

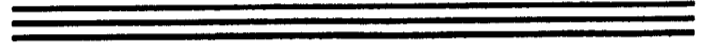
'family tongue', i.e. the language usually spoken in the home, which might be different.³⁴

Nobody was satisfied with this equation of language and nationality: the nationalists, because it precluded individuals speaking one language at home from opting for another nationality, governments – certainly the Habsburg government – because they could recognize a hot potato without having to taste it. All the same, they underestimated its self-heating capacity. The Habsburgs put off the language question until after national tempers, so visibly overheated in the 1860s, had, as they thought, cooled down. They would start counting in 1880. What nobody quite appreciated was that asking such a question would in itself generate linguistic nationalism. Each census was to become a battlefield between nationalities, and the increasingly elaborate attempts of the authorities to satisfy the contending parties failed to do so. They only produced monuments of disinterested scholarship, like the Austrian and Belgian censuses of 1910, which satisfy historians. In truth, by asking the language question censuses for the first time forced everyone to choose not only a nationality, but a linguistic nationality.³⁵ The technical requirements of the modern administrative state once again helped to foster the emergence of nationalisms, whose transformations we are about to trace.

³⁴ Brix, *Die Umgangssprachen*, p. 94. ³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

NATIONALISM

ERNEST
GELLNER



Stages of transition

We have put forward two extreme and simple ideal types, one conducive to nationalism, the other averse to it. The two types of society could hardly be more different. It is hard to conceive a direct, immediate, single-step transition from the older form to the contemporary one. This being so, what are the intermediate stages through which a given society is liable to pass on its way from one form to the other?

The stages will not be the same in all places and circumstances, of course. It may, however, be useful initially to construct one series of stages, inspired largely by the central European experience, and only subsequently explore the varieties to which this pattern may be subject under different conditions. The point about the central and central-eastern European experience is that it does indeed begin with an almost ideally pure, non-national political system and it ends with an ideally pure, national political system. The political organisation of central and eastern Europe was originally based on dynasties, religions and territorial institutions,

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rather than on language and its associated culture, but it ended with the very opposite – in some cases, with political units that have been thoroughly, horrifyingly 'cleansed' ethnically, and so satisfy, to an appalling extent, the requirements of the nationalist political imperative. How did this social order pass from the pre-nationalist to the fully nationalist condition?

Stage 1: The Viennese Situation

The first stage might suitably be called the Viennese situation, in recognition of the Congress held in that city to settle the condition and map of Europe after the Napoleonic wars. The peacemakers, and mapmakers in Vienna went about their task in total disregard of ethnicity. Metternich, Talleyrand and Castlereagh did not commission any teams of ethnographers or linguists to explore the cultural or dialectal map of Europe, so as, in as far as possible, not to offend the sensibilities of the peasants when it came to allocating them to their sovereigns. No such thought crossed their minds, any more than it did the minds of the said peasants. There were other considerations to be borne in mind – dynastic interests, religion, the balance of power, traditional local institutions, rights and privileges, even territorial continuity and compactness perhaps. But the idiom of peasants as a touchstone of political legitimacy or the boundary of realms? The suggestion is laughable.

So Castlereagh, Talleyrand and Metternich did indeed go about their business as if the world had not changed so very much since 1789 or, at any rate, as if the clock could be put back. They could do so without being swamped by protests from the countless varieties of east European Kurttanians, to the effect that their sacred rights were being violated, that their holy fatherland was being torn apart and desecrated. The Kurttanians had not achieved self-consciousness, they had not yet been awakened; they may have been a nation-in-itself, but not, or not yet, a nation-for-itself. There may have

been some protests from the Poles, well advanced in the nationalist race, but all in all, the practices of the peacemakers were accepted not merely as inevitable because backed by force, but as somehow in the nature of things. Nationalism did not raise its head, and it did not presume to challenge the verdicts of Europe's betters. It would be unfair to say of them, as it was said of Talleyrand's new Bourbon masters, that they had forgotten nothing and learned nothing. They had learned a certain amount: they had a sense of rational estate management. Discontinuous properties were, if possible to be avoided, and so, for instance, the Habsburgs willingly gave up their distant possessions in the Low Countries, so as to be compensated nearer to their Viennese base on the southern side of the Alps. Eastern Europe really emerged rather tidily from the Viennese proceedings, neatly carved up among the Romanovs, Habsburgs and Ottomans.

All the same, whether they liked it or not, the world had changed. They, the rulers themselves, were part and parcel of the changes and were eager to advance some of them, which were conducive to the enhancement of their own wealth and power. They rationalised administration, continuing the work of the pre-Napoleonic Enlightenment. Despots, and were quite eager to expand education. A centralised orderly bureaucracy, implementing general rules and appointed by the centre, not selected, like some Ottoman pasha, in virtue of their local power base, had to use one language or another to communicate with each other from one end of the empire to the other. It ceased to be ethnically neutral Latin, and became the ethnically divisive German. This in itself, even if the society governed by the new bureaucracy had not been changing, was bound to have potent nationalist-type implications: when the bureaucracy becomes more pervasive and intrusive, and employs one vernacular, the choice of that language becomes important for people. It becomes very significant for the life prospects of individuals just what that language is, whether they are masters of it, and whether it is easily accessible to them (cf. Mann 1992). Also, liberal and Protestant virtues become

Stage 2: The Age of Irredentism

The period during which the snake was present in the garden but remained inconspicuous was not due to last long. The first nationalist rebellion occurred just a few years after the Congress of Vienna.

The first nationalist rising was that of the Greeks, and it would be idle to deny that some of its features present a problem for our theory. Our theory links nationalism to industrialism: but early nineteenth-century Athens or Nauplia (the very first capital of newly independent Greece) bore very little resemblance to Engels' Manchester, and the Morea did not look like the Lancashire dales. Blake would have found no satanic mills in Hellas' sometimes green, but more often arid and stony land. To make things worse, the first Greek rising did not even take place in territory considered Hellenic, whether in antiquity or in modern times, but in what is now Romania, and in territory in which Greeks did not constitute a majority or anything like it, but where, interestingly, they were privileged and powerful intermediaries between the populace and the Muslim overlords. In fact, there is reason to suspect that the original Greek national movement aimed not at a homogeneous modern nation-state, but rather at a reversal of ranks within the then Empire: in brief, to put the clock back and replace the Ottoman Empire by a new Byzantium.

Generally speaking, not merely Greek, but also the other Balkan nationalisms can be seen as constituting a major problem for the theory, given the backwardness of the Balkans by the standards of industrialism and modernity. All one can say on this point is that, in the Balkans, two distinct processes overlapped. One of them is the turbulence which is normal in the agrarian world at the mountain or desert edges of empires, where local groups and chiefs make use of any weakening of the imperial centre to make themselves autonomous or independent. But it so happened, in the Balkans, that the overlords were Muslim and the peripheral wild men were Christians. This, as it were, accidental con-

enlisted, by invoking a few *ad hoc* special factors, on the side of the thesis which links nationalism to industrialism (notwithstanding the notorious lack of nineteenth-century Detroit, Ruhr or Black Counties in the Balkans), the other nationalists who came to disturb the long relative peace between Vienna and the shot at Sarajevo on the whole fit the thesis fairly well. What is to be said of this Age of Irredentism which stretches from Vienna to Versailles?

Leaving aside Italy and Germany (we shall deal with them anon), the interesting thing is that, politically, nationalism did not achieve all that much. The Magyars, it is true, improved their position somewhat in 1867, but most of the Slavs did not. (Of course, within the Habsburg Empire, it was impossible for both Magyars and Slavs to do so, for their claims were mutually incompatible.) It is true that, by 1912, five or six buffer states existed in the Balkans, whether as a result of the weakness of the Ottomans or the strength of nationalism; but on the whole, the handiwork of the peace-makers of Vienna had worn well. Eastern Europe, at any rate, did not (on the political map) look so very different from what had been agreed in 1815. This restored *ancien régime* does not seem to have been all that fragile. It stood the test of time.

But in dramatic, striking contrast to its relative failure to modify the political map, nationalism, during the very same period, scored an overwhelming victory in ideology, in literature. Ignored even more than openly spurned in 1815, by 1914 no one ignored it, and most took it for granted. The illusion of the fundamental, natural, self-evident role of nationalism in politics was very well established. Some liked to think of themselves as internationalists rather than nationalists, but the popular appeal of such a view was shown to be insignificant in 1914. Come 1918, the crucial standing of nationalism as a principle of political legitimacy is as self-evident as it had been irrelevant in 1815. The moral victory of the principle was nearly complete: very few dared raise their voices against it.

fashionable, even among authorities with little sympathy for liberalism or Protestantism as such, because these virtues are politically and economically useful. The Prussians free their peasants not because they are smitten with the pure ideal of liberty, but because they do not wish to be thrashed again as they were at Jena: free peasants, it would appear, fight better than serfs, so we had better liberate our serfs, whether we like it or not. Among the first to toy with what later became the Weber thesis about the role of Protestantism in productivity were those arch-champions of the Counter-Reformation, the Habsburgs, eager to emulate the productivity of the Prods, and reforming their educational system with this end in mind.

To sum up: the political system set up in Vienna in 1815 remains totally, uncompromisingly, non-nationalist in its organising principles. Sicily can be swapped for Sardinia, Lombardy for Belgium, Norway for Finland, without a word being spoken about ethnicity, language or culture. What have these frits to do with politics? As for the subjects or victims of these decisions, no doubt most of them would, had they the eloquence, express themselves in the terms commended by Elie Kedourie near the end of his book on nationalism.

The only criterion capable of public defence is whether the new rulers are less corrupt and grasping, or more just and merciful, or whether there is no change at all, but the corruption, the greed, and the tyranny merely find victims other than those of the departed rulers. (Kedourie 1993 [1960]: 135)

But for all that, forces were already in operation, had in fact been in operation for some time, which were to ensure that a system based on these principles was unlikely to be stable or remain unchallenged. The nationalist snake may not have been perceived, but it was already in the garden.

vergeance was liable to endow a peripheral dissidence, practised by tribesmen and bandits, with a kind of doctrinal or ideological content: the rebels were not just rebels, but men of a distinct faith and hence culture, and when the confrontation is not merely one between rivals for power and benefits, but between *kinds* of men, nationalism is approached. Furthermore, the Christian faith they more or less shared with the West was a kind of conductor: the Enlightenment and the Romanticism which followed it were both, so to speak, heresies within Christianity. Fellow Christians were highly vulnerable to this infection, whereas Muslims were much less so: a long-standing, ingrained sense of superiority towards Christians made them less liable to be attracted by new ideas within Christianity. They were willing to take over western artillery techniques without the mathematics and philosophy linked to them: they could have employed Descartes the officer without heeding the philosopher.

This conductivity by Christianity of anti-Christian heresies within itself must be part of the explanation of why Balkan rebels – unlike, say, Berber rebels within another Muslim empire – were not just rebels, but nationalists as well. This conductivity must also be part of the reason why the Romanovs modernised faster than the Ottomans, thereby creating a messianic intelligentsia whose salvation politics proved fatal in 1917 – a fate Turkey was spared in as far as the Young Turks were pragmatists concerned with state power, not salvation-drunk messianists. Bandit-rebels in Balkan mountains, knowing themselves to be culturally distinct from those they were fighting, and moreover linked, by faith or loss-of-faith, to a new uniquely powerful civilisation, thereby became ideological bandits: in other words, nationalists. I am not suggesting that the hide-outs of Balkan guerrillas contained well-thumbed copies of Diderot and Condorcet; but, indirectly, these rebels and their poets did absorb and disseminate western ideas, particularly in the form in which Romanticism both inverted and continued the Enlightenment. But no matter: whether or not Balkan nationalists can be

and opportunistic. They made hay while the sun shone, and for some reason supposed that the sun would go on shining. It didn't. Come Adolf and Josef, the system collapsed with humiliating ease. What had been built at Versailles had no stability, no staying power. The states born of the principle of self-determination went down easily to a new empire or empires: some offered token resistance, some none; some joined the new masters with a redirected opportunism. There is only one case of successful resistance: Finland. The application of Wilsonian principles in 1918 did not work; an attempt to apply something similar at the collapse of Yugoslavia has had even more tragic consequences, or rather, consequences which were quicker in coming and required no external assistance. The consequences of a similar application in the ex-USSR are yet to be seen.

Stage 4: Ethnic cleansing

The nationalist principle requires that the political unit and the ethnic one be congruent. In other words, given that ethnicity is basically defined in terms of shared cultures, it demands that everyone, or very nearly everyone, within the political unit be of the same culture, and that all those of the same culture be within the same political unit. Simply put: one culture, one state.

There are various ways of attaining this blessed condition. One of them, itself very fortunate and privileged, is by gradual, slow, organic growth. Ernest Renan defined the modern nation, such as can rightly aspire to its own state, in terms of *oblivion*: the members of the nation, and hence of the state, have simply *forgotten* their diversity of cultural origin. The average Frenchman knows he drinks wine, has a decoration and knows no geography. This is the most popular definition of the typical Frenchman, invoked in France itself. But this typical Frenchman does *not* know whether he or rather his ancestors were Gauls, Bretons, Franks, Burgundians, Romans, Normans or something else. It is this

It had all happened to the Armenians very early, on a more modest scale, some of it happened in the Balkans during and at the end of the Balkan wars; it happened between Greeks and Turks at the beginning of the 1920s; it is happening at present in ex-Yugoslavia and, on a proportionately much smaller scale, in the ex-USSR. But the really outstanding period of this process was the 1940s.

Stage 5: Attenuation of National Feeling

This stage may be part reality, part wish-fulfillment. In advanced industrial society, some processes are set in motion which do, or may, diminish the intensity of ethnic feelings in political life. There is perhaps some measure of truth in the old convergence theory of industrial societies, which claimed that, as time progresses, they all come to resemble each other. The theory was originally formulated in the context of rival capitalist and Communist industrialisms, predicting that the two would assume each other's features. The theory has survived the collapse of Communism and the disappearance of its original motive. It seems to have some measure of validity when the cultural baseline is similar – various European industrialisms come to resemble each other with time – but it is far less clear that a similar convergence operates for, say, east Asian and European industrial societies. The European convergence seems particularly marked, for instance, in the sphere of youth culture: the Soviet Union capitulated to Coca-Cola and to blue jeans long before it surrendered to the market and political pluralism.

In so far as this is true, advanced industrial cultures may come to differ, so to speak, phonetically without differing semantically: different words come to stand for the same concepts. People who speak the same language, without literally speaking the same language, may be able to cohabit and communicate even in a mobile society committed to semantic work. Phonetic diversity without semantic diversity may lead to less friction, especially if, for work purposes,

Stage 3: The Age of Versailles and Wilson

The now so self-evident principle was implemented at Versailles – not, admittedly, with an even hand. In areas of great ethnic complexity such as eastern Europe, there is *no* way of implementing the principle fairly. Demographic, historical, geographic and other principles cut across each other. The appeal to referenda will depend, for the result, on how the electoral districts are drawn. Some principles invoked have a certain charm: the Serbs, for instance, do not constitute a majority in Kosovo, but what rational mind could deny that they cannot separate themselves from the location of their greatest national disaster?

The implementation depended a fair amount on who had been on which side in the war, and on geopolitical accident. The new Czechoslovakia (or the reborn Bohemian state, whichever way you wish to look at it) annexed heavily Magyar areas, a mistake which was to cost the new state dear at Munich, with neither demographic nor historical justification, simply because, strategically, the Danube looks like a kind of Rhine, and it was necessary to have a slice of the Pannonian plain if the internal lines of communication of the new state were not to be arduous and precarious. The Magyars and the Bulgarians were unfortunate not merely in having been on the wrong side, but also in being so located as to engender, almost automatically, an alliance of all their neighbours against them, united in a desire to cut a slice of land.

The particular details of the settlement hardly matter. The overall result was only too clear. The system of states set up at Versailles, in the name of the principle of self-determination, was appallingly fragile and feeble. It collapsed at the first storm. The new states had all the weaknesses of the empires they were replacing: they were minority-haunted, at least as much as the empires, and this was inevitable whichever way the boundaries were drawn, short of ethnic cleansing, which in those backward days was not widely practised. On top of that, the new states were inexperienced, small, weak, greedy

national Cloud of Unknowing, this blessed amnesia, which *maker* France. Renan's contrast was with the Ottoman Empire, not at all a national state, in which, he said, the Arabs, Turks, Greeks, Armenians, Jews and so forth knew them, at the time he was writing, as well as on the first day of the Ottoman conquest, that they were Arabs, Turks, etc. He should really have said that they knew it *better* even than they had at the inception of the empire: at that early period, their general cultural or religious category may well have been obscured by some local communal membership, whereas the Ottomanising the overall society into self-administering ethnic 'millers', made this miller-ethnicity highly visible and significant, and thus obliged people to identify with it.

A thousand years of history of an (on and off) strong state have achieved that blessed oblivion which Renan praised and singled out as the essence of nationhood. He was right: it is the anonymity of the membership, the participation in the total 'nation' *unmediated* by any significant sub-groupings, which is what distinguishes the modern nation.

But the French have been granted a thousand years to achieve this. What of young-nations-in-a-hurry, eager to forge that homogeneous culture-and-state unit, and unable or unwilling to wait for a long, slow process of dissolution and forgetting of differences?

There is one way in which such homogeneity can be achieved with speed, and since the Yugoslav tragedy it has a name: ethnic cleansing. It constitutes stage 4 of the sequence we are spelling out, on the basis largely of central European history. In central Europe, the main age of this process was the 1940s. Wartime secrecy, the racism-and-ruthlessness ideology of the then masters of Europe, and then victors' licence granted by indignation and opportunity after the end of the war, made possible methods of attaining homogeneity – mass murder, forced migration, migration induced by intimidation – which in more normal times men shrink from. These methods were in fact used.

Of course, these methods were not invented in the 1940s.

These are some of the factors which help to explain the diminution of nationalist virulence in a world in which the basic factors making for nationalism – the semantic nature of work, the dependence of everyone on the mastery of and acceptability in a named high culture: in other words, a 'nation' – continue to operate powerfully. We shall also consider this problem in the context of the question: what made nationalism so very acute during the first half of the twentieth century? This is the obverse of the question: why is it diminishing now (if indeed it is)? Whether nationalism is indeed diminishing is contentious and only time will tell.

This consideration does not operate, of course, when it comes to the relationship between a host community and labour migrants who 'do not speak the same language' on top of not speaking the same language. The geographic area where diminution of the intensity of ethnic feeling has been observed is western and even parts of central Europe, but this diminution does not apply to culturally distant labour migrants.

Stable government plus affluence and the expectation of growth do jointly militate against extremism. People who may or may not harbour personal ethnic prejudices will not sacrifice their security and comfort for the sake of provoking violent conflict. The danger arises when these conditions fail to apply: for instance, during the collapse of large political units (e.g. the Habsburg, Bolshevik or Yugoslav states). When authority collapses anyway, when no centre is authoritative in virtue of being recognised by most other members of the society, when new authorities need to be created and one selected from among a number of rival pretenders, then – apart from competitive terror (the commonest way of singling out the victor and recipient of new legitimacy) – a good way of recovering social cohesion is through ethnic movements. They can be activated and mobilised more quickly than movements based on more complex considerations: the marks and symbols of ethnic membership are more conspicuous in the modern world than any other. This may be sad, but it is a fact.

Ethnic conflict is frequently about territory. The symbolism of land continues to be potent in the emotional poetry of nationalism. Nevertheless, a great ideological change has come over much of the world since 1945: the brilliant success of some of the victors have made it plain that what makes you big, important, rich and strong in the modern world is not acreage, but rates of growth. This lesson has sunk in, and is at least a contributory factor to the diminution of nationalist ardour.

Nations and nationalism since 1780

Programme, myth, reality

SECOND EDITION



E. J. HOBBSBAM