them view nations as natural phenomena that have existed for centuries, if not millennia. While perennialists do not share the primordialist view that nations are natural or essential categories — considering them, instead, to be social and historical phenomena — they do share the belief in the continuous or, at least, continually recurring existence of nations throughout history.

A more widely accepted conceptualization of nations is the ethno-symbolist approach commonly associated with the work of Anthony Smith. In general, ethno-symbolists share the perennialist view that nations are social and historical phenomena (rather than 'given'), but they reject stark 'continuism' by acknowledging the transformative impact that the modern era has had on 'the complex social and ethnic formations of earlier epochs' (Smith, 1995:59–60). Nevertheless, ethno-symbolists argue that nations and national identities have strong roots in pre-modern *ethnies* (ethnic communities) and that they cannot be understood without reference to a living legacy of symbols, myths, memories and so on that defined the core ethnic group before modernity.

Finally, the modernist or instrumentalist conception of the nation is best explained through the ideas of its most famous exponent, Ernest Gellner (1964, 1983). Gellner understands nationalism as the product of modern industrial society. He argues that state education produced a standardized form of language, history and culture to create the idea that all inhabitants of a particular territory were part of a single community. This construction was important for two reasons: first, because it created loyal members of society, whose ability to function as such would not be hampered by attachments to sub-groups within or beyond state boundaries; and second, because it created culturally standardized, interchangeable populations who were capable of achieving high productivity in industrialized societies.

Each of these three theories conceptualizes the nation as a fundamentally cultural entity. In contrast, proponents of these perspectives disagree, sometimes vehemently, about whether the *significance* of nations is cultural or political, or both. For primordialists, the view that nations are 'given' connotes an unalienable capacity

(and right) for nations to rule themselves. For them, and for most perennialists, it is the cultural unit of the nation that both predates and justifies a state and not vice versa. Ethno-symbolists share the view that culture has value in its own right, but they would also argue that the politicization of culture has granted nations much of their significance and power. Proponents of the modernist or instrumentalist schools view nations as modern entities that were conceptualized and constructed to achieve particular socioeconomic and political ends. From this perspective, the state predates the nation and the function of the nation is to improve the cohesiveness of the state and the efficiency of its economy. While culture is seen as important in defining nations, the significance of nations themselves is confined to their functional, political, usefulness.

Scholars agree that nations are important because they are seen to constitute a unique cultural identity. The culture of a nation and the national identity that it fosters combine to produce the mythical qualities necessary to inspire a sense of belonging and this, in turn, is essential to the fostering of loyalty and support. The mobilization of nations involves the ideology of nationalism and it is this political doctrine that is largely responsible for the formation of nation-states. Not surprisingly, different views about the origins, qualities and significance of nations are paralleled by different views on nationalism. It is to this issue that we now turn.

Nationalist Ideology and Nationalism: From Nation to Nation-State

Different understandings of the concept of nation complicate the study of this phenomenon, but **[p. 273 ↓]** the situation becomes even more confused by the tendency to use the term 'nationalism' to refer to both a political ideology and a type of political movement. In an attempt to overcome this terminological laxity, we will use 'nationalist ideology' to refer to the core conviction that the boundaries of a nation (however defined) should coincide with those of a state (following Weber, 1947). In contrast, 'nationalism' will be used to refer to attempts to implement nationalist ideology in practice; nationalism is a political movement. In this section, we would like to illustrate how nationalist ideology was mobilized, through nationalism, to produce nation-states. The key point here is that it is possible to identify two trajectories of nation-state

formation but that these should not be confused with two different types of nation. Once the two trajectories have been outlined, we will highlight the key mechanisms that have been deployed, with remarkable consistency, to merge the cultural unit of the nation with the political unit of the state to form the new and quintessentially modern political entity called the nation-state.

Given its incredible pervasiveness, it can be surprising to realise just how recent nationalist ideology is — a little over two hundred years old. In pre-modernity, political legitimacy was not derived from popular consent or shared culture but from divine right; whether the ruler and the ruled shared a common culture, language or ethnicity was immaterial. In the Middle Ages the development of national consciousness was hampered by the feudal structure of society and by the power and aspirations of the Church (Anderson, 1996). The clergy exercised complete control over education and the written word, the exclusive language of which was Latin. The immense prestige that this language enjoyed prevented vernaculars from gaining general acceptance and being standardized in written form, thus hampering the development of national tongues. It was not until the Reformation in the sixteenth century that the standardization of vernaculars began to engage with nascent national consciousness by gradually increasing feelings of community among people who shared a language (Mann, 1993: 217; cf. Billig, 1995: 29–36). Nevertheless, Church and monarchy continued to hold sway until the Enlightenment, when new philosophical and social conditions enabled the concept of nation to become, in time, widely accepted as the legitimate source of political power.

Nation-State Formation Take One: State + Nation = Nation-State

The first trajectory of nation-state formation emerged during the Enlightenment and involved the construction of a state prior to the formation of a nation within its boundaries. This process began with the ideas of political philosophers such as Locke, Rousseau and Mill, which came to have almost unprecedented transformative power over the societies in which they were developed. These ideas included the concept of the general will, popular sovereignty and a revaluation of democracy that

included development of the notion of majority rule and the concept of representative government based on individual self-determination (i.e. allowing people to decide collectively who should represent them). It is noteworthy that Rousseau made no explicit reference to the concept of nation as a legitimating principle, although he did imply that the 'social groups from which a general will can most effectively emerge will be genuine cultural communities and not casual dynastic accumulations of mutually unsympathetic people' (Quinton, 1994: 332; see Rousseau, 1947, [1762] book II, chap. X: 41). For Rousseau, the idea of a 'general will' — as the moral personality of the state — was necessary before the idea of a nation could have any reality (Cobban, 1964: 108). As this suggests, Rousseau consistently privileged the political entity of the state, and the political principles that defined his new conception of a state, over the cultural composition or characteristics of its inhabitants (cf. Penrose, 2002: 287–9).

These priorities are reflected in one of the first attempts to apply Rousseau's ideas: the French Revolution of 1789. The French Revolution was nationalist in that its proponents wrested political legitimacy from the King and placed it in the hands of *la nation*. Importantly, this 'nation' was understood by the revolutionaries to mean *all* people who lived within the territory of the French Republic — regardless of former rank or title or place of birth (Hampson, 1991; Kristeva, 1991; Gildea, 2002). In this context, the nation was seen as a collectivity of free individuals with equal rights based on citizenship, and nationalism was synonymous with liberalism, democracy and popular sovereignty based on the principle of consent.[1]

Initially, then, the French Revolution did not promote a nation in any cultural sense, but rather a new form of political unit that was defined by citizenship and legitimized by principles of popular sovereignty and self-determination. However, in post-revolutionary France there were good reasons — ideological, psychological and functional — for promoting cultural cohesiveness within the borders of France. Ideologically, the need for homogeneity was based on the legitimizing power of nationalist ideology: for a state to be legitimate, it had to (be seen to) represent a single nation. As this suggests, if other nations existed within the borders of a state they could, in theory at least, claim a right to a state of their own. In a France that was characterized by numerous alternative nations (e.g. Bretons, Normans, Basques, Alsatians and so on) this was a real **[p. 274 ↓]** concern and the creation of a common culture based on the dominant French

model became imperative to the survival of the state. Psychologically, then, the French state had to find ways of erasing or at least overriding existing loyalties to other nations (within or along its borders) if it was to retain political legitimacy. The rational appeal of citizenship and self-government remained evident, but post-revolutionary experience clearly demonstrated that political doctrines were incapable of generating the same depth of loyalty as that associated with non-rational allegiance to nations (Connor, 1994; Fine, 1999). Finally, there were very sound functional motivations for pursuing some measure of cultural uniformity within the state's borders. Simply put, it was much easier to govern a homogeneous community with a single identity than a disparate collection of heterogeneous collectivities.

For all of the reasons just outlined, post-revolutionary France began to be constructed itself as a nation-state. Crucially, however, the focus on creating cultural uniformity within the boundaries of the state only began to occur *after* the modern French state had been established. The French Revolution was not about nationalism. It was about republicanism, and the country only began to promote nationalist ideology when its leaders realized that a homogenous and unified nation was essential to the attainment of political goals, including the legitimacy of the state itself (Weber, 1977). Somewhat ironically, attempts to construct a distinctive French nation drew on the experiences of those who had pursued the second trajectory of nation-state formation. It is to this path of nation-state formation that we now turn.

Nation-State Formation Take Two: Nation + State = Nation-State

In large part, the second trajectory of nation-state formation was born of resistance to some of the key ideas advanced by Enlightenment thinkers. Romanticists such as Fichte (1922 [1806]), Hamman (1967) and Herder (1968 [1784]) emphasized the primordial elements of nationhood, arguing that the world was divided naturally into communities that were inscribed in space and defined by culture, ethnicity, tradition and history rather than politics and citizenship. They reified the concept of *Volk* (sometimes using it interchangeably with nation), generating the idea that collectivities were entitled to power and resources on the basis of shared culture.

As this suggests, the second trajectory of nation-state formation began with the cultural unit of the nation and sought to ensure that it was able to develop according to its own internal logic and values. In this case, the purpose of a state was to protect the nation — as a fundamental unit of humanity — and in doing so, the state also served as a manifestation of the nation's right to self-determination. For nation-states that were formed by following this trajectory, the cultural unit of a nation both preceded and was prioritized over the political unit of a state. Thus, territories that were inhabited by groups sharing a common language and/or culture could merge to form a single nation-state (e.g. Germany and Italy). Alternatively, larger (often imperial) territories that were home to numerous cultural groups were divided into a number of smaller polities, each representing or seeking to represent a single nation (e.g. Estonia, Bulgaria and Slovenia).

Clearly, this second trajectory's ideal of privileging culture over politics is the converse of the first trajectory of nation-state formation, which began with a state based on new political doctrines and then sought to create a nation within its boundaries. Yet, despite their antithetical priorities and processes, both trajectories were nationalist (and profoundly territorial) in that they sought to make the boundaries of the nation and the state coincide. It was out of the fusion of the idea that government should be by and for 'the people' and the idea that 'the people' should be defined by cultural communities, that nationalist ideology emerged with the goal of encouraging the formation of nation-states. Simply put, nationalism involved the politicization of culture (the nation) and the cultural codification of the state. As these new ideas and the ideologies that they supported gained prominence, state behaviour could no longer be legitimated in religious or dynastic terms but only by the nation, a cultural community. By the early twentieth century, national self-determination had become a universal principle, recognizing only one type of polity — the nation-state — whose borders were no longer determined by 'the courses of rivers, the direction of mountains, or the chances of war, but according to races or rather [ethno]nations' (Cobban, 1970: 109).

As geographers have pointed out, these dominant theoretical explanations of the formation of nation-states do a good job of outlining general processes and experiences, but they often do so at the expense of spatial and contextual sensitivities that are the hallmark of geographical analysis. For example, Agnew and Corbridge (1995: 80) explore the limitations that come from relying on 'ideal types' that are

'fixed representations of territorial or structural space … irrespective of historical context'. This is most obvious in the often neglected fact that the model of the nation-state that most scholars accepted as the norm until the mid-twentieth century was confined almost exclusively to the industrialized world (Claval, 2001: 35–6). Geographers have also argued that understandings of the formation of nation-states can be enhanced by viewing then as entities *in process* — as units that **[p. 275 ↓]** are produced and reproduced through a whole host of uneven power relations that extend from the political and socio-cultural to the economic and environmental (cf. Katz, 2003). Not surprisingly, then, it is in the realm of nation-state building that geographical perspectives have made some of their most important contributions to the understanding of nations and nationalism.

From Nation-State Formation to Nation-State Building

Just as most commentators agree that nation-states can be formed in the two ways outlined above (e.g. Connor, 1980; Smith, 1991; Ignatieff, 1994), they also agree that the fit between political and cultural boundaries was seldom, if ever, perfect and that loyalties to the new unit of the nation-state had to be developed (cf. Connor, 1972: 319). For the most part, this process of unifying a group of people within a state, as defined (in principle, at least) by those same people, has been termed nation-building. We would argue that this is often a misnomer for at least two reasons. First, as Connor (1972) has also noted, the cultural pluralism that characterizes most states means that the promotion of one nation has frequently occurred at the expense of another. Thus, within the process of nation-state formation, one nation's building often involves another's destruction. Second, the process of building a nation-state involves both of this unit's constitutive entities, namely, the nation and the state. The key quality of this new political unit is the joining together of an explicitly cultural entity with an explicitly political one, to form something brand-new. As indicated above, it is almost inevitable that, in the process of combining these two entities, the nation will become increasingly politicized and the state will become culturally encoded. Accordingly, it

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seems appropriate to refer to the processes of constructing, unifying and solidifying the nation-state as 'nation-state building'.

In general terms, nation-state building always involves at least some of five main processes that have been well rehearsed in the literature but which warrant a brief summary here.[2] Given that the modern state is characterized by a set of institutions and a regularized staff to administer them (Weber, 1947:143), it is not surprising that one of the key functions of nation-state building is to establish these institutions as well as the bureaucracy capable of running them. By the same count, the nation is a community defined in general terms by shared culture and meanings and this means that nation-state building is also geared to unifying the population of the new geopolitical entity. Both of these processes, creating institutions and inspiring loyalty to them, are apparent in each of five key processes commonly associated with nation-state building.

The first of these processes involves establishing the overtly political structures of the nation-state, namely, institutions of government and systems of representation. In most cases, the ideal is to develop a centralized form of government for the simple reason that this offers greatest power, and security of power, for those who command it. The next step is usually to establish national (culturally distinctive) and state-wide (territorially universal) political parties that have the advantage of forcing political issues and perspectives to be conceptualized in ways that reify the cohesiveness of the nation-state. Thus, even though people may disagree about the identification of problems and/or their solutions, the acts of engaging in debate about key societal issues and of supporting one party over others implicitly reinforce a sense of belonging and loyalty to a single geopolitical unit.

The second main mechanism of nation-state building involves establishing a monopoly over the legitimate use of force (a key characteristic of a modern state) by creating 'national' military and police forces. These institutions reinforce the power of the state but they also help to unify the nation by bringing together diverse segments of the population in ways that help to break down prejudices and nurture an overriding allegiance to their common nation-state, which they share a duty to defend. Similarly, the establishment of a national system of education — the third main process — contributes to this project by promoting shared experiences and encouraging individual

identification with the new polity. Through a standardized curriculum it is possible to emphasise collective, national interpretations of both historical and current events and, perhaps even more importantly, to ensure that this shared knowledge is communicated in a common language.[3]

Standardized language is also fundamental to the fourth and fifth mechanisms of nation-state building because it establishes the means of developing and communicating shared meanings and, in the process, it can both arouse and convey ideas of a common identity (cf. Johnson, 2002: 132). As scholars like Anderson (1991) and Billig (1995) have so convincingly demonstrated, national media are capable of moulding their audience into an imagined community and thereby encouraging feelings of affinity among its members. As such, national media work to reify the existence of a given nation-state; they constitute mechanisms for promulgating particular understandings of what the nation-state is (or ought to be); and they are powerful means of inspiring personal loyalty to the polity (cf. Robins, 1995).

Finally, the building of an effective nation-state is aided by symbols, shared meanings and **[p. 276 ↓]** memories that are identified, and/or created, to confirm the existence of the nation-state and to invite personal allegiance to it (as well as performance of it). These symbols can be both material and symbolic representations of the nation-state and are thus very powerful in their own right. However, they also have the capacity to highlight connections between all mechanisms of nation-state building, producing synergies that enhance the power of all constituent elements. For example, a national anthem is a symbol of the nation-state that can inspire and mobilize emotive responses to the country it represents, making the nation-state a source of community, personal identity and belonging. When the anthem is sung in school, at a Remembrance Day service, or as part of an Olympic medal ceremony, its symbolic and emotional power enhances the capacity for these events to confirm the existence of the nation-state and to invite — sometimes even demand — personal allegiance and loyalty to it.

The discipline of geography has made several important contributions to the understanding of nation-state formation, three of which we would like to accentuate here. First, geographers have demonstrated the importance of space and place to the construction of nation-states. For Johnson (2002: 141), the territorial dimension of

nationalism cannot be underestimated, not least because 'the occupation of, and control over, space and the delineation of boundaries has been the source of many regional, national, and international conflicts'. Such conflicts have influenced the rise and fall of particular nations and nation-states as well as the relations within and between them. For others, the importance of space and place to nation-state building is evidenced in the capacity for geographical perspectives to challenge the dominant, but largely unquestioned, view that territorial borders are fixed and physically defined.

Instead, geographers like Paasi (1995) and Smith (1993b) have shown that, by drawing selectively on various dimensions of boundaries — historical, natural, political, cultural, economic, psychological, sensual and so on — it is possible for very different places to be constructed and for diverse ideological agendas to be advanced. For others still, the usefulness of quintessentially geographical concepts is apparent in their demonstrations of how and why specific places and territories are constructed (e.g. Tuan, 1974; Johnston, 1991; Rose, 1995), and in their explorations of how particular visions of the nation produce, and are produced by, the iconography of landscape (e.g. Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988; Lowenthal, 1994). In all of these ways, conceptions of space and place and territory help to explain the construction of nation-states and to reveal just how contested these construction processes can be.

The importance of conscious construction processes is also apparent in the second main geographical contribution to understandings of nation-state building. Here, we are thinking of arguments about the centrality of immigration policy to nation-building: in Smith's words, '[t]oday, immigration controls, at least as much as territorial extent, are an indicator of where the boundaries of a nation-state lie' (1993a: 50–1). In a world where more and more people are on the move, the importance of immigration policies in shaping nation-states — their composition in terms of age, gender, sexuality, 'race', health and so on — cannot be overstated and geographers are well placed to spearhead work in this area. Finally, geographers have attempted to show that dominant theories of nations, nation-states and nationalism have themselves been influential in the formation of these things (Livingston, 1992; Penrose, 2002). For example, the efforts of French geographers to document and explain the rise of France becomes part of the evidence that such an entity exists (Hooson, 1994: 4). Similarly, Agnew (2003) shows how very specific Euro-American experiences gave rise to a

hegemonic geopolitical discourse that was then projected on the rest of the world. Both geography and geographical knowledge are important elements of nation-state building.

In summary, nation-states are constructed as empirical manifestations of nationalist ideology in practice; state borders are established and defended and within these borders constant efforts are made to encourage and maintain the cohesiveness of the population. As this suggests, nation-state building involves both the construction of an object of loyalty — the nation-state — and the inspiration of loyalty and belonging as qualities in their own right. These qualities are often referred to as 'national identity' and it is to this subject that we now turn.

Formation and Function of National Identity

Identity, like nation and nationalism, is a term that seems self-explanatory and unproblematic until people really stop and think about it. At its simplest, identity is who we are. More accurately, if more complexly, it is how we understand and construct who we are (Katz, 2003: 249). Identity is the way in which we more or less self-consciously locate ourselves in our social world and this process of location relies heavily on social roles and categories (Preston, 1997). However, knowing who we *are* also implies knowledge of who we *are not* and this makes it clear that all identities are relational (Massey, 2004: 5). All identities — both individual and collective — are thus defined with reference to both Self and Other, to a 'me' and a **[p. 277 ↓]** 'you' or an 'us' and a 'them'. The designation of who we are does not relies on a whole range of categories that serve as means of making sense of the world and communicating it to others. According to social psychologists, human beings have an instinctive need to categorize humanity into distinct social groups and to ascribe each with a unique identity.[4] They view this process of categorization as necessary because the social world has very few explicit lines of division and it helps render 'our experience of the world subjectively meaningful' (Hogg et al., 1995: 261).

Importantly, even though the *process* of category formation may be instinctive, the categories that are produced are not 'givens' (Penrose, 1995). Instead, they are a reflection of the perceptions, priorities and aspirations of those people who have the

power to both construct categories and promote them as 'natural' or superior. The same is true of representations of those people who are associated with specific categories. These representations are not 'givens' but constructions that reflect the power relations that exist within any specific social, geographical and historical context. In both cases, power relations reflect a process of hegemony whereby those in positions of power have the capacity to convince subordinate others to accept the dominant group's moral, political and cultural values as the 'natural' order (Jackson, 1989: 52–3, after Gramsci).

Although attempts at persuasion are always met with some resistance, some categories of identity can become entrenched through hegemony. In part, this is because even though the content and/or significance of categories can be contested, the very act of doing so only reifies the category as a legitimate division of the world. Thus, even though the meaning of identities is not fixed, the dominant categories of identity — things like 'race', gender, class, religion and nation — have proven very difficult to challenge, let alone dislodge. Such categories of identity can also acquire a relative fixity because of individual tendencies to take on specific identities for themselves. People do this largely because it is a fundamental mechanism for generating a sense of belonging and for maximizing self-esteem. This process entails identification with an in-group (often defined by hegemonic categories or a combination of categories) and with this in-group's dominant group norms and its differentiation from the out-group. The importance of group membership for self-definition means that human beings internalize their own group categorization; as the individual becomes part of the group, the group becomes part of the individual. It is this internalization of identity that makes the categories that support them so important, and consequently, so powerful. Those categories that inspire the greatest internalisation, that become personal and perceived as key to the survival of the self, are those that assume the greatest significance in structuring divisions of people and space as well as the power relations and the structures of power that mediate them.

National identity is one such category. It constitutes one of, if not *the,* most important identities in the modern world. Simply put, it is the identity that is born of the category 'nation' and supported by personal identification with a specific nation. As this suggests, national identity can be understood in two complementary ways. First, it reflects the constitutive elements of nationhood (language, collective memory etc.), and this permits 'snapshots' of a nation's identity that suggest which cultural symbols and

conventions are most salient at any particular time. In this sense, national identity is the identity of any specific nation; it is what the nation is. Second, national identity is also a psychological condition whereby 'a mass of people have made the same identification with national symbols — have internalized the symbols of the nation — so that they may act as one psychological group when there is a threat to, or the possibility of enhancement of, these symbols of national identity' (Bloom, 1993:52). In this sense, national identity is personal; it says something about who individuals think that they are.

The successful construction of a nation fuses both elements of national identity; it inspires personal identification with the constitutive elements of the nation such that its members believe that they *are* the nation. Once this belief has been inculcated, it is likely that people who identify with the nation will defend it at all costs, for to do so is to defend themselves. This imperative is especially strong where the nation is imagined as an extension of family or kin networks because defence of the nation becomes synonymous with defence of family — past, present and future (Penrose, 2002). As this suggests, the strength of national identity stems from the tendency for members of a given nation to imagine that all of its other members view and experience their shared nation — and its associated identity — in very similar if not identical ways. These processes of convergence are aided by the mechanisms of nation-state building described above.

National identity provides individuals with objective and subjective dimensions to their sense of self, of who they are in the world. This is valuable in its own right, but the significance of national identity is magnified through other associations and functions. The fact that nation-states are the only legitimate geopolitical unit in the current world order means that national identity has become a key means of regulating access to resources. Thus, on a global scale, association with a specific national identity is key to inclusion within the space and resources defined by that nation, and it also defines all of those other spaces and resources from **[p. 278 ↓]** which one is excluded. Where national identity is expressed geographically, in natural resources, landscapes, architecture, monuments and so on, it connotes rights to a share in the material and symbolic resources that define the nation (Johnson, 1995; Penrose, 2002). The important thing here is that all of the symbols and institutions that are developed as expressions of national identity, and that serve as contexts for its performance and representation, feed back into the construction of a specific nation and the identity that

it fosters. For example, playing the bagpipes while wearing a tartan kilt can reinforce dominant constructions of Scottishness and justify continued identification with this nation. Alternatively, playing an electric guitar while sporting a Mohawk haircut and Doc Martin boots, along with the same tartan kilt, can advance a less orthodox construction of Scottish-ness that is equally capable of inspiring personal identification with, and loyalty to, something that is universally recognized as Scotland.

The continuous and overlapping processes of constructing a nation and stimulating identification with it emphasize unity and shared experience, but this glosses over the ways in which different interests, often defined by other categories of identity (like gender, age, religion and class), can position people very differently within the nation and the state. For example, the promotion of national unity and a singular national identity works well for those who have the power to direct this process and, until very recently, this hegemonic group was constituted almost exclusively by men, particularly those who possessed wealth and/or particular social status. As long as the nation was constructed in their own image, their positions of dominance within it were secured. In contrast, the very same nation became a context in which women's marginality could be reinforced, and by identifying with this nation, women became complicit in their own marginalisation (cf. Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1989; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Hall, 1999).

Despite these obvious disadvantages, women remain relatively privileged as long as they, like most of the population of a nation-state, are accepted as legitimate members of the nation. Everyone who holds membership in a nation is granted a share of the nation's resources and the freedom to participate actively in processes that reify the nation and that encourage internalization of its symbols. As indicated above, however, being unequally positioned within the nation (both spatially and socially) produces different experiences of these processes and of just what the national identity entails. This unfairness is compounded by contemporary processes of migration. Legal immigrants can be granted formal citizenship in a nation-state but still be denied membership in the associated nation (cf. Parekh, 1999: 71), and even more serious problems of inequality emerge for refugees and asylum-seekers who are regularly deprived of both sources of identity within their host society.

The fact that one can hold citizenship of a state without sharing in its national identity, underscores the importance of distinguishing the two concepts. It also underscores the

fact that the vast majority of nation-states do not comprise a single, unified nation, even though they continue to rely on the ideology of nationalism to legitimize their existence. This fundamental inconsistency raises serious questions about the robustness of the category 'nation', the contemporary relevance of the ideology of nationalism, and the viability of nation-states as the cornerstone of the global geopolitical order.

Challenges to Nations and Nationalist Ideology

When the ideology of nationalism was first formulated and applied, the world was a very different place than it is today. For a start, significant parts of the globe remained uncharted and largely unknown to Western Europeans, but the evidence that did exist (and that continued to accumulate) revealed extraordinary diversity in human appearance, culture and social organization that seemed to support the view that humanity was divided into distinctive groups. This is a classic example of Alexander Pope's adage that 'a little learning is a dangerous thing', and part of the power and endurance of the concept of nation is that it continues to be legitimized by its apparently accurate reflection of reality. Because individuals could *see* that people and territories were different from one another, they seldom stopped to think about how these differences could be translated into finite categories (Penrose, 1994: 163). This meant that it was possible to avoid confronting the fact that concrete boundaries between people and environments cannot be identified in practice. It also meant that the tendency for one territory to be claimed by multiple groups could be overlooked, along with the tendency for people to hold fluid and/or multiple (sometimes even contradictory) identities.

As the world became more thoroughly known and as people began to move around it with increasing speed and ease, these comforting illusions about the integrity (and hence, usefulness) of the category of nation were harder to maintain. Indeed, and as discussed above, attempts to apply nationalist ideology and to define political units according to coinciding boundaries of nations and states were proving impossible without significant human intervention and 'national modification'. Then, as now, there were only two real options. The first involves imposing homogeneity on the population

[p. 279 ↓] of a given state, and this can be achieved through policies that promote assimilation to the hegemonic norm or, even more objectionably, through policies of genocide and/or ethnic cleansing. In both cases, the nationalist ideals of a state serving all of its people and of the people legitimizing the state are woefully abandoned in favour of an illusion of homogeneity. If this is to be the cost of living according to nationalist ideology, then very few people are likely to be willing to pay the price.

The only other option for applying nationalist ideology is to change what is meant by the category of nation. It could be argued that this strategy was first implemented when French revolutionaries used the term 'nation', as defined by citizenship, to identify 'the people' that the new government and state would serve (Connor, 1978). Crucially, however, this political conceptualization of the nation was not effective in inspiring a loyalty that overrode existing allegiances to more culturally defined nations that existed within the boundaries of the new state (Weber, 1977). It was only when the dominant French nation, culturally defined, was transmitted to (or imposed upon) the rest of the population through active practices of nation-state building, that allegiance to the nation-state called France began to inspire loyalties that came close to pre-existing affinities with older nations associated with various regions of the country. Over time, the politicisation of the French nation and its dissemination across civil society and into institutions of state have produced a national identity that is capable of unifying what is almost universally recognized as the nation-state called France. The persistence of nationalist movements within the boundaries of this state is, however, a salutary reminder that the loyalties of citizenship seldom override the loyalties of culture if people are forced to choose between the two dimensions of identity.

The key point here is that nationalist ideology has been successful to date because personal identification with a culturally constructed nation has inspired loyalty to the associated nation-state. Despite its inadequacies, the ideology of nationalism has convinced most people that they are members of a nation — a cultural community — that is either represented and protected by a state, or worthy of acquiring such a state. It is extremely doubtful that nations defined by membership in a civil society can be as persuasive — or inspire the same depth of loyalty — as those defined by shared culture, let alone those based on assumptions of shared descent. In part, this is because the lack of distinctiveness between states (increasingly defined as liberal and democratic) would reduce their capacity to inspire personal identification with, and

loyalty to, any given state. Moreover, if this were the case, then there would be good reasons for redrawing the boundaries of states so that they become the most efficient administrative units for delivering democracy alongside individual rights and freedoms. The fact that this is not going to happen is, in itself, powerful testament to the poor logic of using exclusively civic constructions of nations to legitimize states.

The reason that this is not going to happen, aside from the reluctance of the powerful to empower the disinherited, and of the wealthy to share with the poor, is that culture has huge, inherent value to most people. Although more and more states are defining themselves as multicultural, few people — especially the immigrants that add this new 'complexion' to states — believe that this has altered the power and prominence of hegemonic nations within states (Ignatieff, 1994). Multicultural definitions of societies do reflect a welcome acknowledgement of diversity and, often, the desire to develop tolerance (if not acceptance) of difference. This may even result in some tempering of the hegemonic nation's self-definition (e.g. curry as the British 'national dish'), but this is not the same thing as relinquishing the nation as the basis of self-identification and political legitimacy or abandoning claims to privileges, power and resources that are based upon membership in the dominant nation.

As all of this suggests, the contemporary world is trapped by a reliance on the concept of nation to legitimize its division into states, at the same time as this concept is becoming increasingly indefensible as a reflection of these states. In other words, there is a profound contradiction between the growing cultural pluralism of virtually all nation-states and the ongoing ideological investment of power in the idea of a single, hegemonic nation along with the use of this 'ideal' nation to justify statehood. This unacknowledged contradiction masks the fact that the celebration of cultural diversity continues to be paralleled by an often profound (and sometimes violent) fear of cultural difference. These inconsistencies between nationalist ideology, political rhetoric and practice represent a time bomb that is in urgent need of defusing.

So far, two general strategies have been advanced for overcoming this disjuncture between the ideology that structures the global geopolitical order and the realities of growing cultural diversity within nation-states. The first strategy involves the promotion of nation-states as primarily civic entities, adopting policies of multiculturalism, and exploring responses to internal demands for minority group rights. All of these

developments are cause for hope. Eventually, human beings may even learn that our similarities are much, much greater than our differences and come to live the belief that 'they are us'. At the same time though, the mobilizing power of (exclusive) cultural conceptions of the nation remains a force to be reckoned with. This is evident in the rhetorical power of Bush's 'war on terror', which is calculated to inspire fear of difference and which has already **[p. 280 ↓]** led to increasingly restrictive immigration legislation in both North America and Western Europe. The UK has recently introduced citizenship tests and linguistic requirements for new immigrants — both of which reinforce the values of the hegemonic culture of the nation-state and have the potential to undermine the concomitant push for greater inclusion.

These responses reflect a potential to slide into a second, less encouraging strategy for dealing with the contradictions between nationalist ideology's reliance on a single, homogeneous nation and the spread of cultural pluralism. This is the strategy of reasserting culturally distinct nations at the expense of internal diversity and minority rights. Throughout the 1990s the government of almost every Central and East European state set itself the task of 'returning to Europe', seeking EU membership as confirmation of its European heritage. The push for EU membership was driven as much (if not more) by issues of identity and geographical and historical self-perception as it was by a rational consideration of economic and political benefits. Yet, the Europe to which the post-communist states sought to return and the Europe created by the Treaty of Rome were entirely different entities. To the new political elites, the return to Europe was the return to the Europe of the pre-communist, inter-war period. This era is highly important in the historical memory of most of the East European nations, because the inter-war republics provided the political space within which the national identity of the people was first disseminated among, and internalized by, the population at large. While the states of Western Europe have gone to great lengths to promote identities that are at least ostensibly inclusive, to develop European citizenship, and to establish strict minority rights regimes, the newly sovereign states of the former Soviet bloc have sought to rebuild their nation-states on the basis of the ethnic cultures that had for decades been repressed by political elites and supplanted by communism as the core state identity.

Following the collapse of state socialism in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the discrediting of communist ideology left the nations of Eastern Europe with an identity

crisis. To understand why — despite embracing democracy — so many post-communist nations turned to ethnicity to fill their identity vacuum, it is important to grasp the complex interplay of forces underpinning nationhood in democratic societies. George Schopflin (2000: 35) argues that democratic nationhood comprises three essential elements that exist in a mutually interdependent relationship: civil society, ethnicity and the state. While not exactly a zero-sum game, ethnicity will, he suggests, play a greater role in the composition of national identity when the state and civil society are weak. After the collapse of communism, the absence of firmly established political, legal and military institutions meant that the states of Eastern Europe were unable to provide, by civic means, the cohesion necessary to make society function. Political elites instead sought to generate cohesion, and at the same time legitimate their claims to power, by appealing to ethnicity and 'historical rights'. And in the absence of civil society, they were left unchallenged to do so.

Thus, the harmonization process that the states of Central and Eastern Europe underwent to bring their political, economic and social structures into line with those of the European Union conflicted with many of the nation-state building measures that they were implementing at the same time. The resurgence of ethnicity and culture as primary collective resources is consistent with Max Weber's (1947) idea of monopolistic closure. He argues that when resources are scarce, titular nationalities use ethnicity to press for privileged access to economic and especially political rights. The 'natural' preference for maximizing gains for members of the in-group can result in the maximization of difference between 'us' and 'them'. Yet, ongoing developments in Europe offer post-communist states an opportunity to revive civil society and refine their states such that these forces become more effective in balancing the power of ethnicity and culture. Most obviously, the prospect of EU membership has encouraged new member-states to adhere to emerging European norms with regard to minority rights, language and citizenship. This strategy of tolerance, recognition and accommodation is clearly the most dominant moral force in the current world order and it has the capacity to refine nationalist ideology from the inside. Of course, it is possible that the states of Central and Eastern Europe (and Western Europe for that matter) may not have undergone a genuine shift in their attitudes towards minorities at all and that they have simply proclaimed support for liberal values as a rhetorical device for securing (or retaining) EU membership and its benefits. Similarly, responses to terrorism, including restrictive

immigration and notions of citizenship that are heavily inflected with culture, have the potential to provoke a swing back towards the more exclusive and isolationist strategy of coping with the inadequacies of nationalist ideology in the contemporary world.

Ultimately, it remains to be seen how the world will deal with the limitations of the political ideology that currently structures and legitimizes the geopolitical order. What seems much clearer is that there is an urgent need to expose and address these limitations. As we have attempted to show, the concept of nation is unsound, the pursuit of nationalist ideology is inherently divisive, and both nations and nationalism(s) severely constrain options for adapting political power to the changing composition of states, let alone the changing demands that are being placed upon them. Geographers are **[p. 281 ↓]** well placed to help the world move beyond this deadlock because the key elements — nations and nationalism, nation-states and national identity — are all quintessentially geographical phenomena. They are spatial constructs, both grounded and imagined, that continue to draw selectively on particular understandings of boundaries and power in order to lay exclusive claim to the loyalties born of cultural affinity. Geographers have the capacity to show how the promotion of different kinds of boundaries can produce different kinds of places, and they can do so over a whole range of geographical scales and contexts. Moreover, different kinds of places can, in turn, be incorporated into the promotion of different kinds of identities and ideological agendas. In the process, geographers can help to develop new and liberating forms of geopolitical organization that work with, rather than against, evolving geopolitical realities.

Notes

1 For some scholars, this use of the term 'nation' has been used to justify the idea that there are two types of nation, that the French Revolution gave rise to a 'civic' or political nation that could be contrasted with the original understanding of nations as 'ethnic' or cultural units. However, recent writing has questioned the logic and usefulness of the concept of a 'civic' nation (e.g. Seymour et al., 1996; Xenos, 1996; Yack, 1996; Schulman, 2002).

2 For overviews of these processes, see Hayes (1945 [1931]) and Penrose (1997); for a related discussion with specific reference to political geography, see also MacLaughlin (1986) and Johnson (2002).

3 As Grano (1981) suggests, geography and history were especially well suited to transmitting the new secular religion of nationalism, and this position has been corroborated by the work of numerous historical geographers (e.g. Livingstone, 1992; Godlewska and Smith, 1994; Hooson, 1994; Withers, 2001).

4 Two of the better-known psychological theories of identity are social identity theory and selfcategorization theory (see, for example, Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel and Turner, 1986 and Turner, 1987).

JanPenrose and RichardC.M. Mole

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