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***How Homogenous Must We Be?
Reflections on the Theory of Nationalism***

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ABSTRACT

One of the last and greatest thinkers of Jewish origin from Central Europe, Ernest Gellner, produced a theory of nationalism insisting that the very nature of modernity involved the creation of homogeneous nation-states. I explain why he felt like this, describe his theory of nationalism, note criticisms properly directed against its explanatory mechanisms, insist on the considerable cogency of his basic insight, seek to provide alternative and improved explanatory mechanisms, and end with reflections on our changed political economy – so as to assess the extent to which previous horrors can be avoided.

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He has published eight monographs including *The Sociology of Literature* (Longmans, 1979); *Diagnoses of our Time* (Heinemann, 1981); *Powers and Liberties* (Blackwell, 1985); *Liberalism* (Paladin, 1988); *The State*, co-authored with G.J. Ikenberry (Minnesota, 1989); *Coercion and Consent* (Polity, 1994); *International Orders* (Polity, 1996); and *Is America Breaking Apart?* with Charles Lindholm (Princeton, 1999). He has also published edited collections dealing with the state, the rise of capitalism, the social philosophy of Ernest Gellner, the theory of nationalism, and the nature of civil society. At present he is writing a biography of Ernest Gellner and an analytic history of sociological theory.

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Introduction

Reading Pitirim Sorokin in graduate school did a very great deal to turn me into a comparative historical sociologist so it is accordingly a very great honor to deliver this lecture. I think the best way to honor him is to address the macrohistorical question on which the newspapers of 2005 force our attention. This is at once the sixtieth anniversary of Auschwitz and the year in which the future of Iraq is likely to be decided. Can Iraq find a way in which it can provide a political roof beneath which several nations can prosper? Differently put, have we learned, can we learn, the lesson so graphically posed by the Holocaust?

Asking how homogeneous we must be naturally suggests reflections on the theory of nationalism. I concentrate here on two theorists, Ernest Gellner and Michael Mann, both of whom privilege social structural factors. I concentrate on these two theorists because they are exceptionally distinguished in intellectual terms. No other structural approaches carry such force. Another reason for focusing on Gellner and Mann is that there is something of a progression from one to the other. It is quite proper to see Mann as responding to Gellner, both formally and informally. Two elements are worth stressing. On the one hand, Mann can properly be seen as *the* heir of Gellner's view of nationalism, at least in respect of the historical record. On the other hand, Mann identifies rather different structural factors at work in European history than does Gellner, and he notes that the structuring conditions of contemporary world politics are changing – and in such a way that the character of nationalism may yet be affected. A final preliminary point is in order. I endorse structural accounts and I am sympathetic to the view of nationalism as a reality in the historical record and as a continuing danger within

our world. Accordingly, this lecture is not given from the outside, rather it describes a viewpoint and theoretical developments within our world that I judge to be essentially correct.

Malign Fates

Intellectual history is likely to demonstrate the profound impact of Gellner in his early years on later students of nationalism. His lectures at the London School of Economics in the late 1950s and early 1960s that ended up as the celebrated chapter on nationalism in *Thought and Change* (1964) were attended by such later luminaries in the field as Benedict Anderson and Tom Nairn. This powerful initial justification for concentrating on Gellner, of course, is reinforced by the best-selling status of his book *Nations and Nationalism* (1983). But herein lies a problem. Some themes of that book are so well-known that its central point has been somewhat forgotten. Gellner's central vision, however, is of the greatest import, and it can be seen anew by a means of a biographical excursus – designed less, it should be stressed, to fully understand the man than to take us to the heart of his understanding of nationalism.

The position of Czech Jewry was deeply problematical in the last years of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Kieval, 1988; Kieval, 2000). The social dominance of the German minority had been challenged by the Czech majority, driven by industrialization into cities whose character changed once the demographic balance tipped. Many Jews were part of, or aspired to belong to, the high culture of the imperial centre, and accordingly made sure that their children were educated in German, then distinctively a world language. But the Young Czech movement insisted that Jews learn Czech, not

least so as to undermine the salience of the ‘German’ minority. If this was a cross pressure, further ambivalence was added by the fact that the Young Czechs did not really allow them into the heart of the Czech nation. Thus was born the tricultural world of Kafka (and of course of Hans Kohn, one of the great early theorists of nationalism), a world of dispossession which bred varied longings – for inclusion in the German world, for inclusion in the Czech world, for the recovery of simple Jewish roots, and for Zionism more generally, and endless oscillations between them (Spector, 2000). The break up of the empire did not remove all ambivalence. Loyalty to Germany became ever more difficult given the rise of Nazism, but complete integration into the Czech community remained difficult. Tomas Masaryk gave special status to the Jewish community, allowing it to identify itself on the census returns by religion rather than by nationality or language; this was in one sense a compliment, but it also indicated a measure of distance. Still, in the interwar years out-marriage from the Jewish community reached very high levels, with the position of Jews in general being far better than was the case elsewhere in the region.

This was the world in which Gellner grew up (Hall, 2003; Hall, forthcoming). His parents were German speakers of Jewish background who, nonetheless, took the trouble to learn Czech. The family had a German governess and a Czech maid and Gellner grew up bilingual. Loyalty to Masaryk’s republic was intense, not surprisingly given its liberal democratic success and stunning cultural efflorescence. But there was always awareness of other identities. There is evidence of some Zionist leanings in the mother, and certainly in an aunt. The father had had communist links, and began to cultivate ties to England as fears of the Nazis increased. All the same, the family stayed

until 1939, and so witnessed the arrival of Hitler's troops in Prague. Escape to England was difficult. It was also emotionally traumatic – Gellner viscerally missed Prague during his school years. But his return to Prague in 1945 only brought disillusion. The tricultural world of Prague had come to an end: most Jews, including many in his own family, had been killed, whilst he witnessed the vicious, if comprehensible, ethnic cleansing of the Germans. Convinced that the Czechs would accept communism given their experience at Munich, Gellner left in 1946 to pursue an academic career in England.

Two summary points about the experience of this twentieth century Central European intellectual of Jewish background are obvious. First, modern life forced identity change whether one wanted it or not. Second, *world historical* forces were destroying diverse and varied identities, and inexorably replacing them with units based on a single culture. Not surprisingly, he came to stress rule by one's co-nationals as one of the basic elements of the modern social contract (1964, chapter two).

Gellner's thoughts about nationalism were further influenced by personal experience after the seemingly final move to England in 1946. At an intellectual level, the loss of his early taken-for-granted identity certainly led to a desire to understand closed and meaningful worlds. This was the emotional force behind Gellner's desire as anthropologist to work amongst Berber hill tribes of the High Atlas (Gellner, 1996: 679-80). The involvement in North Africa occasioned his first forays into the study of nationalism, and they marked the initial theory – above all, in demonstrating the invented quality of modern nationalism (Gellner, 1961). But one has the clear impression that the concern with belonging was initially as practical as academic. Gellner's earliest academic papers show him to have been, in part, a member of the tribe of the then

dominant Oxford style of philosophy (Hall, forthcoming). But, unlike Isaiah Berlin, of whose position he was deeply critical, Gellner was unable to stay within this rather confined world. He was thereafter marked down as an oddity, as Central European rather than British. There is a sense in which he wanted to be let in, but was rejected for failing to follow the customs of the country with sufficient diligence. This created a particular ambivalence within him – at once interested in, and attracted to, belonging yet concerned that no social organization would ever be able to contain him in such a way as to limit his freedom of thought.

In the later years of his life Gellner was forced by the tectonic shifts of world politics into thinking further about nationalism. Visits to the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s seemed to confirm his view that multinational political systems were doomed by the social pressures released by modernity. But his return to Prague after 1989 made him reconsider matters. For one thing, Prague itself was so utterly homogenized as to be boring – for all that, this very condition was what Gellner insisted the forces of modernity demanded. For another, he became very conscious of the huge costs that had been unleashed when the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires had collapsed. The resulting power vacuum had encouraged war, which did much to cover the practices – ethnic cleansing, politicide, population transfer, and genocide – that sorted European populations into more homogeneous entities. Arguing against himself, Gellner tried to produce prescriptive ideals which would prevent the break up of the Soviet Union, hoping to see it liberalize and soften, and able to allow sufficient cultural autonomy to retain the passive loyalty of its peoples under a single political roof (Gellner, 1991). These hopes very largely came to naught, but without the generalized disaster –

Chechnya being the obvious exception – that Gellner had expected.

Theories of Nationalism

These personal experiences meant that Gellner thought about nationalism all his life. Complexity lurks beneath this simple statement for it is possible and necessary to distinguish three rather separate theories of nationalism in Gellner's work. Despite the brilliance of *Nations and Nationalism*, the earliest formulation is the most complete and the most powerful, with the final thoughts being, in the last analysis, of lesser interest.

The theory in *Thought and Change* is essentially simple. A good deal of cultural consensus is needed within political units if they are to prosper in the modern world. State education systems typically choose to privilege one language in the interests of economic and military efficiency. If this is to say that some of the world's linguistic cultures are too small to survive, nationalism results from the fact that imperial systems are too large for the purposes of modernity. The key explanatory argument that then follows concentrates heavily on the blocked mobility of the native intelligentsia. Empires tend to send rulers to the peripheries from the metropolitan centre, thereby disadvantaging the ambitious locals who had gained cultural capital by studying at the heart of the empires. Second class citizenship within a large polity – due to skin color, religion, ethnicity, or some other cultural marker – naturally suggested the sense of playing the nationalist card, of becoming a first class citizen within one's own state. Gellner's subtle initial theory suggested a number of sources of support for such intellectuals – mostly sources, it should be noted, present in North Africa. If the working class of newly created cities was an obvious and modern core membership, equally

important were traditional groupings – such as the tribes of the High Atlas – irritated by imposition of non-customary law within their domains. Absolutely central to Gellner's vision was the insistence that nationalists in power were social revolutionaries, creating a nation where none had really existed before. Traditional groupings which had resisted imperial pretensions were doomed to still greater disappointment at the hands of the new, modernizing elite.

What strikes one most about Gellner's second theory of nationalism, expounded in *Nations and Nationalism*, is that it is written at a much higher level of abstraction. The benefit of this was the introduction of a scheme of philosophic history which did much to justify his claim that nationalism was modern. But there was a negative consequence of this very development. Structural conditions at times came to be seen in purely abstract terms, above all in the insistence that industrial society simply needs nationalism – on the grounds that culturally cohesive community was a precondition for the proper working of a modern economy. This was functionalism at its purest, a world bereft of human agents, and it represented a step backwards from the earlier theory. Care needs to be taken at this point. *Nations and Nationalism* is a marvelous book in which Gellner writes his life as if it were sociology. Accordingly, insights of varied sorts abound. A measure of agency is restored in the long parable about Megalomania and Ruritania which describes the move from cultural awakening to political demand on the part of a national community of the imperial periphery. If job prospects might benefit from secession, there are hints at a rather different psychology – at feelings of humiliation that come from not being able to operate within one's own language. Further, Gellner noted that not every ethnic or national community makes it into the world of modern nation-states. A selection

mechanism seems to be at work, but it was not one that Gellner ever theorized. Finally, an ingenious typology of nationalism was worked out, purportedly designed to go beyond Plamenatz's distinction between Western and Eastern (in effect, civic and ethnic) forms of nationalism – but not in fact much used by Gellner thereafter (Gellner, 1983: 99; Plamenatz, 1973).

The seismic shift of 1989, that is, the break up of the Soviet Union and the hideous wars of the Balkans, forced Gellner once again to confront the national question. An obvious shift in Gellner's position has already been mentioned, namely that move from description to prescription that saw him arguing against himself, forgetting, so to speak, his view that empires were doomed in an effort to support a liberalized Soviet Union so as to avoid the bloodshed likely to follow from secessions. But there were also subtle changes, mostly emphasizing either non-material motives for nationalist mobilization or insisting that industrialism's 'need' for nationalism was put into action by entirely mundane desires of specific actors for power and influence.¹ Further, Gellner turned slightly from abstract theorizing towards historical location, producing a scheme mingling geographical zones with developments within the history of European nationalism (Gellner, 1997). But these changes are somewhat *ad hoc* (there being no link, for example, between this historical scheme and the typology of *Nations and Nationalism*), and they are of interest principally to specialists.

There is one constant throughout Gellner's work on nationalism, namely the insistence that nationalism and industrialism are related, with the former very largely being seen as the child of the latter. This is distinctively a structuralist account, as Gellner emphasized repeatedly. Little attention needed to be paid to nationalist ideas,

¹ For details of Gellner's last views, see Hall (1998; introduction)

Gellner argued at all times, given the predominance of causal necessity. This view came naturally to a thinker whose philosophy of social science emphasized cause so much more than meaning (Gellner, 1973).

What's Wrong with Gellner's View of Nationalism

An enormous amount of attention has been given to Gellner's work, most of it focusing on *Nations and Nationalism*. A measure of agreement has been reached on four major criticisms that can usefully be considered in turn (Hall, 1998 contains a series of papers, especially those by Hall, O'Leary, Laitin and Brubaker, that make the following points).

There is a virtual consensus in the contemporary philosophy of social science to the effect that functionalist reasoning is meretricious. There is a great deal to be said in favor of this view. Consequences should not be taken as causes. Differently put, history has never seen fit to recognize my needs (of which there are many). But two points should be borne in mind to counter any easy rejection of Gellner's view of nationalism on this count. First, it is not at all clear that Gellner's work is functionalist. The initial theory most certainly was not, whilst that of *Nations and Nationalism* can be saved – as Gellner himself stressed (1996: 627-8) – by adding to it agents who homogenize national territories because they believe that this will aid the varied workings of social, economic and political life. Second, a measure of skepticism is due towards the anti-functionalist consensus. Much of life is drift rather than mastery, making the search for agents in control of events highly unrealistic. One way of thinking of functionalism is in terms of unintended consequences: this rich seam of social understanding has been sidelined by

social theory obsessed with the impact of rational actors. My own hunch is that the social sciences will soon see some revival of functionalism. But this is essentially an aside. Let us imagine that Gellner's theory is, so to speak, judged to be philosophically sound, and turn to the remaining criticisms. The next two are related, and so can be taken together; they are the most damning.

Gellner's work at all times suggests that there is a link – which must concern both timing and location – between industrialization and the emergence of nationalism. This viewpoint is subject to fairly obvious refutation. To begin with, several European nationalist movements unquestionably predated the emergence of industrialization. This is true of the drive for Greek independence, as Gellner himself realized (1996: 629-30), but it is even more strikingly so for much nineteenth century Balkan nationalism. There is simply no way in which the Balkans can be seen as an area of industrialization until much later in the twentieth century. The same points apply to the rise of nationalist sentiments within pre-existing states. Britain and France gained such sentiments in the eighteenth century, before the onset of industrial organization (Mann, 1992). Still, a word of warning is in order here. The language of conjecture and refutation is, of course, Popperian. It tends to extreme Puritanism: a single refutation means that a theory should be dropped once and for all. One wonders if this attitude is really suitable for social science. It is very rare for any theory to explain anything *fully*; often we rest content with theories that explain perhaps half of the variation of any particular variable. In the case of nationalism, it is certainly the case that Gellner's account does not explain everything, and I will argue that an alternative view does rather better. But one should not throw the baby out with the bathwater. There *are* cases where nationalism is linked to

industrialization, albeit these are often intermingled with the more political causes of nationalist mobilization that will be presented shortly. Further light can be cast on this topic slightly later in this paper.

A final point made about Gellner's viewpoint is that it is dangerous (Abizadeh, 2002). To think in terms of homogeneity is, according to this view, to encourage it. This is ridiculous. One can, indeed must, recognize the power of nuclear weapons without thereby being a proponent of their use. Further the attack is purely *ad hominem* in character, and it can be refuted on similarly personal grounds. Gellner knew, then longed for, and always wished to find, ways in which a more plural world could work – stressing on many occasions that a repetition of the European pattern of nation-building in Africa would cause disaster. The attempt to understand the world should not be judged harshly, especially since much practical damage has been done in world politics through the actions of the naïve rushing into situations that they do not understand at all. But this is a large issue of great complexity, and it must be dropped immediately, although it is worth discussing on another occasion.

What's Right with Gellner's View of Nationalism

The fundamental, but neglected, insight of Gellner's theory of nationalism is simple: homogenization processes have been central to the history of nationalism. Quite properly Gellner himself had ambivalent feelings about this, at once hating the removal of a plural world whilst insisting on the inevitability of a process that would likely bring economic and political efficiency in its tail. The claim to be made here is very simple, namely, that Gellner's key insight has much to recommend it in descriptive terms. Let us

consider some cases in turn so as to justify this claim.

The Czech case does indeed support Gellner's position. The tricultural world did collapse in the Second World War, with further simplification – the secession of the rich Czechs from the poor Slovaks, discrimination against gypsies – taking place in the years after 1989. Crucially, Czechia is part of a larger European pattern. Mazower's (2005) analytic history of Salonica makes this point for a single city. Crucially, the pattern applies throughout the continent. Before 1914 perhaps 60 million people lived in states not ruled by their co-nationals. This figure was much diminished – perhaps to a mere 25 million – by the break up of empires in 1918 (Mann, 1999:33). Still, the messy intermingling of people within new and fragile states remained a cause of tension in the interwar years. The practices of Hitler and Stalin – genocide, population transfer, ethnic cleansing, and boundary changes, all covered by the fog of war – then created very homogeneous units in most of Central and Eastern Europe. Everyone will be able to bear witness to the continuing homogenization of recent years: the break up of multinational arrangements in Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia – with hideous ethnic cleansing being involved in the latter case. There are rather few cases – Spain above all, with Great Britain currently undergoing change, Switzerland having idiosyncrasies all its own, with Belgium almost having ceased to exist – from Eastern to Western Europe in which one can speak of significant multinationalism. Differently put, most countries are now fully developed nation-states, within which a single ethnicity or culture dominates. There are of course minorities, sometimes expanding, within such states, and there is much talk of multiculturalism. But multiculturalism is not multinationalism, for one thing being much easier to manage politically.

To this point I have concentrated on European history, but the mention of multiculturalism suggests turning attention briefly to the United States. It is important to note – whilst remembering at all times that the continuing disadvantage and discrimination faced by Afro-Americans – that in crucial respects the United States is, as it always has been, a huge machine for turning people into Americans (Hall and Lindholm, 2001). What is noticeable, for example, about the purported rise of ethnic politics is that this is so very general. Claiming an ethnic past is almost an American right, but it remains American in that such ethnicities are symbolic rather than real – not least because out-marriage rates from ethnic groups tend to be so very high. Perhaps the key indicator of the Gellnerian homogeneous character of the country is that the United States is, and will remain, a monolingual entity. ‘If English was good enough for Jesus Christ’, a campaigning politician declared, ‘it’s good enough for Texas.’ In a nutshell, a fundamental reason for the success of the United States is its lack of deep diversity.

A final general point is worth making. Gellner’s functionalist account of the rise of nationalism does deserve criticism. But this does not detract from the claim that presence of homogeneity has functional benefits. Economic flexibility is often helped by the ability of a homogeneous community to act together – because an external threat is seen as a common problem (Alesina and Spolaore, 2004). These generalizations hold true, for instance, for Denmark – whose success owes much to the way in which it divested itself of territories and peoples due to its remarkable ability to lose wars (Campbell, Hall and Pedersen, 2006). An extremely powerful and highly technical paper seeking to explain the manner in which the Danes took over the English butter market from the Irish in the nineteenth century makes the point especially forcefully.

Homogeneity allowed the Danes to set up co-operatives and to improve the quality of their butter, for this was where profits lay. In contrast, the main avenue to advancement in Ireland lay in the courts – that is, in claiming land from the English (O'Rourke, 2006). Might it be that a background element to recent Irish success – the emergence of the so called 'Celtic Tiger' – is that of the creation of a homogeneous community in the Republic? Gellner said less about two further functional matters, but each deserves comment. First, welfare spending is certainly related to homogeneity, for the simple reason that people are prepared to be taxed at high rates as long as monies go to people exactly like themselves. Secondly, democratic politics also become easier in circumstances of homogeneity. For one thing, an end to stalemate between competing groups allows decisions to be made. For another, the regulation of differences at the heart of democratic politics is much easier when the differences in question are bounded by shared identity.

Conditions for Homogenization

The processes by which homogeneity was established were often so repulsive that much effort has gone into thinking about ways in which multinational arrangements can be maintained. Though this is morally desirable, it can amount, in intellectual terms, to replacing analysis with hope. But we must seek to explain what actually happened, not least so as to determine whether the structure of modern politics has now so changed as to allow nationalism to somehow change its colors. The social scientist who helps us most in regard to these questions is Michael Mann. His important *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (2005) is the successor to the work of Gellner

in taking processes of homogenization as the core fact to be explained. Our immediate task is to examine the conditions for prior homogenization in European history and then to see whether structural conditions have changed in ways that allow for hope or necessitate fear.

Before turning to Mann's particular contribution, some general points – taken for granted in his work as much as explicitly spelt out – about European society at the end of the nineteenth century need to be stressed. Crucially, this was a period of intense geopolitical competition. The character of nationalism was massively affected by two elements then taken to constitute the strength of a state, both of which can be illustrated with reference to the political views of Max Weber. First, let us remember that Weber was a Fleet Professor – that is, a member of an elite convinced that imperial possessions were necessary for the well being of the state. Secure sources of supply mattered as much as markets because geopolitical autonomy depended upon the ability to feed one's population and to have the raw materials necessary to produce a full complement of weapons. Importantly, there was nothing peculiar about the German elite: all European states patterned their industrialization so as to gain political autonomy – a development which led by the end of the century to massive over production of steel (Sen, 1984). But there is a second less well-known side to Weber's politics. It is neatly summed up in the nickname used by his friends – Polish Max. This referred to his early research project on Polish labor on the East Elbian Junker estates. The attitude that Weber took to such labor – that it would weaken the fabric of the nation – was entirely typical of the time. The leading edge of power seemed to reside in monolingual nation-states, not least as multinationalism was considered likely to undermine military efficiency (Lieven, 2000).

A general point about nationalism can usefully be made here. Nationalism is best seen in Freudian terms, as a labile force, prone to take color from its surroundings. In the late nineteenth century nationalism was, as argued, closely linked to imperialism: a strong state needed (or, rather, in order to be strong a state felt it needed) both peoples and colonies if it was to survive in a hostile world. It is at this point that a key difference with Gellner's explanatory framework emerges. His parable of Megalomania and Ruritania is subtly wrong – at least insofar as it sees nationalism in terms of secession, that is, suggests that the prime mover of nationalism was Ruritania. But social movements characteristically take their character from the states with which they interact. Politically conscious movements tend to arise when states act in an arbitrary manner, whether in terms of taxation, repression, exclusion or conscription (Mann, 1993). This most certainly applies to nationalism. What many of the peoples of the Austro-Hungarian Empire wanted was recognition of their historic rights, something which would allow them to protect their own languages and cultures. Masaryk sought such a liberal empire or constitutional monarchy, perhaps even until the onset of the First World War. Exit became a fully attractive option only when voice was so denied that loyalties were destroyed (Hirschman, 1970). Differently put, secessionist impulses very often resulted from the drives of great powers – the Megalomanias of the time – to homogenize their territories.

The emphasis on the social psychology created by state actions has always been at the core of Mann's sociology, and it is no surprise that it features so much in his view of nationalism (1993: chapters 7 and 20). But he adds a set of factors, carefully constructed and skillfully deployed, which are specific to his understanding of ethnic cleansing.

Geopolitical conflict matters enormously, for it provides the fuel from which vicious actions can understandably arise. The most dangerous situations arise when rival national movements claiming the same piece of territory are backed by powerful neighboring states. The fear that help may come to one's rival from abroad encourages preemptive cleansing, not least as those rivals can all too easily be dubbed a fifth column likely to betray the state. In these circumstances democracy can be dangerous, for the people will be seen as belonging to an organic ethnic nation rather than to a liberal polity based on civic inclusiveness and the presence of institutional checks and balances upon the exercise of power. But another fact, pointing in somewhat the opposite direction, needs also to be noted. Limits to ethnic conflict can often be set by a strong state able to control communal conflict of one sort or another. It is no accident that the vicious side of nationalism was so very present in interwar Europe. Defeat in war led to a weakening of social institutions in Germany, whilst newer or newly reconstituted states in Central and Eastern Europe had very limited state capacity.

It is as well at this point to highlight similarities and differences between the accounts of nationalism offered by Gellner and Mann. Both stress that processes of homogenization have been central to nationalism and both insist that this is modern. But their views of modernity differ. Gellner stresses industrialization and, thereby, makes homogenization a necessary feature of the modern world. In contrast, Mann concentrates his attention on the entry of the people on to the political stage. It is important to specify what is involved in his claim that democracy has a dark side, for the phrase is one that can easily lead to confusion. An initial claim is that white settler populations behaved with particular viciousness towards the natives they encountered – it being important to

emphasize that this had nothing to do with industrialization. More generally, Mann stresses that the *moment* of political modernization, that is, decompressions, aberturas, and glasnosts, is always dangerous. His account of ethnic cleansing shows how danger leads to disaster when fear is generated by geopolitical uncertainties. This account represents, in my view, clear cognitive advance for it captures motivation and explains timing far better than do the varied theories proposed by Gellner. But it is only fair to note that Gellner had a reply to Mann (1996: 636) in which he stressed that he was merely operating at a higher level of abstraction, but quite prepared to accept centralizing state construction as part of a generic model of modernization. This does not really protect Gellner's position, but it most certainly does muddy the waters.

Accordingly, the availability of another means of distinguishing the two accounts is welcome. Mann is not claiming, as noted, that the people always defines itself in organic terms: very much to the contrary, he highlights the capacity for inclusiveness of liberal states, and their ability to regulate conflict between social classes. This matters greatly. The flexibility of liberal regimes allowed for their political form to remain unchanged despite the impact of industrialization as deals accommodated classes and even nations.² However, to a considerable extent this does not challenge Gellner's metaphysic: these are largely instances in which state came before nation, in which processes of homogenization, from religious unification to complete conquest, had taken place earlier. This is utterly different from the pattern of the Tsarist, Ottoman and Austrian empires in which nations were extant and conscious at the moment states sought to modernize themselves. Nonetheless, there remains, at least in potential, a fundamental

²This is of course a large area, in which a good deal of caution is needed. The liberal regime of Great Britain did accommodate workers and Scots, but it also expelled Chartists and cleared the Highlands.

difference between the two thinkers. Gellner offers us a general theory of nationalism in which rule by one's co-culturals is an unavoidable necessity. Mann at least allows for the possibility that liberal regimes may provide political roofs within which several nations can prosper especially, of course, if the structure of world politics diminishes levels of geopolitical conflict. Differently put, Gellner's view of nationalism may be a product and sociology of European modernity rather than of modernity *per se*.

Options and Constraints, or, From Description to Prescription

Two cautionary notes should be issued immediately. Firstly, it behooves us to remember that no European empire was able to decompress successfully. The moment of modernization led to the destruction of every multinational entity. Secondly, the spread of liberal political structures in Europe in the twentieth century has a very great deal to do with ethnic cleansing. We are liberal because the national question has been solved by ethnic cleaning, population transfer, border changes, and genocide. But the analytic question remains. Might liberalism solve the national question rather than be the happy product of horror?

It is possible to begin with some good news. The structure of world politics has changed in ways that help contain nationalism. Crucially, in much of the rest of the world the very high level of geopolitical conflict that characterized European history is not present. As a consequence, the link between nationalism and imperialism has to a large extent been broken. Many state leaders wish to join the elite of world politics, to be part of global modernity, rather than to insulate themselves from it. Further, in key areas of the world, states have sufficient capacity to control ethnic conflict. This is strikingly

true of India where frequent communal conflicts are brought to an end by the power of the Indian army, the backbone of the state (Mann, 2005, chapter 17). The mention of India suggests a final point. National demands can be and sometimes are satisfied by the provision of voice and cultural rights. Laitin (1992) has quite properly made much of this in connection with language. In order to be a complete fully functioning Indian citizen one needs, he claims, three languages plus or minus one. Two of these languages, Hindi and English, are the languages of the state, the latter still present because so many in the elite resisted its extirpation at the time of independence given that it gave them cultural advantage. A third language is that of one's state, and a fourth that of a minority within such a state. A situation of three minus one occurs when one is a Hindi speaker within a state in which Hindi is the official language. Of course, this is but an example of the possibilities inherent in federal and consociational arrangements of varied sorts. The presence of such strategies returns us to the consideration raised at the start of this paragraph. The absence of geopolitical conflict allows states to be less unitary.

Unfortunately, there is also bad news. The link between nationalism and imperialism is not completely broken: Putin is not cognizant of the certain fact that retention of Chechnya will hinder rather than help the Russian economy. More generally, many of Mann's variables apply outside Europe (2005, chapter 17). There most certainly are areas in the world in which nations fight over the same territory, as was recently the case in the erstwhile Yugoslavia and in Rwanda, making murderous homogenizing drives a potential reality in a significant number of places. Further, illiberal policies of states towards national minorities exist in some abundance – notably in Tibet, Southern Sudan, Kashmir, Aceh, Chechnya, Kurdistan, and Palestine. In these circumstances secessionist

nationalism is likely to flourish quite as powerfully as it did within European history. Mann also notes that many federal and consociational schemes have failed, it being something of an open question whether the devolution of power appeases or abets secessionist nationalism. Finally, Mann introduces three new structural elements within world politics that may well reinforce the unpleasant face of nationalism (2005, chapter 17). The neo-liberal economic policies encouraged by the United States since 1989 do nothing to help state construction and at worst help to deconstruct states that had begun to gain some capacities. In Africa some states have become so weak that they cannot see far outside their capitals. Ethnic mobilization is all-too-easy in such circumstances, and its suppression well beyond the power of states bereft of bureaucracies and merit-based armies. Secondly, the end of socialism means that a major alternative meaning system to nationalism has gone. Third, the gap left by the decline of socialism has been filled, especially in much of the Middle East, by Islamism. There is a resonance here between Mann and Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996). If nationalism has changed its character for the better in some places as the link with imperialism has been broken, it may be that it will mutate once again into a lethal brew linked on this occasion to religious fundamentalism. Hideous processes of homogenization may come to haunt the developing world as much as they did the European past.

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