

Chapter 1

MAPPING THE FIELD: THEORIES OF NATIONALISM AND THE ETHNOSYMBOLIC APPROACH

Daniele Conversi



To be fully understood, the ethnosymbolic approach, developed by Anthony D. Smith, must be placed in the context of a larger body of literature on nations and nationalism. Two streams of thought are particularly important here: *instrumentalism* as opposed to *primordialism*, and *modernism* as opposed to *perennialism*. This chapter will explore those theories with which Smith has most often engaged, placing his own approach within a larger cross-disciplinary context. The scope of this volume compels me to be highly selective: I will only deal with those theories with which Smith has most persistently interacted. The reader will not find here much about other theories like rational choice, which still dominates US academia.¹ The chapter will conclude with an exploration of the limits of ethnosymbolism as a tool for interpreting current events and conflicts.

PRIMORDIALISM

Smith's initial polemics were directed at two contrasting vogues in scholarly research: primordialism and instrumentalism. Primordialists appeal to emotional and instinctive constraints as ultimate explanations for national mobilisation. They typically date the origin of nationhood back to remote epochs, treating them as emotional givens. Their approach is often associated with nationalist discourse, which occasionally reverberates in academia. For Steven Grosby (1995), 'primordial' refers to the 'significance of vitality which man attributes to, and is constitutive of, both nativity and structures of nativity', including lineage, family, and, most importantly, territory. Donald Horowitz (2004) postulates the existence of a broader scholarly category called '*the primordialists*', distinguished by their reluctance to analyse ethnonationalism as a relevant phenomenon in its own right. Classic nationalists proclaim the immutable nature of their symbolic universes. 'Nation-states' seem to have the power, tools (media) and legally enforceable apparatus (official education) to impose their primordialist vision as the only acceptable one.

But what happens when self-defining 'nation-states' fail to absorb recalcitrant minorities? In the heyday of the nation-state (till about the end of World War Two), this was a common goal. Dominant nations responded to the challenge of mobilised nationalities by stressing further their primordialist 'pedigree'. Far too often, ethnic cleansing and mass expulsions became the ultimate culmination of denial of difference. Thus, the state's determinist eschatology was constructed as a powerful obstacle vis-à-vis the feared transformation of rival '*ethnies*' into fully fledged 'nations'.² The very institutional continuity of existing states was often proffered as evidence of the primordality of the nation they embody. As Smith notes, these visions were 'heavily influenced by an organic nationalism which posited the "rebirth" of nations after centuries of somnolence, amnesia and silent invisibility' (Smith 2004: 53).

No wonder primordialists have been an easy target for more positivist, calculative approaches, becoming 'the straw man of ethnic studies', indeed 'the most maligned for their naivete in supposing that ethnic affiliations are given rather than chosen, immutable rather than malleable, and inevitably productive of conflict' (Horowitz 2004: 72–3). By accentuating the explosive and unpredictable nature of ethnic bonds, primordialists seem to discourage further scholarly enquiry, particularly into the causes of, and possible solutions to, ethnic conflict.

An approach that encompasses both primordialism and instrumentalism is *sociobiology*. Smith describes this as a radical variety of primordialism. In fact, Pierre Van den Berghe, who began to use the term '*ethny*' as early as the 1970s, considers ethnic and racial sentiments as an extension of kinship ties (1981: 80). Sociobiological and 'kinship' perspectives bring forth the centrality of descent in defining ethnic groups. However, Van den Berghe's idea of *kin selection* can also be read as an extreme form of 'individual instrumentalism': if the overriding criterion is the reproduction of one's own genes, everything else becomes a tool to this end, the epiphenomenon of a larger biological drive for group survival. The idea of ethnic ties as 'kinship' ties is also embraced by Donald Horowitz (1985), who defines ethnic groups as '*super-families*'. Indeed, nationalism conveys the idea that members of the nation are somehow related by birth. No real biological relationship is needed, a mere unproven belief could turn nationalism into a *placebo*, a potion with no chemically active ingredients but miraculous effects.

INSTRUMENTALISM

Instrumentalism conceives ethnicity as a dependent variable, externally controlled according to its strategic utility for achieving more secular goods (formally in the name of the group, in fact solely to the elites' advantage). Instrumentalism is also often referred to as *constructivism* (Brown 2000), while 'the claim that ethnic

group boundaries are not primordial, but socially constructed is now the dominant view' (Hechter and Okamoto 2001: 193).³

For radical instrumentalists, the category 'nation' does not correspond to any objective reality. They postulate a sharp fracture between political-economic élites and their followers, seeing the latter as passively manipulated by the former. For Eric Hobsbawm (1995), they are ambitious '*social engineers*' deliberately stirring up the atavist emotions of the masses. Elie Kedourie (1960) rather saw nationalism as a conspiracy devised by German Romantic intellectuals. In short, instrumentalists try to single out the 'manufacturers' of nations among those social groups that have most to gain from it.

Hobsbawm's term '*invention of tradition*' has acquired a nearly iconic meaning (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Hobsbawm belongs to a Marxist tradition that Smith sees as over-confident in locating national manipulators with surgical precision (1998: 117–24). For this line of thought, it is rather irrelevant whether or not the repository of ethnic symbols from which elites attain power persists through the ages. They reject the claim that nations are fixed, pre-determined, natural entities, and identify nationalism as deriving from discursive and political practices. Unscrupulous leaders such as Adolph Hitler, Slobodan Milosevic and Saddam Hussein can engage in an unprincipled, deceitful, devious use of patriotism, deforming it into annexation, conquest, subjugation, imperialism, war and genocide. They manipulate public feelings for the only purpose of holding on to power. Of course, this does not mean that elites can instantly invent the symbolic material from which to draw on their mobilising power.

Smith does not deny that ethnicity, as an independent variable, can be abused and manipulated. But he stresses that it can scarcely be created. Therefore, elites can distort and dramatically alter existing myths. Yet, it is questionable whether, and how far, they can 'invent' them. In their pristine version, instrumentalists also failed to recognise that key activists in the mobilised groups may simply be interested in the maintenance of their cultural heritage, rather than gaining material goals. There may well be no cynical aspirations there, but a sincere desire to preserve something from the past, if not merely a positive self-image.

Nevertheless, ethnonational mobilisation often results from the conscious efforts of elites to obtain access to specific social, political and material resources. Such goals are better pursued in the name of 'alleged' common interests. Socio-political elites are particularly efficient in deploying the ethnosymbolic complex to the full: they often engage in top-down 'myth-making' – or at least they attempt to do so. But does this mean that they can invent myths *impromptu*? Not quite so.

MODERNISM

Speculations about the timing of nations ('when is a nation?') and the emergence of nationalism ('when did nationalism become an influential force and dominant ideology?') has led to two contrasting calendars: *modernists* date their formation to the rise of modernity, in whatever form the latter is defined; *perennialists* see them as enduring, inveterate, century-long, even millennial phenomena, certainly predating modernity.⁴

Modernism remains one of the few postulates overwhelmingly embraced by most scholars, in itself a rare achievement: even primordialists may see nationalism as the *modern* re-enactment of a pre-modern idea. Modernism has long been the dominant trend not only in nationalism studies, but also in related fields: for genocide scholars, ethnic cleansing tends to be a substantially modern phenomenon (Kuper 1981; Levene 2005; Mann 2005), whether or not one includes 'colonial' (antipodal) genocides within an expanded definition of modernity (Palmer 1998).⁵ Similarly, and more obviously, Fascism studies (Gentile 2000; Gregor 1979) and totalitarianism studies (Griffin 1991) share a fully fledged modernist view of history, arguing that both these phenomena cannot develop outside modernity. Most scholars of nationalism are also modernists and entirely associate the nation, not only nationalism, with modernity.⁶

Can anti-instrumentalist primordialism combine with modernism? Connor (1993; 2004a) adopts a critique of instrumentalism while pursuing a robust modernist agenda. The Connor–Smith debate is highly representative of this contrast: while Smith (2004) argues that it is possible to date an embryonic development of modern nations to ancestral times, Connor (2004b) retorts by defining such a task as purely speculative and rejects sweeping *longue durée* explanations.⁷ If nationalism is a mass – not an elite – phenomenon, then it can only occur at a quite advanced stage of modernity. That is when the development of modern mass communication makes it possible for an ethnic core elite to spread national identification amongst larger and larger sectors of the population.

GELLNER'S THEORY OF INDUSTRIAL HOMOGENISATION

Since Gellner was perhaps the major modernist influence on Smith's work, it is appropriate to dedicate a separate section to his theory. A former disciple of Ernest Gellner (1925–95), Smith has questioned and challenged the latter's deterministic and modernist grand-vision. This has been a daunting task, not least because Gellner had, since the 1970s, been the revered doyen and most influential scholar in the field. Not only has Smith succeeded, he also fruitfully tackled a broader range of approaches, producing an alternative vision that vigorously

challenged established wisdom.

Gellner (1983) associates modernity with the spread of industrialisation. The latter brought about an unprecedented, all-pervasive change that disrupted the traditional balance of society, creating new constellations of shared interests.⁸ For Gellner, nationalism was the offspring of the marriage between state and modern culture, celebrated on the altar of modernity. With the passage from agricultural to industrial society, a 'high', scientific culture, carried by standardised, national languages, becomes an all-pervasive requisite. However, only the state has the power to inculcate the new standard on an uprooted labour force. A nation is hence defined as common membership in a shared 'high culture'. In turn, nationalism is defined as 'primarily a principle that holds that the political and national unit should be congruent' (Gellner 1983: 1).

In his typical lapidary and terse style, Ernest Gellner pushes the 'invention' of nations argument to its logical consequences: 'Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist' (Gellner 1964: 168). But he also argued that state-enforced homogenisation, metaphorically identified as the Empire of '*Megalomania*', provokes the reactions of those who have been either excluded, or opted out by their own choice in order to protect their own culture. These latter are bound to form their own national movements, in which a low culture is promoted and transformed into a High Culture. Their political project is the establishment of a new '*Ruritania*', the prototypical nationalist homeland (reminiscent of historical occurrences in Eastern Europe, including Gellner's native Czecho-Slovakia).⁹ In the homogenising world of nation-states, societies find themselves at a radical crossroads: either organise themselves on the basis of the nation-state model or succumb (Gellner 1983).

Smith has accepted in part Gellner's focus on nationalism as replacing the social cohesion of pre-modern societies, but did not share his radical modernism, or his dogmatic stress on the relationship between industrialism and socio-cultural homogenisation. Contra Gellner, he has argued that industrialisation is not a prerequisite for nationalism, as there are instances of nationalist movements emerging well before the latter's advent. He mentions the cases of Finland, Serbia, Ireland, Mexico, Japan and many others, including post-revolutionary France and pre-Bismarckian Germany (Smith 1998: 36ff.). The critique is commonly accepted by most scholars. Gellner himself acknowledged the Greek 'exception'.¹⁰ He also quoted the Kurdish experience, as a case where 'a modern nationalism might appear in a region in which tribal organisation survives' (Gellner 1964: 173), even though Kurdish nationalism was mostly born as a reaction against the imposition of the Turkish state's secular nationalism (Rugman and Hutchings 1996).¹¹ Moreover, Gellner's evolutionism (Smith 2004: 65) postulates a view of mankind advancing through a series of progressive evolutionary stages leading to

socio-political paradigm shifts. This grand theory is too deterministic and associated with over-ambitious neo-positivist paradigms.

PERENNIALISM

To the perennialists, the nation is reassuringly granted for posterity, indeed destined to eternity. This double projection towards past and future represents nationalism's greatest force, but also its greatest weakness as a generalisable principle.

Smith (1999: 5–27; 2000: 34–41) has identified two varieties of perennialism: *continuous perennialism* focuses on the continuity of nations over the centuries, indeed millennia; *recurrent perennialism* focuses on the broader recurrence of the nation as a general phenomenon – particular nations 'may come and go, but the phenomenon itself is universal' (2000: 35). Again, it is the idea of ethnic chosenness, which can better explain persistence and articulate the stress on continuity.

For Adrian Hastings (1997), the very act of translating the Bible into the vernacular turned the reading public into a 'chosen people'. By allowing translation of Sacred Texts from Hebrew/Greek into the vernacular, Christianity encouraged the development of ethnicities and pre-modern nations. It also endowed the latter with a new sense of sacredness attached to their collective identities by supplying a ready-made sense of God-sent chosenness. Even in a secular world, the most powerful election myth remains a Biblical one: ensuing secularisation, the sacred object of devotion shifts from God to the 'chosen people' themselves in a self-idolising frenzy. Many authors have viewed nationalism as a religious surrogate: the spread of secularisation, and perhaps atheism itself, was accompanied by this sense of divine election, stressing the profane essence of neighbouring groups. Smith (1972) has identified here continuity with pre-modern ethnocentrism.

Islam, by contrast, 'deconstructs' nations, remaining one of the most powerful antidotes against nationalism (Hastings 1997: 200–2). The sacred centrality of Arabic as a God-given tongue makes the development of vernacular nationalisms unlikely. In the West, religious print literature and, in particular, vernacular Bibles play a key role in generating national feeling and cultures. Firmly rooted in Judeo-Christian values, nationalism then spread outside Christianity in the wake of colonialism. It is through the mirror of the Bible which nations are initially conceived: 'The Bible provided ... the original model of the nation. Without it and its Christian interpretation and implementation, it is arguable that nations and nationalism, as we know them, could never have existed ...' (Hastings 1997: 4). In particular, the role of territory is comparable to that of biblical Israel (see also Grosby 1995). The concept of a Holy Land has been passed on to all significant nationalist movements, either civically or ethnically based.

Hastings' work is a critique of mainstream 'modernism' and its claim that nations and nationalism are a product of the modern era, ignoring – among other fallacies – the early examples of English and Irish nationalisms. For most modernist historiography, nations did not exist before the French Revolution (and occasionally before the Polish Rising of 1794). Instead, Hastings argues that English national identity can be dated back at least to 1066 and that the main European nations had already emerged by the sixteenth century. 'England presents the prototype of both a nation and a nation-state in the fullest sense' (1997: 4). The English case in Europe is unique and as such it became a model 'which was then re-employed, remarkably little changed, in America and elsewhere' (1997: 5). But English nationhood preceded English nationalism, the latter manifesting itself visibly during the long fourteenth-century wars with France. 'Divine election' can also help explain the self-righteous character of British imperial patriotism or '*missionary nationalism*' (Kumar 2003). Despite the nation's antiquity, a formal political philosophy of nationalism only appeared in the nineteenth century. It was universally canonised even later, after World War I, when President Woodrow Wilson turned it into the building block of the US-led post-Versailles new world order (1920).

One aspect that has been left unexplored is the association of chosenness with the state, rather than the nation, particularly noticeable in fascist and totalitarian regimes. Some of the excesses of such secular nationalisms are to be found in the idea of chosenness.

Smith (1998) has provided one of the staunchest critiques of modernism and has therefore been often identified as a 'perennialist'. However, his focus on ethnic persistence does not necessarily imply that *ethnies* are perennial entities, since he clearly identifies patterns of ethnic survival, contrasting them with instances of ethnic demise and extinction (Smith 2000; 2003). His novel approach, perhaps not yet a fully fledged theory, has come to the fore to bridge the gap: to overcome the dichotomy between perennialism and modernism, Smith (1986; 1998; 2004) has developed his own *ethnosymbolic* approach.

ETHNOSYMBOLISM

Ethnosymbolism underlines the continuity between premodern and modern forms of social cohesion, without overlooking the changes brought about by modernity. The persisting features in the formation and continuity of national identities are myths, memories, values, traditions and symbols. This is a complex set of elements that Smith tends to use interchangeably, often without sufficient specification to allow critical analysis or easy application. Myths of ethnic descent, particularly myths of 'ethnic chosenness', lie at its core. Of all these myths, the

myth of a 'golden age' of past splendor is perhaps the most important.

Although Smith does not systematically focus on the *intellectuals*, he acknowledges their pivotal role as the creators, inventors, producers and analysts of ideas (Smith 1981: 109).¹² How is it that the intellectuals are central to ethnosymbolism? They mostly act as 'chroniclers' of the ethnic past, elaborating those memories which can link the modern nation back to its 'golden age'. Philologists, archeologists, poets, literati and, most of all, historians are the key players in the ethnonational game (Conversi 1995; Hutchinson 1987). Leoussi (2004) adds visual artists, inspired by demotic, historical and ethnocultural themes. If one extends the category of intellectuals to include 'conveyors of ideas', rather than mere producers of ideas, one can see the key role of painters, musicians, sculptors, photographers, novelists, play-writers, actors, film directors and television producers in establishing a connection between the present times and a national 'golden age'. Smith recognises their strategic use of national *symbols*, as 'perhaps even more potent than nationalist principles' and ideology (2000: 72). Through them, the imagined community becomes vividly popular, emotionally awakened and periodically celebrated. Scholars, artists and poets help the modern nation to draw sustenance from a re-lived ancient past, providing the linkage with earlier *ethnies* or ethnic communities. Indeed, a historically deep ethnic foundation is a prerequisite to the survival of modern nations.

'Intellectuals' should not necessarily be understood as individuals belonging to a particular class and sharing a specific high culture. As initiators of nationalism, they first envision, define, codify and set the boundaries of the nation. Nationalist 'intellectuals' must be literate, but barely so: there is no need for particular *finesse* or sophistication. What matters is their capacity to express and combine a credible national identity. This includes an ability, not simply to speak the language of their core constituencies, but to reinterpret and re-live their ancestral myths.

This leads us to ask how far the intellectuals can influence, mobilise and 'instrumentalise' public opinion. How can relatively lonely, isolated individuals have such wide appeal? How is it possible to convince people to believe in the immemorial, perennial essence of the nation? The answer is to be found in a second social category, the *intelligentsia* or the *professionals*. Smith (1991; 1996; 1998) identifies this category as a group of individuals exposed to some form of superior education. It is not strictly a class but rather a social category, since in theory individuals from all classes can belong to it. They have not merely the will and inclination, but also especially the power and capacity to apply and disseminate the ideas produced by the intellectuals.¹³ Therefore this stratum plays an even more crucial role in the success of nationalist movements. Once the intelligentsia begins to challenge officialdom by exploiting its strategic position, it becomes a key protagonist of expanding mass movements.¹⁴

In general, the intellectuals' role is seen by ethnosymbolists as providing a skeleton upon which to build a larger movement: 'bridges' must be built between past and present, between ethnic myths and their modern translation into viable, coherent identities and political programmes. If the focus is on the incipient stages of nationalism, then we could hardly conceive a nation without intellectuals. A first generation of amateur scholars is needed to envision the nation, to spawn an embryonic 'image' of the nation. Yet, nationalism can and does exist without them. Indeed, the worst nationalist excesses are often carried out in a wholly militarised environment, in which intellectuals may be routinely executed. Under such polarisation, their role – and the fate of culture in general – will be inevitably limited.

THE LIMITS OF ETHNOSYMBOLISM

Although ethnosymbolism remains broadly unchallenged on its own ground, some internal weaknesses may be signalled. I shall concentrate here on two of them.

The first weakness lies in its fragile conceptual foundations. Smith defines the nation as 'a named human population occupying an historic territory, and sharing myths, memories, a single public *culture* and *common rights* and *duties* for all members' (Smith 2004: 65, my emphasis). This is somewhat unclear. The inclusion of 'common rights and duties' in the definition seems to refer to *citizenship* rights, which can only be fully granted by the existence of a state or autonomous region. Around the world, there are cases that seem to substantiate Smith's definition: for instance, the Basque *fueros* were crucial in the formation of modern Basque national identity. The latter were 'common rights and duties' enshrined in bilateral agreements stipulated by the Crown with various localities (Conversi 1997). These rights ceased partly to exist ensuing state centralisation in 1876 (date of the final Carlist defeat). Of course, Basque nationhood persisted insofar as nationalist sentiments lingered on. It is even possible to affirm that nationalism was largely a response to the abolition of the *fueros*: the unilateral breach of such an agreement prompted an 'ethnogenetic' effect. I am not denying that a Basque *ethnie* existed before nationalism: indeed, the Basque case is a particularly rich illustration that a sense of shared ethnic distinction could be preserved for millennia without supportive state institutions. More limitedly, I am arguing that a new form of collective consciousness emerged as a result of the Spanish state's centralisation, forced assimilation and repression of ethnic dissent ('ethnogenesis' does not refer to the 'instant' creation of an *ethnie*).

A similar pattern could be found in Catalonia. In 1716 Philip V's Royal Decree of *Nueva Planta* ('New Order') banned the use of language and other autonomous institutions. Despite this centralist onslaught, a Catalan civil code persisted: indeed,

an uncodified Catalan law remained in vigour till 1960, whereas the Spanish civil code (codified in 1889) was only applied as a complementary measure.

Connor (2004b) counter-argues that Smith's definition is far too inclusive to be effective, confusing nationhood with *citizenship* (and nation with state). Instead, Connor defines the nation as 'the largest group that can command a person's loyalty because of felt kinship ties; it is, from this perspective, the fully extended family' (1994: 202). I believe this to be a more straightforward definition. However, it may be even too rigid. For instance, Connor argues that there is no American or Indian nation (2004b: 37). The US Constitution's opening sentence, 'We the people', lends itself to two opposite interpretations: one ethnic, the other civic. The 'people' can be either the *ethnos*, sharing putative descent, or the *demos*, simply sharing citizenship and hypothetically equal rights, irrespective of their descent (Mann 2005: 55–69). Consequently, Connor's definition is not helpful here. In other words, the ethnic core of American 'patriotism' emerges both in extreme situations and in daily recurrences of 'banal nationalism' (Billig 1995).

A second weakness of ethnosymbolism relates to its apparent difficulty in explaining the variability of nationalist movements and their different motivations. Failing this task, ethnosymbolism risks remaining a descriptive endeavour. Until recently, ethnosymbolism had been relatively immune to criticism. Some authors have now come to describe it as a sort of scholarly romanticism (Özkirimli 2000: 216). How is it that ethnosymbolism is actually 'neo-romantic'? One 'romantic' postulate is ethnosymbolism's stress on the role of the intellectuals in the passage from *ethnie* to nation that I discussed above. The world has greatly changed since the first nineteenth-century nationalist stirrings. Do nations still depend on intellectuals to articulate their identities and aspirations? In my view, political elites are now key agents in nationalist movements, aided by the modern mass-media through which they obtain direct access to their constituencies. Indeed, outside the media's spotlight, a political movement would lose all chances to reach its 'natural' constituencies, unless, as sometimes happens, it uses terrorism as a reminder of its existence and goals. But, while terrorism is itself media-driven, it lies at the opposite spectrum of intellectual endeavour. Does this mean that intellectuals have become dispensable or inadequate? I would argue that intellectuals have become marginal in their public role, since the media-aided power of political elites to manipulate ethnic myths and traditions for their own ends has increased. This development is particularly prominent and dangerous in authoritarian and totalitarian regimes.

But it is not only totalitarian societies that aspire to the creation of a 'new man': media-driven societies can achieve the same outcome under apparently democratic conditions. Of all the media, the television has the power of achieving vast mobilising effects. For this reason, the political scientist Giovanni Sartori (1997)

describes television as totalising to the point of *anthropogenesis* the creation of a 'new man', whom he calls '*homo videns*'.

The breakup of Yugoslavia is a litmus test. The country collapsed mostly because of the extreme distortion of pre-existing ethnonational myths blazed abroad by state-controlled media. Whereas primordialists tend to speak of a 'revival' of (mostly) Serbian pre-modern ethnic symbolism (Anzulovic 1999), a more prosaic interpretation is that these myths were strenuously deformed by state-controlled media, particularly Belgrade TV, the *Tanjug* News Agency and the newspaper *Politika* (Gallagher 2003; Malcolm 1994; Ramet 2002; Thompson 1999). A common misconception is that Yugoslavia 'fell apart' or suddenly 'broke up', due to the internal tensions caused by peripheral secessionism, particularly in Croatia and Slovenia. The conflict was instead induced by the militarily and politically dominant centre, mobilising pre-existing ethnosymbolic complexes through a 'ravidly distorted national control of almost all television and information on the conflicts' (Hardin 1997: 160).¹⁵

What I am trying to demonstrate is that a naked ethnosymbolic approach cannot do justice to the complexities of particular national circumstances. It is also limited in its power to explain how ethnic conflicts emerge and how nations are mobilised. Finally, ethnosymbolism has not addressed the wider context, nor the precipitates, nor the different outcomes of various ways of mobilising ethnic myths and symbols. So far, ethnosymbolism has largely disregarded the changes in and adaptations of these myths to the goals of elites. Hence, there is the risk of drifting towards an agency-less approach.¹⁶ Furthermore, by dismissing outright the role of elite manipulation in the enormous emotional appeal of nationalism, ethnosymbolism leaves out of consideration the dynamics of power.

My critique does not question ethnosymbolism's deepest findings: even though it may be possible to claim that elites can, to a certain extent, engage in myth production, what most often appears to be the case is that they *deform* and *distort* existing myths beyond recognition. They can do so in specific and historically identifiable ways. But, in modern times, the control of the mass media is probably the essential precondition for such a change. Among other things, this limits or rules out the manipulative capacity of *non*-state actors. The implication is twofold: First, state and stateless nationalisms should be treated separately, because the latter cannot enjoy the monopoly of information and exert overwhelming control of the media. Second, in the radio–television age the role of the intellectuals remains more testimonial and occasional, as the state can easily dispense of their contribution.

I would like to believe that instrumentalism is not necessarily incompatible with ethnosymbolism. Indeed, in order not to remain on the surface and avoid 'descent into discourse', ethnosymbolism would need to be supplemented by a

robust dose of instrumentalism, with special attention to mass manipulation. If Smith's approach could be ideally combined with Herman and Chomsky's (1988) scholarship on 'manufacturing consent', it could yield still unexplored and greatly more appealing results.

CONCLUSION

All the theories Smith has engaged with can shed light on different aspects of the rise of nations and nationalism. I have focused on two broad dichotomies: instrumentalism–primordialism and modernism–perennialism. Primordialism can offer testimonial insights into the nationalists' kinship-like vision of common descent. But instrumentalism is necessary to identify political dynamics, provided that it avoids determinist reductionism. Combining modernism and perennialism, ethnosymbolism focuses on the centrality of myths of descent in ethnic persistence. It also focuses on the role of the intellectuals and the intelligentsia as interpreters, rather than manipulators.

Has Smith achieved a universal account of ethnic conflict and nationalism? In my view, and on the basis of the preceding analysis, there remain two major obstacles to a universal application of ethnosymbolism: its uncertain conceptual basis, particularly in Smith's rather too inclusive definition of the nation; and its limited engagement with the problem of distortion of ethnic myths by political elites.

In defence of ethnosymbolism, this approach has been shown to be applicable and adaptable to a host of widely different epochs and latitudes. It can explain common features lying at the basis of a great deal of sociopolitical developments. But accepting that ethnosymbolism is one of the most sophisticated approaches to the study of nationalism does not bring us nearer to a general theory of nationalism. If Gellner's approach was trenchantly clear, it remained substantially removed from reality and, at best, over-simplified. In contrast, whereas the ethnosymbolic approach may perhaps be closer to reality, it remains conceptually opaque and politically un-nuanced.

The road that leads to the full understanding of nationalism in all its complexities is still a long one. Lacking a general theory, we have still to rely on several approaches, each of which will, in Smith's words, 'illuminate a corner of the broader canvas only to leave the rest of it in untraversed darkness' (1998: 220).

NOTES

- 1 For a recent discussion on this topic, see Banton (2004), Edwards (2004), Stone (2004).
- 2 Smith's choice of the term *ethnie* indicates the emphasis on a sense of collective identity as predating the rise of the modern nation-state, thereby dissociating the nation-state from

- nationalism. The term is a French borrowing, which Smith encountered in the writings of the European federalist Guy Heraud (1963).
- 3 Brown (2000: 5) identifies 'three conceptual languages, which see nationalism as, respectively, an instinct (primordialism), an interest (situationalism) and an ideology (constructivism).'
 - 4 Perennialism is not to be confounded with primordialism. The former refers to nations and is opposed to modernism, the latter refers to ethnic groups and is opposed to instrumentalism. For John A. Armstrong, '*Primordialism*, as the belief that nations have usually existed from time immemorial, has generally been discarded by scholars. However, *perennialism*, the belief that a few nations existed in antiquity or the Middle Ages, and revived subsequently, has more support ...' (Armstrong 2004, 9, my emphasis)
 - 5 Smith (1991: 31) mentions the destruction of Carthage as a possible example of ancient 'genocide'. However, this and similar examples were of an entirely different sort: victors were exerting intimidating practices on the vanquished. In antiquity, it was not uncommon for winning armies to terrorise the populations into submission by providing chilling examples of the fate they might face in case they pondered over rebelling. This had nothing to do with the systematic targeting of entire populations, which can only be ascribed to modern times, with the rise of centralising states, the expansion of empire, scientific management, social engineering, military conscription, and large-scale war-making.
 - 6 For a critique, see Smith (1986: 12; 1998).
 - 7 Both Smith and Connor relate the nation inextricably to ethnicity, but they sharply disagree on the definition and the timing of nationalism (Smith 2004; Connor 2004b)
 - 8 Smith (1998) devotes a chapter of *Nationalism and Modernism* as a critique of Gellner's 'culture of industrialism'.
 - 9 The *Ruritania* metaphor was not Gellner's coining. He took it from the writer Sir Anthony Hope Hawkins (1863–1933), who set his novel *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1894) in the fictional Kingdom of Ruritania.
 - 10 'Early nineteenth-century Athens or Nauplia ... bore very little resemblance to Engels' Manchester, and the Morea did not look like the Lancashire dales' (Gellner 1997: 41).
 - 11 A critique of the industrialisation–nationalism linkage can be shared by both modernists and non-modernists. The modernists see nationalism as a result of modernity, but most often locate the core of modernity in something other than industrialism, for example the modern state (Breuilly 1993), printing (Anderson 1983), or modern communications (Connor 1994, 2004a). Non-modernists insist more broadly on the pre-modern reality of nations (Horowitz 2004; Smith 2004).
 - 12 Elie Kedourie places the intellectuals at the core of his Euro-centric approach (1960): nationalism spread via a mechanism of emulation touching first the local intellectuals and, subsequently, other elites. Its sources can be found in Fichte's combination of Kant's 'self-determination' and Herderian Romanticism, both of which allied with the political praxis of the French Revolution. Intellectuals of one country imitate those from another country, and the epicentre of everything lies in the midst of Europe (France and Germany).
 - 13 The distinction between the two is not too sharp and they may overlap: in their lifetime some individuals have had the possibility both to create and disseminate their ideas. However, these are two clearly distinct activities or 'phases'. Generally, the tendency to be organised in professional corps indicates membership of the intelligentsia (Smith 1981: 109).

- 14 The milestone work on the intellectuals and the intelligentsia remains Miroslav Hroch (1985). With his three-stages model, Hroch shows how an incipient proto-elite of dreamers can flourish and become a mass movement. Phase A is the period of scholarly research, when poets, philologists, archeologists, historians, artists all contribute to the 'discovery', creation and formalisation of the national culture. Phase B is the period of patriotic agitation. Finally, phase C corresponds to the rise of a mass national movement.
- 15 For this purpose, I coined a concept hitherto inexistent in both International Relations and political theory: 'secession by the centre' (Conversi 2000, 2003). The dominant state-centred vision naively assumed that secession could only occur in the periphery, and that the centre was congenitally interested in maintaining the existing status quo. The rise of Serbian secessionism can be better seen as an attack on the Yugoslav Constitution and a denial of the 'rule of law' through the manipulation of ethnic myths and memories. It expressed no loyalty to the state, but only to the ethnic group, in high and consistent disrespect for political boundaries.
- 16 Agency-lessness is shared by postmodernism's preference for broad descriptive portraits, although it is hard to identify a coherent post-modernist theory of nationalism. In his critique of postmodernism, John Stone (1998: 1) also indicates 'bringing power back in' as the most promising strategy.

REFERENCES

- Anzulovic, Branimir (1999), *Heavenly Serbia: From Myth to Genocide*, New York: New York University Press / London: Hurst.
- Anderson, Benedict (1983), *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso.
- Armstrong, John A. (2004), 'Definitions, periodisation, and prospects for the *longue durée*', *Nations and Nationalism*, 10: 1–2, 9–18.
- Banton, Michael (2004), 'Are Ethnicity and Nationality Twin Concepts?', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 30: 4, 807–14.
- Billig, Michael (1995), *Banal Nationalism*, London: Sage Publications.
- Breuilly, John (1993), *Nationalism and the State*, Manchester: Manchester University Press / NY: St. Martin's Press.
- Brown, David (2000), *Contemporary Nationalism: Civic, Ethnocultural, and Multicultural Politics*, London: Routledge.
- Connor, John (1993), 'Beyond Reason: The nature of the ethnonational bond', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, XVI, 373–89.
- Connor, John (1994), *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Connor, John (2004a), 'Nationalism and political illegitimacy', in Daniele Conversi (ed.), *Ethnonationalism in the Contemporary World: Walker Connor and the Theory of Nationalism*, London: Routledge.
- Connor, John (2004b), 'The timelessness of nations', *Nations and Nationalism* 10: 1/ 2, 35–7.
- Conversi, Daniele (1995), 'Reassessing theories of nationalism. Nationalism as Boundary Maintenance and Creation', *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 1:1, 73–85.
- Conversi, Daniele (1997), *The Basques, the Catalans, and Spain: Alternative Routes to Nationalist Mobilisation*, London: Hurst / Reno: University of Nevada Press 2000.

- Conversi, Daniele (2000), 'Central Secession: Towards a new analytical concept? The Case of Former Yugoslavia', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 26: 2, 333–56.
- Conversi, Daniele (2003), 'The Dissolution of Yugoslavia: Secession by the centre?', in John Coakley (ed.), *The Territorial Management of Ethnic Conflicts*, London: Frank Cass, 264–92.
- Edwards, John (2004), 'Rational Nationalism?', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 30: 4, 837–41.
- Gallagher, Tom (2003), *The Balkans After the Cold War: From Tyranny to Tragedy*, London / New York: Routledge.
- Gellner, Ernest (1964), *Thought and Change*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson / Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gellner, Ernest (1983), *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Gellner, Ernest (1997), *Nationalism*, London: Phoenix / New York: New York University Press.
- Gentile, Emilio (2000), *Il Mito dello Stato nuovo*, Roma/Bari: Laterza.
- Gregor, A.J. (1979), *Italian Fascism and Developmental Dictatorship*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Griffin, Roger (1991), *The Nature of Fascism*, London: Pinter / New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Grosby, Steven (1995), 'Territoriality: The Transcendental, Primordial Feature of Modern Societies', *Nations and Nationalism*, 1: 2, 143–62.
- Hardin, Russell (1997), *One for All: The Logic of Group Conflict*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hastings, Adrian (1997), *The Construction Of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nationalism*, Cambridge / New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hechter, Michael and Dina Okamoto (2001), 'Political Consequences of Minority Group Formation', *Annual Reviews of Political Sciences*, 4, 189–215.
- Heraud, Guy (1963), *L'Europe des ethnies*, Brussels: Presses d' Europe.
- Herman, Edward S. and Noam Chomsky (1988), *Manufacturing Consent. The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, New York: Pantheon Books.
- Hobsbawm, Eric J. and Terence Ranger (eds) (1983), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hobsbawm, Eric J. (1995), *The Age of Extremes*, London: Abacus.
- Horowitz, Donald L. (1985), *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Horowitz, Donald L. (2004) 'The Primordialists', in Daniele Conversi (ed.) *Ethnonationalism in the Contemporary World: Walker Connor and the Study of Nationalism*, London/ New York: Routledge.
- Hroch, M. (1985), *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among Smaller European Nations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hutchinson, John (1987), *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism. The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State*, London: Allen & Unwin.
- Kedourie, Elie (1960), *Nationalism*, London: Hutchinson.
- Kumar, Krishan (2003), *The Making of English National Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kuper, Leo. (1981), *Genocide: Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Leoussi, Athena S. (2004), 'The ethno-cultural roots of national art', *Nations and Nationalism*, 10: 1–2, 143–59.
- Levene, Mark (2005), *Genocide in the Age of the Nation State*, London: I. B. Tauris.
- Malcolm, Noel (1994), *Bosnia: A Short History*, New York: New York University Press.
- Mann, Michael (2005), *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Özkirimli, Umut (2000), *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Overview*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Palmer, Alison (1992), 'Ethnocide', in Michael N. Dobkowski and Isidor Walliman (eds), *Genocide in Our Time: An Annotated Bibliography with Analytical Introductions*, Ann Arbor: Pierian Press.
- Palmer, Alison (1998), 'Colonial and Modern Genocide: Explanations and Categories', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 21: 1, 89–115.
- Ramet, Sabrina P. (2002), *Balkan Babel. The Disintegration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to the Insurrection in Kosovo*, Boulder CO: Westview Press.
- Rugman, Jonathan and Roger Hutchings (1996), *Ataturk's Children: Turkey and the Kurds*, London: Cassell.
- Sartori, Giovanni (1997), *Homo Videns: Televisione e Post-Pensiero*, Roma-Bari: Laterza.
- Smith, Anthony, D. (1972), 'Ethnocentrism, Nationalism and Social Change', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, XIII, 1–20.
- Smith, Anthony D. (1981), *The Ethnic Revival*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, Anthony D. (1986), *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Smith, Anthony D. (1991), *National Identity*, Harmondsworth: Penguin/Reno: University of Nevada Press.
- Smith, Anthony D. (1992), 'Chosen Peoples : Why ethnic groups survive', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 15: 3, 436–56.
- Smith, Anthony D. (1996), *Nationalism in a Global Era*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Smith, Anthony D. (1998), *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism*, London: Routledge.
- Smith, Anthony D. (1999), *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, Anthony D. (2000), *The Nation in History*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Smith, Anthony D. (2003), *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity*, Oxford /New York: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, Anthony D. (2004), 'Dating the nation', in Daniele Conversi (ed.), *Ethnonationalism in the Contemporary World*, London: Routledge .
- Stone, John (1998), 'New paradigms for old? Ethnic and Racial Studies on the Eve of the Millennium', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 21: 1.
- Stone, John (2004), 'Deconstructing Rational Choice: Or Why We Shouldn't Over-Rationalise the Non-Rational', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 30: 4, 841–53.
- Thompson, Mark (1999), *Forging War. The Media in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina*. Luton: John Libbey Press.
- Van den Berghe, P. L. (1981), *The Ethnic Phenomenon*, New York: Elsevier.