

## Multiculturalism and Nationalism,

### Or, Why Feeling at Home is Not a Substitute for Public Space<sup>1</sup>

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Multiculturalism is, as Foucault would say, a discursive formation, not just an integral position. Like individualism, it is endlessly generative of new discourses, new arguments, new certainties and new challenges to them.<sup>3</sup> I shall not attempt to pin down all that travels under the name, but rather to focus attention on one central paradox of much multiculturalist discourse. Multiculturalism is an argument for diversity often rooted in a claim to integral singularity.

Arguments for the public recognition of culturally diverse groupings, often start by claiming those groupings to be 'natural' or 'essential', while presuming the broader public forums in which the claims are brought forward to be artificial or constructed. The premise of many multiculturalist arguments is that people 'naturally' feel at home in one culture that is either smaller than a nation-state or cuts across the boundaries of nation-states. Yet it is not clear that the claims about the constituent or cross-cutting cultural groups are really always of a different order from those about the nation-states that constitute the primary arenas for multiculturalist discourse. Brazil and the United States, for example, are countries intensely conscious of their internal cultural diversity. Yet, in the context of the United Nations and similar internationally constructed arenas, their

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<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York, 1969); *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (New York, 1977).

representatives present them as singular claimants to distinctive voice, as the embodiments of commonly Brazilian or American cultures.

In considering both multiculturalism and nationalism, I want to contend, we need to keep two senses of solidarity distinct. One involves “feeling at home” with people whom we know personally or with whom we share largely similar cultural styles. The other is constituted by means of public discourse in which distinct individual or subgroup positions may be articulated and draw their meaning, motives, and power from their embeddedness in the larger whole. The two are not opposites. Indeed, cultural similarity may grow out of public discourse and public discourse may be grounded in cultural similarity. But the analytic distinction is important.

We may feel at home in a certain public discourse--as I imagine Brazilian intellectuals inhabit particular arguments with a comfortable feeling of *heimlichkeit*, especially when returning from abroad (and I know the same is true for many Americans). We are, in other words, comfortable with particular ways of expressing ourselves and with particular sorts of differences from others, as well as with sameness or identification with “people like us.” We even enjoy, I would posit, particular ways of feeling *different* from others, and one of the unsettling things about entering new cultural contexts is that we lose some of those familiar differentiations, not just familiar identifications. One who has always thought of himself as a left-wing outsider or cultural critic, for example, may be suddenly uncomfortable when traveling abroad. Not only is he apt to be seen by an others as a representative of the dominant national culture with which he considers himself to be in some tension (and perhaps rightly so on both sides). There may be an unsettling loss of personal identity in discovering that one is not

immediately recognized as left-wing, that the cultural cues that locate one's distinctive differences no longer operate.

Nonetheless, though they may overlap, the activity of engaging in a public discourse is distinct from the activity of finding commonality in pre-established cultural similarity. Public discourse depends on articulating differences--crucially differences of opinion; potentially but not necessarily also differences of group identity.<sup>4</sup> "Articulating" is a key word here. What we know as "public" discourse is that in which ideas, opinions, and identities are made clear and subjected to more or less open discussion--ideally, perhaps, rational-critical discussion. It is an arena of debate and acknowledged attempts at persuasion. Such discourse is one way in which culture is transmitted or reproduced, but not the only one. It is distinct from much of what goes on in families, communities, and other settings--especially face-to-face ones--in which we transact much of the business of our lives--fall in love, raise children, play sports, read poetry, listen to music. These latter settings are distinct by virtue of scale, but also--partly for reasons that scale facilitates--by virtue of the extent to which common understandings can be taken for granted and produced, tested, or altered mainly unconsciously, as a byproduct of other activities, without rational-critical codification or publicness. Above all, these arenas of familiarity are distinct from public settings by virtue of the (relative) absence of strangers. Publics are arenas in which people speak to

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<sup>4</sup> One of the key--but I think mistaken--arguments of Jurgen Habermas's classic *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT, 1989) is that the capacity for rational-critical discussion of differing opinions is based on suppression of group differences--notably class differences, but also by implication differences of cultural identities. See counter-arguments by Oscar Negt and Alexander Kluge in *The Public Sphere and Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), and by various authors in Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT, 1992), and Calhoun, "Civil Society and Public Sphere," *Public Culture*, Vol. 5 #2: 267-280.

each other at least in part as strangers. This need not mean that they have never met, but that they are not bound by dense webs of common understandings or shared social relations, that they will have to establish rather than take for granted where they agree and disagree. While an element of “publicness” may enter into familial or communal realms of familiarity--one may engage in a rational-critical debate about kinship and descent when inheritance is at stake--very much of it would radically disrupt daily life and undo what we mean by community or family.<sup>5</sup>

We need to be attentive, then, to two distinct modes of relating to each other and to culturally produced and encoded information. One of the problems with much multiculturalist discourse is that--directly in common with nationalist discourse--it constructs large-scale groupings in which people are in fact quite different and are often strangers to each other on the model of small-scale familial or communal groupings. It presents nations, cultures, peoples, genders, etc. as realms of familiarity and sameness, not as categories within which heterogeneous members have rights of participation; it thereby undercuts the creation of realms of public discourse. It makes a great deal of difference, for example, whether one talks about a Black public sphere in which different ideas connected to race are critically debated among Black people, or a Black nationalism in which the identity of Black people with each other is more uncritically assumed. Likewise, one of the great accomplishments of feminism in many settings has been the

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<sup>5</sup> Think of Harold Garfinkel’s famous breaching experiments and other “*Studies in Ethnomethodology*,” (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1967). Garfinkel not only had students and other research subjects breach norms to see what would happen, but implicitly or explicitly tried to get people to make radically explicit their tacit understandings of the rules by which they conducted their lives. Among other things, this made everyday life impossible. See also Goran Palme’s evocation of what would happen to family life if we tried to use the “rational-critical” methods of bureaucratic organizations to allocate tasks (*The Flight from Work*; New York: Free Press, 1982).

creation of intense and intellectually vigorous and creative public debate--among women but also in other public spheres. Yet this accomplishment is undermined by some relatively extreme adherents to "feminist standpoint theories" who assert a radically distinct women's way of knowing which is not only incommensurable with men's ways of knowing, but fundamentally common to all women.<sup>6</sup> What makes us feel at home may, in other words, not coincide precisely with what enables us to articulate and rationally-critically debate our differences of opinion.

Surprisingly often, then, multiculturalist visions describe the interplay of putatively discrete collective (and individual) identities. They offer suggestions, in other words, about how people of different colors, or religions, or ethnicities, or sexual orientations might better live together within single societies. But they presume that these labels define meaningful social groupings, that the members of these groups accept the dominance of a single label over their identities, and that their identities are relatively settled. In other words, these simplistic multiculturalist visions share with monocultural visions the notion that the world can be divided neatly into categories within which individuals are largely similar by virtue of the identifying traits they share, and between which there are consistent and significant differences. The distinguishing claim of multiculturalists, then, becomes simply that people of different cultures can live together peaceably and to mutual benefit within the same country. Such a view does little to challenge or even to analyze critically the underlying notion of discrete and internally homogenous cultures that has been widespread, powerful, and largely pernicious

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<sup>6</sup> See my discussion of standpoint theories in *Critical Social Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995).

throughout the modern era. This is a vision of the world pioneered by nationalism, and reinforced by much in the broader current of modern individualism.

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As individualism posited discrete and integral personal identities, with their unique biographical trajectories, so nationalism posited sharply bounded and internally unified nations with their unique histories. Whether it first flourished in the claims of Latin American elites to commonality with each other and distinctness from Iberian overlords, or in the rhetoric of Oliver Cromwell, "God's chosen Englishman," or in the public performances of nationhood implicit to the collective action of the French Revolution, nationalism has become an international rhetorical formation.<sup>7</sup> One of the central paradoxes of modernity, indeed, is that this international rhetoric of national identity should become the preferred, nearly universal, mode of claiming autonomous local cultural identity. Countries claim their local distinctiveness or uniqueness, in other words, by claiming to be tokens of a more universal type: nations.

This is true not only for nations succeeding in claims to sovereignty as nation-states, but for insurgent social movements adopting the rhetoric of nationalism. As Wilson Moses has remarked, "In its secular form, black chauvinism derives, ironically enough from European racial theory. Like the concept of civilization, racial chauvinism can be traced back to the writings of Hegel, Guizot, Gobineau and other continental racial

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<sup>7</sup> On origins, compare Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, rev. ed, 1991); Leah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Calhoun, *Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming 1997). Note that the question here is one of the origins or first flourishings of nationalism as a discursive formation--something that seems clearly a part of the modern era--not the question of whether particular nations have longer-

theorists of the nineteenth century. Indeed it was the German, Herder, who in the eighteenth century, developed theories of organic collectivism upon which Blyden and Crummel later built their own brand of ethnic chauvinism."<sup>8</sup> This does not mean that all discourses of Third World or subaltern nationalism were merely derivative discourses; they were not.<sup>9</sup> But it does mean that the world was already integrated on a global scale, and that it was within that transnational reality that national identities were forged, and it does mean that this was done often in large part by reproducing or appropriating--albeit sometimes with considerable transformations--the European discourses of enlightenment, romantic individualism, and national identity.

But there was a deeper contradiction in the spread of this discourse and many kindred discourses of modernity. This was the attempt to constitute identities in sharp, categorical terms, to render boundaries clear and identities integral even while the processes of capitalist expansion, slave trade, colonization, war, and the globalization of culture all ensured the production of ever more multiplicities and overlaps of identities. It is fashionable to characterize modernity as involving standardization, routinization, and the elimination of differences. It is opposed thereby both to prior local heterogeneities--the differences of dialect and craft that distinguished European villages before industrialization and modern communications technologies--and to postmodern celebrations of differences. But modernity was more contradictory than this. For every

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standing ethnic roots. On the latter, see Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

<sup>8</sup>Wilson Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 25.

<sup>9</sup>See Chatterjee's argument against this view in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (London: Zed Books, 1986).

spatially localized “difference” that was eradicated by McDonald’s or television there were increased confrontations with difference created by the juxtapositions of diverse cultures in media and cosmopolitan cities. New hybrid identities were created by international migrations--including the slave trade (which was just as integrally modern as the campaigns to abolish it that are more often treated as modernizing by self-congratulatory Western thinkers). Peasant economies were not in all respects models of heterogeneity--consider the remarkably common routines of most peasant farmers and the remarkable diversity of occupations today. Nonetheless, though modernity brought new differentiations and new juxtapositions of people different from each other, dominant patterns of thought attempt to order difference by relying on categorizations of those presumed to be essentially the same. The phenomenon of "double consciousness" that W.E.B. Du Bois analyzed in the situation of those who were both Negro and American was a resistance to this dominant pattern in the construction of identities.<sup>10</sup> It was an assertion that in the politics and experience of identity, “both/and” is true at least as often as “either/or.” But it was in more than one sense a minority voice.

However common, even ubiquitous, double consciousness really was, the prevailing rhetoric of identity and agency sought singular, integral subjects. Thus lines were drawn on maps and populations understood--at least ideally--to fit as unambiguously as possible within them. Moreover, the loyalties and obligations of individuals to nations were commonly described as unmediated and direct. Unlike traditional kinship systems with their reckoning of identity in a series of nested groups from families outward to larger lineages and clans, and often cross-cut by age-sets and

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<sup>10</sup>Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam, 1989/1903).

other groupings, modern thought understood individuals to be immediately members of a nation, as though nationality were inscribed in their very bodies. Nationalism launched a war on traditional intermediate associations. And ways of constituting local identities throughout the world, from China to India to Turkey to Spain were all influenced by this discourse of individuals and nations. Even in the manifestly international culture of "the Black Atlantic," produced by the slave trade and maintained by later migrations of people and cultural products, there was a tendency to construct Black identities in essentialist terms. In Paul Gilroy's words, "...original, folk, or local expressions of black culture have been identified as authentic and positively evaluated ...while subsequent hemispheric or global manifestations of the same cultural forms have been dismissed as inauthentic and therefore lacking in cultural or aesthetic value precisely because of their distance (supposed or actual) from a readily identifiable point of origin."<sup>11</sup>

In a wide range of other contexts and for other identities, similar processes were at work, constituting certain versions of collective culture as authentic, claiming certain historical precursors as definitive, The issue is not just the invention of new traditions, in the sense analyzed by Hobsbawm and Ranger, but also the fixing of previously more flexible and continually renewed traditions and the institutionalization both of biases and of powerful agents of cultural regulation.<sup>12</sup> Thus, for example, the creation of modern Turkish identity drew on precursors that could be understood as "always already" Turkish--a mixture of Anatolian culture, Ottoman imperial heritage, and Islam, but it also

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<sup>11</sup>Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 96.

<sup>12</sup>E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

constituted something new, something distinctively related to a non-imperial state and to the idea of nation as well as (more famously) to Western-influenced secularism. It is precisely because a nation was being forged according to standards that seemed to require internal homogeneity and authenticity that Turkish nation-building was accompanied by the genocide of Armenians.

In the late 19th century, ironically, precisely as the globalization of political and economic organization and the world wide flows of culture were reaching unprecedented levels, the urge to organize social life in terms of sharp boundaries, national identities, and essentialist cultural categories likewise reached a peak. In Europe, it was in this period that nationalists began effectively to urge immigration controls; in this period they created the standing citizen armies that fought World War I; in this period they opposed socialism in part, as Hobsbawm has suggested, precisely because it was internationalist.<sup>13</sup> It was in this period that modern anti-Semitism took shape. And it was in this period that nationalism became most conclusively identified, in the European context, with movements for secession rather than amalgamation of existing states.<sup>14</sup> No era placed greater emphasis on the autonomy of the nation state or the capacity of the idea of nation to define large scale collective identities. But it did so precisely when and partly because the world was becoming pronouncedly international. In this there may lie some lesson for the present era when the acceleration of global processes of capital accumulation, the rapid global transfer of technology, the almost instantaneous spread of cultural products,

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<sup>13</sup>Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 123.

<sup>14</sup>See E.H. Carr's emphasis on this point in *Nationalism and After* (London: MacMillan, 1945), pp. 24-5.

and huge waves of migration lead many to imagine the nation state is likely to vanish quickly into the shadows of history.

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To use the international rhetoric of nationalism to claim local self-determination was not only to commit oneself to representing local distinctiveness in internationally recognizable terms. It was also to make the local nation a token of a global type, to construct it is equivalent to other nations. We can see the ironies of this change of perspective in the case of reconstructing ancient China as a modern nation. This reconstruction was not simply an imposition of the international rhetoric; it was the product of a Chinese discourse that combined older indigenous roots with the predominantly Western rhetoric of national identity, giving the latter its own distinctive inflections.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the idea of nation was a distinctively new way of understanding what it meant to be Chinese. China had been understood previously--for millennia--as a "world," or as the "middle kingdom" that occupied the heart and vast majority of that world. This was a conception that did not recognize a larger world within which China was only one of many equivalent units. It constituted China not as a state, or as a civilization, but as civilization itself.

This "culturalist" understanding of large scale collective identity contrasted sharply with nationalist thought. In the older view, Chinese culture was a singular whole, to which individuals and particular generations might conform better or worse, might measure up more or less well. This is part of what helped to define the famous "generalist" learning of the literati-officials of Confucian China: "his learning was not

just valuable for office [or for vocational tasks], but happened to be *the* body of learning, artistic as well as moral, which was valuable in itself."<sup>15</sup> Where in the older mode of thinking, any innovation had to be justified by demonstration that it was in accord with tradition, in the new approach both innovations and traditional inheritances alike required justification by demonstration that they served the interests of the nation.

One of the key steps in this change was reconstituting China as one of a number of like units undergoing "parallel histories." Instead of describing China as a world or as civilization, intellectuals at the end of the 19th century and especially the beginning of the 20th began to adopt the word *guo* which had previously been used to indicate a kingdom. Within imperial China, there could be a number of such kingdoms; Confucian China could even recognize the existence of barbarian kingdoms in this sense, like tribute-paying Korea. But after the turn of the century, China itself began to be described more and more often as a *guo*. At first this was sometimes still linked to dynasty; the *guo* meant literally the object of a particular ruling regime, as in *Qingguo*, which reduced the imperial regime to the status of merely one ruling power.<sup>16</sup> Gradually, however, the meaning began to shift towards the notion of people; China became *Zhongguo*, or in a compound, *Zhongguoren*, the Chinese nation.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Levinson, *Confucian China and its Modern Fate* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), p. 42.

<sup>16</sup>In addition to Levinson, *op cit.*, pp. 98-114, see discussion in several of the contributions to Lowell Dittmer and Samuel S. Kim, eds., *China's Quest for National Identity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

<sup>17</sup>"Ren" means people or persons; *Zhongguoren* is more or less "Chinese nation (or kingdom) people". There are a number of other terms and combinations of terms that figured in the Chinese attempt to come up with an adequate vocabulary of national identity. For example, the term *minzu*, derived from the traditional word for fellow clan members, was extended to become a term for nation, and might be combined with reference to speakers of Chinese language in terms like *Zhonghua minzu*.

Where a *guo* had formerly been a political unit, defined only by its power, it became now a repository of ultimate values. But unlike the notion of Chinese or Confucian civilization, which had constituted the good, the *guo* was a being capable of benefiting from a variety of goods. It was valued, but it also experienced the value of various specific goods, from wealth to military power.<sup>18</sup> With this redefinition, China could both retain its specific cultural content, and adopt a formal constitution as one of the world's many sovereign nations. A resolution could be offered to the nagging problem of to what extent China could learn from the West without forfeiting her essence. The answer was a variant of the old *ti-yong* instruction: "Western learning for practical purposes, Chinese learning for spiritual essence." But now practical purposes could take more of an upper hand; instrumental criteria could be employed to justify Chinese learning; and lessons could be drawn on any of the many matters in which China was comparable as a nation to the other nations of the world. Thus by 1934, the *Guomindang* (or Chinese Nationalist Party) could write in a handbook that:

A nation must always remain faithful to its own history and its own culture in order to maintain an independent existence on earth. For a people to keep faith with itself and progress courageously, it ought not to renounce its own old civilization lest it become like a river without a source or a tree without roots. While wishing to assimilate the new knowledge of western civilization, we ought

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<sup>18</sup>See Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power*, an intellectual biography of Yen Fu, one of the crucial protagonists of this changed understanding.

to give it for a base the principles of Confucius. The whole people must learn the doctrine and conform to the thoughts of Confucius.<sup>19</sup>

But though this was a way of talking about being distinctively Chinese, it was a way of doing so that cast this as the specifically local content of one token of a universal type, nation. Indeed, in the pursuit of nation-state development--progress--an entire literature developed of "historical warnings from perished countries."<sup>20</sup>

This kind of discourse shaped the construction of national identities, not only in China but throughout the world, where claims to distinctive local identities--to be Chinese, or Turkish, or Spanish--were usually couched in terms shaped crucially by the cosmopolitan discourse of nationalism. Nationalism was always a discourse about the multiplicity and distinctiveness of nations, of course, but it was also about the constitution of nations as the agents of history by whose interests progress might be assessed. This figured sharply in the late 19th and early 20th century production of nations in place both of empires and of disunified principalities.

Not all states were in comparable positions to exercise central power, and not all could claim to have integrated "their nation" within their borders. China was (and is) remarkable for the extent of cultural unity obtaining among a very large population (although it is also true that Chinese ideology typically exaggerates this unity). But Chinese national identity was also both ascribed too and chosen by millions of Chinese residing outside the borders of China, people also marked by varying degrees of

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<sup>19</sup>Cited in Levinson, *op cit.*, p. 106.

<sup>20</sup>See Michael Hunt, "Chinese National Identity and the Strong State: The Late Qing-Republican Crisis, pp. 62-79 in Dittmer and Kim, *China's Quest for National Identity*, discussing the historical writings of Yu Danchu on this subject.

assimilation to other collective identities--in the Philippines, Hawaii, Indonesia, Malaysia and elsewhere. Many of the principal backers of the Republican Revolution of 1911 were precisely these ambiguous partial outsiders; many others were students returned from study abroad. Those both groups certainly had grounds for the claim to be Chinese, they were also both different from the prototypical and putatively maximally authentic Chinese constructed in literature and nationalist discourse.

This was a modest issue in China; it has been much more significant elsewhere. The carving up of the former Austro-Hungarian empire into putative nation-states is a case in point. The essentialist reasoning that dominated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries helped to issue in a collection of states conceived of as representing different national groups although none of them was domestically homogenous in ethnic, linguistic or other terms. Any nationality that would truly unify the citizens of any of these states would have to be made, not simply found. But it is also true that the essentialist notion of nationality--the notion that clear and necessary criteria for inclusion can be found which are shared among all members and no non-members of the nation--was never as operative on the ground, in the making of everyday life decisions, as in the discourse of state-building and legitimacy-seeking elites. This is why intermarriage rates between different supposedly national groups could remain quite high (so high that as many as 16% of the citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina were children of "mixed" marriages at the time fighting broke out in 1992).

The dominant modern story of state formation, that epitomized by French history, is thus not typical. There, over an extended period of time, disparate duchies and other feudal territories were transformed into provinces and knit into an increasing effective

centralized power structure concentrated in a primate city. Ironically, the very successful integration of the French nation-state may have predisposed France to its succession of republican revolutions--all of which not only claimed popular legitimacy but were made possible by the concentration of state power in a handful of spatially centralized institutions that could be seized by revolutionaries.<sup>21</sup> In the 1890s, however, what seemed manifest about France was that those who "knew" themselves to be French lived in France, and those who lived in France knew themselves to be French. Were they really "hyphenated" Frenchmen (and women) in the phrase made possible by American usage (which was nearly always derogatory at the turn of the century)? Béarnaise-Frenchmen, Provençale-Frenchwomen? After all, we now know what was not dwelled on in the 1890s, that for no more than two generations had the majority of Frenchmen spoken French.<sup>22</sup> Clearly, whether by their own choice or not, Jews could be placed in the situation of hyphenated Frenchmen, as the Dreyfus case showed clearly. They must also have experienced a double consciousness. And this was in a France which was often taken as the paradigm nation because of its seemingly manifest internal unity, because the hexagon seemed to be integral.

This felt and perceived unity was also part of the hidden basis for France's vaunted civic nationalism. The celebration of the revolutionary heritage in which all French people putatively shared in the founding moment of a new French nation did indeed facilitate a nationalism tied unusually closely to ideals of citizenship and offering

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<sup>21</sup>Calhoun, "Classical Social Theory and the French Revolution of 1848," *Sociological Theory*, vol. 7 #2, pp. 210-225.

<sup>22</sup>Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

clear openness to assimilation.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, this very ideology of civic nationalism itself depended on the settledness of the identity French, which was not sharply in contest by the late 19th century either from diverse subpopulations or from French speakers in neighboring states.

To the east, the process of state formation worked out somewhat differently. Only late in the nineteenth century did German state-builders achieve even partial integration of the culturally similar German peoples, and only briefly under the Third Reich did this unification reach nearly completely throughout German Europe. In France, a growing national integration was spearheaded by a central state of long standing. In Germany, the central state was added fairly late on top, as it were, of a variety of regions more or less widely understood as "German" in their language and culture. But despite their differences, both French and German stories thematize nationalism as an aspect of amalgamation of disparate regions into a superordinate state. In the territories of the declining Austro-Hungarian Empire, by contrast, nationalist discourse was more commonly invoked by separatists against the more central power (though we should not forget calls for amalgamation into a greater Germany, and calls to remake Austria on the German nationalist model). The Hapsburgs self-consciously maintained an empire of the old style; they did not attempt to integrate their dominions into a modern nation-state. That is, they did not attempt to treat their subjects as more or less interchangeable members of the polity, to impose linguistic uniformity, to build an infrastructure rendering communication and commerce easy throughout the realm, to replace narratives

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<sup>23</sup>See Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

of conquest with those of primordial ethnic commonality, or to base claims to legitimacy on the interests or will of "the people."

Imperial rule--in the Austro-Hungarian case or those of most of the rest of the world--is precisely *not* the attempt to forge a unity between nation and state.<sup>24</sup> Empires are organized through the coexistence--albeit often hierarchically structured--of a number of distinct "peoples" or "communities." These need not enter into any public discourse with each other, nor indeed into many collective activities. Their economic relations are typically matters of market exchange not cooperation in production, and while imperial armies may mobilize members of different ethnic groups, they are generally organized more on the model of mercenaries than citizen-soldiers.

Parts of empires can be transformed into nations by the creation of quasi-autonomous public spheres. This is as characteristic of metropolises as peripheral regions. As the Ottoman empire declined, for example, it was just as novel a project to engender a national consciousness and project of state formation in Turkey as in Egypt, and early projects for pan-Islamic nationalism grew in the same soil. Among the most problematic settings are the frontiers between former or declining empires. The disastrous contemporary situation in the Balkans, thus, is not simply the result of ancient ethnic hatreds, nor entirely produced by the forced integration of Yugoslavia under communism, nor conjured out of nothing by the ideological and military manipulators who have turned the discourse of nationalism into the project of ethnic cleansing. It is rooted in the long history of the region as a frontier in which neither of the relatively stable imperial

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<sup>24</sup>The pursuit of such unity is Gellner's famous definition of nationalism as a political principle. See *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983).

regimes--Ottoman or Hapsburg--achieved clear hegemony. Local ethnic groups were not only divided by religion and military enlistment, they were in some cases resettled precisely to serve as buffers and prevent both socio-political and military consolidation. As empires receded from this frontier, they left behind not spatially compact and socially integrated nations but fragmented and interspersed ethnic communities. Pockets of Serbs, for example, were located in the middle of Croatian farm districts because their reputation as fighters made the Hapsburgs think they would stiffen defense against the Turks. Even tiny cities like Mostar were miniature metropolises, housing a range of religions and ethnicities. Once they were no longer ruled from distant imperial centers, however, the members of these different ethnic groups were called upon to form their own public discourses to organize collective affairs. In such cases, elites who were previously subordinates in larger imperial hierarchies helped to promote national culture (including language and literature as well as nationalist ideology) partly as a project that would put them on top of the new or newly independent nation. Either the new public spheres would incorporate diverse cultures into regionally compact polities--as attempted most recently by Bosnia-Herzegovina--or the public spheres would be defined on ethnic lines and offer implicit bases for projects of ethnic nationalist reorganization of territory and population--as in the Serbian counterpart. But note that in either case the institutionalization of a public sphere was at the heart of the project of defining the nation, whether in terms of the civic institutions of a territorial polity or in terms of ethnic unity.

Nowhere was the formation of national unity really apolitical or entirely a matter of distant past history. But the countries where republican and sometimes democratic

constitutions took root--and the countries with the clearest acceptance in international forums--were largely ones where the history of unification itself could be kept at a distance. As Ernst Renan said of France,

Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality. Indeed, historical enquiry brings to light deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations, even those whose consequences have been altogether beneficial. Unity is always effected by means of brutality ..."<sup>25</sup>

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The consequences of the pursuit of national unity by strategies of both forgetting past brutalities and forging ahead with new ones included an implicit repression of differences within such identities and differences cross-cutting them. As Gilroy puts it, "where racist, nationalist, or ethnically absolutist discourses orchestrate political relationships so that these identities appear to be mutually exclusive, occupying the space between them or trying to demonstrate their continuity has been viewed as a provocative and even oppositional act of political insubordination."<sup>26</sup> The insubordination is resented and often repressed not only by established states and agents of institutionalized power, but by those who would organize social movements and popular struggles on behalf of oppressed or disadvantaged groups.

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<sup>25</sup>"What is a Nation," trans. by M. Thom, pp. 8-22 in H. K. Bhabha, ed.: *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), quotation from p. 11.

<sup>26</sup>*Black Atlantic*, p. 1.

Nationalism was not the whole, but only the most important part of the tacit consensus forged in the late 19th century as to what would count as politically appropriate identities. It played a central role in the development of "essentialist" thinking that was also basic to the way race, gender, sexual orientation and other modalities of collective identities came to be constituted.<sup>27</sup> In all cases, the assumption has been widespread both in social theory and in more popular discourses that these cultural categories address really existing and discretely identifiable collections of people--and more surprisingly that it is possible to understand each category by focusing on its primary identifier rather than on the way it overlaps with, contests and/or reinforces others.

Put another way, as I suggested near the beginning, it has been the tacit assumption of modern social and cultural thought that people are normally members of one and only one nation, that they are members of one and only one race, one gender, and one sexual orientation, and that each of these memberships describes neatly and concretely some aspect of their being. It has been assumed that people naturally live in one world at a time, that they inhabit one way of life, that they speak one language, and that they themselves, as individuals, are singular, integral beings. All these assumptions came clearly into focus in the late 19th century in ways closely linked to nationalism; all deeply shape contemporary multiculturalist discourse; and all seem problematic.

The underlying issues are hard to get at because social and cultural theory did not consistently study the constitution of nations, races, genders or other categories. Rather, a variety of putatively neutral terms--society, culture, subculture--were introduced. Their

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<sup>27</sup> See Calhoun, *Critical Social Theory*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), esp. Ch. 8.

seeming neutrality obscured the extent to which they reflected the presumptions about categorical distinctiveness that were forged especially with sex, race, and nation in mind. Social scientists came to a remarkable extent to take for granted the objects of their study--notably societies--without reflecting on the extent to which their view of what societies were had been produced largely on the foundation of 19th century nationalist reasoning.

The 19th century discourse of nationalism still shapes much of our vocabulary for thinking about these issues--and identifying the subjects of democratic projects. From Bosnia to the South Bronx, the question of European unification to that of Canadian division, this mode of understanding identity and difference remains basic to contemporary politics and culture. Yet politicians--and for that matter some influential social theorists such as Jurgen Habermas--act often as if these questions are settled in advance, in some sort of prepolitical prehistory to our contemporary struggles. Habermas's recent proposals for a "constitutional patriotism," for example, are really just idealizations of the "civic nationalism" model, with the same presumption of an underlying "natural" nation always already there.<sup>28</sup> To such presumptions, sociologists respond with an idea of constructionism that makes any identity seem equally plausible, but this robs us of a grasp on why some of these identities have the power they do, and underestimates the importance of the enduring rhetoric within which struggles over identity are conducted. Poststructuralist celebrations of difference resist uniformity but

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<sup>28</sup> See "Citizenship and National Identity: Some Reflections on the Future of Europe," *Praxis International*, 12 #1 (1992) and "Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State," in Amy Gutman, ed: *Multiculturalism: Exploring the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Rev. Ed. 1994).

too often abandon the search for explanation and the prospect of giving normative guidance against the violence of simple expression of will.

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Two tacit guiding assumptions to much modern thinking on matters of identity are that individuals ideally ought to achieve maximally integrated identities, and that to do so they need to inhabit self-consistent, unitary cultures or lifeworlds. It is thought normal for people to live in one culture at a time, for example; to speak one language; to espouse one set of values; to adhere to one polity. But why? Not, I would suggest, on the basis of historical or comparative evidence. On the contrary, throughout history and still to a considerable extent around the world we find multilingualism common; we find people moved simultaneously by different visions of the world (not least, religion and science); we find people able to understand themselves as members of very differently organized collectivities at local and more inclusive levels, or at different times or stages of life. Think of the extent to which civilization has flourished in polyglot and more heterogeneous empires and in cosmopolitan trading cities. Consider the extent to which nationalist visions of internally uniform and sharply bounded cultural and political identities have had to be produced by struggle against a richer, more diverse and more promiscuously cross-cutting play of differences and similarities.

Modernity, ironically, has brought both the attempt to “clarify” and “consolidate” identities, and the production of an enormously increased field of cultural differences--both by expanding the reach and communicative ease of interactions across lines of difference and by encouraging new freedoms in cultural creativity. It has been an era not of simple sameness but of conflicting tendencies. The idea that people need

“naturally” to feel at home in a taken-for-granted and internally homogenous community contends with the creation of polities and cultural fields too large and differentiated to be organized as communities. Within such larger settings, it is not an adequate response to human differences to allow each person to find the group within which they feel at home. It is crucial to create public space within which people may discourse--not just to make decisions, but to make culture and even to make and remake their own identities.<sup>29</sup>

Echoes of conflicts over what constitutes a real nation run through contests over the “domestic” claims of women, and of gay men and lesbians, as well as of racial and ethnic groups. They shape equally the incapacity of international actors (including our own government) in the face of genocide. They even help determine the conventional categories of social science. In short, examining the discourse of nationalism helps us to see some of the basic contradictions of the cluster of social projects we commonly call modernity, and to see how many of these continue to shape the production and reproduction of social life and struggles despite the announcements of a postmodern era.

Prominent among these is the common pattern of claiming diversity among groups by means of positing sameness within groups. One of the effects of this is to denigrate the potential role of public discourse internal to groups as the basis for a more critical and democratically open way of forging and reforging collective identities. This displaces democratic politics and rational-critical debates to the relations among groups or representatives of groups, and risks reifying potentially limiting or repressive group identities as the bases for multiculturalism. This is as true whether group identities are

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<sup>29</sup> Talk of being “at home” should evoke Heidegger, and talk of “public space” will I hope recall Arendt--and the juxtaposition will suggest some of the crucial differences between their linked philosophies.

brought forward only for “recognition” or they are used as the bases for (re)distributive political-economic programs.

These problems challenge the “multiculturalist” project to come up with ways of conceptualizing differences and solidarities that do not presume discrete and relatively homogenous categories of people. Can we speak of multiple cultural differences and networks of integration, for example, rather than of multiple cultures? Can we find ways to relate to each other in public on the basis of respect for our differences--even if this requires some formality and distance--rather than pursuing the chimera of a sense of community on the scale of nations, and relying on the feeling of being at home as our primary basis for interpersonal relationships?