

Nations, Nationalism and the European Citizen

John Keane

Early modern origins

What is a nation? Do nations have a right to self-determination? If so, does that mean that the national identity of citizens is best guaranteed by a system of democratic government, in which power is subject to open disputation and to the consent of the governed living within a carefully defined territory? And what of nationalism? Does it differ from national identity? Is it compatible with democracy? If not, can its growth be prevented, or at least controlled, so as to guarantee the survival or growth of democracy?

These questions, pressingly familiar in contemporary politics although strangely neglected in contemporary political theory, have their roots in early modern Europe. With the decline of the Carolingian Empire, a new sense of collective identity, national awareness, began to emerge as a powerful social force. This process of nation-building was championed initially by sections of the nobility and the clergy, who used derivatives of the old Latin term *natio* to highlight their dependence upon a common language and common historical experiences.¹ The »nation« did not refer to the whole population of a region, but only to those classes which had developed a sense of identity based upon language and history and had begun to act upon it. Nations in this sense were seen as distinctive products of their own peculiar histories.

From the fifteenth century onwards, the term »nation« was employed increasingly for political purposes. According to the classic definition of Diderot, a *nation* is »une quantité considérable de peuple qui habite une certaine étendue de pays, renfermée dans de certaines limites, et qui obéit au même gouvernement«.² Here »nation« described a people who shared certain common laws and political institutions of a given territory. This political conception of »the nation« defined and included the *societas civilis* – those citizens

1. Helmut Beumann and W. Schroeder (eds.), *Aspekte der nationenbildung im Mittelalter* (Sigmaringen 1978); Helmut Beumann, »Zur Nationenbildung im Mittelalter«, in Otto Dann (ed.), *Nationalismus in vorindustrieller Zeit* (Munich 1986), pp. 21-33; and Bernard Guenée, *L'Occident aux XIVe à XVe siècles* (Paris, 1981), chapter 3.

2. *Encyclopédie* (17 volumes, Paris, 1751-1765), volume 11, p. 36.

who were entitled to participate in politics and to share in the exercise of sovereignty – and it had fundamental implications for the process of state-building. Struggles for participation in the state assumed the form of confrontations between the monarch and the privileged classes, which were often organized in a parliament. These classes frequently designated themselves as advocates of »the nation« in the political sense of the term. They insisted, in opposition to their monarch, that they were the representatives and defenders of »national liberties« and »national rights«.³ If the sovereign monarch came from a different nation – as in the Netherlands during the war against Habsburg Spain – then such claims were sharpened by another dimension: the struggle for privileged liberties was transformed into a movement for national emancipation from foreign tyranny.⁴

During the eighteenth century, the struggle for national identity was broadened and deepened to include the non-privileged classes. Self-educated middle classes, artisans, rural and urban labourers, and other social groups demanded inclusion in »the nation«, and this necessarily had anti-aristocratic and anti-monarchic implications. From hereon, in principle, the nation included everybody, not just the privileged classes; »the people« and »the nation« were supposed to be identical. Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791-2) was the most influential European attempt to »democratize« the theory of national identity.⁵ *Rights of Man* sparked bitter public controversies about the merits of monarchies and republics, forced Paine into permanent exile from his native England hunted by death threats, and led to a general crackdown against »Paineites«, all for suggesting that each nation is entitled to its own system of representative government.

Paine had first proposed this thesis during the American Revolution and several of his eighteenth-century contemporaries – Vattel and Sieyès for example – had explored, or were exploring, the same theme. But *Rights of Man* examined the political dimensions of national identity with unprecedented intellectual fire. Paine's prose burned with the drama of the French Revolution. Its bristling optimism also reflected the breakthroughs of the American Revolution: the declaration of the natural and civil rights of the sovereign people of

3. The example of the English Parliament during the Tudor period is analyzed by G.R. Elton, »English national self-consciousness and the Parliament in the sixteenth century«, in Otto Dann (ed.), *Nationalismus in vorindustrieller Zeit* (Munich 1986), pp. 73-82. The French case is considered in R. Bickart, *Les Parlements et la notion de souveraineté nationale* (Paris 1932).

4. The case of the Netherlands is examined in Johan Huizinga, »How Holland became a nation«, in his *Verzamelde Werken* (9 volumes, Haarlem, 1948-1953), volume 2, pp. 266-283.

5. Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man. Part First* and *Rights of Man. Part Second*, in Philip S. Foner (ed.), *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* (New York, 1945), pp. 243-458.

a nation, including the right to resist unlawful government, and the establishment of a republican democracy on a wholly new federal basis. Paine spat at the court and government of George III and warned all other monarchic rulers that the outbreak of revolution in Europe heralded a new dawn for democratic principles. »Monarchy is all a bubble, a mere court artifice to procure money«, he wrote, although he admitted that the pompous power and money-grubbing of monarchy still trapped the world in a cage of war and rumours of war. »There are men in all countries,« he continued, »who get their living by war and by keeping up the quarrels of nations.« He nevertheless insisted, in the face of this trend, that citizens of all nations, united in their love of republican democracy, had a duty to expose the taxing hypocrisy, fraud and gun-running of monarchic despotisms, understood as aggressive governments accountable only to themselves. And he concluded that the struggle for representative government – for periodic elections, fixed-term legislatures, a universal franchise, and freedom of assembly, the press and other civil liberties – required recognition of the right of each nation to determine its own destiny. »What is government more than the management of the affairs of a nation?«, he asked. »It is not«, he answered. »Sovereignty as a matter of right, appertains to the nation only, and not to any individual; and a nation has at all times an inherent indefeasible right to abolish any form of government it finds inconvenient, and establish such as accords with its interest, disposition, and happiness.«⁶

Paine's thesis that the nation and democratic government constitute an indivisible unity subsequently enjoyed a long and healthy life. Nineteenth-century Europe saw the emergence of two great powers (Germany and Italy) based on the principle of national self-determination, the effective partition of a third (Austria-Hungary after the Compromise of 1867) on identical grounds, two revolts of the Poles in support of their reconstitution as a nation-state, and the formal recognition of a chain of lesser independent states claiming to represent their sovereign nations, from Luxembourg and Belgium in the west to the Ottoman successor states in south-eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, Romania). During our own century, especially after the First World War, the principle of »the right to national self-determination« enjoyed considerable popularity among international lawyers, political philosophers, governments and their opponents, who supposed that if the individual members of a nation so will it, they are entitled to freedom from domination by other nations, and can therefore legitimately establish a sovereign state covering the territory in which they live, and where they constitute a majority of the population. From this perspective, the principle that citizens should govern themselves was identified with the principle that nations should determine their own destiny,

6. *Rights of Man. Part First*, in Philip S. Foner (ed.), *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* (New York, 1945), p.341.

and this in turn produced a convergence of meaning of the terms »state« and »nation«. »State« and »nation« came to be used interchangeably, as in such official expressions as »League of Nations«, the »law of nations« or »nation-state«, and in the commonplace English language usage of the term »national« to designate anything run or regulated by the state, such as national service, national health insurance or national debt. Such expressions reinforce the assumption, traceable to the eighteenth century, that there is no other way of defining the word nation than as a territorial aggregate whose various parts recognize the authority of the same state, an assumption captured in Karl Deutsch's famous definition of a nation as »a people who have hold of a state«.⁷

The principle that nations should be represented within a territorially defined state echoes into our times. In the European region – to mention several examples – the birth of Solidarność and the defeat of martial law in Poland, the dramatic velvet revolution in Czechoslovakia, the collapse of the Berlin Wall to the trumpet sounds of »Wir sind ein Volk«, and the successful struggle of the Demos government and its supporters to achieve Slovenian independence simply cannot be understood without reference to this equation. The same powerful dynamic worked to secure the collapse of the Soviet Empire. The Soviet Union was an empire comprising a diversity of nationalities all subject to the political dominance of a Russian-dominated Communist Party that ensured for seven decades that the federal units of the Union had no meaningful political autonomy and that demands for »national communism« would trigger a political crackdown backed if necessary by military force.

This multi-national empire harboured a self-paralyzing contradiction. The Party insisted on subjects' conformity to its Russified definition of policies for securing »socialism«, all the while governing through national cadres, promoting national cultures, encouraging education in the local language and even talking of eventual rapprochement (*sblizhenie*) and assimilation of nations (*slyvanie*). From the Khrushchev period onwards, this contradiction fostered not only the growth of national *nomenklatura* who ran the republics, particularly in Transcaucasia and Central Asia, as fiefdoms controlled by Party »mafias« rooted in circles of friends, kinship networks and local and regional systems of patronage. It also stimulated the growth of civil societies expressing themselves in a national idiom, protesting against Russification and ecology-damaging, enforced industrialization and demanding »democracy« and »independence«, thereby lunging with a dagger at the heart of the imperial system structured by the leading role of the Russian-centred Party.⁸

7. Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and Its Alternatives* (New York, 1969), p. 19.

National identity and citizenship

The collapse of the Soviet Empire under pressure from struggles for national self-determination adds weight to the thesis that a shared sense of national identity, in Hungary and Russia no less than in Scotland and Slovenia, is a basic precondition of the creation and strengthening of citizenship and democracy. Understood in ideal-typical terms, national identity is a particular form of collective identity in which, despite their routine lack of physical contact, people consider themselves bound together because they speak a language or a dialect of a common language; inhabit or are closely familiar with a defined territory, and experience its ecosystem with some affection; and because they share a variety of customs, including a measure of memories of the historical past, which is consequently experienced in the present tense as pride in the nation's achievements and, where necessary, an obligation to feel ashamed of the nation's failing.⁹

National identity so defined is a specifically modern European invention and its political importance is that it infuses citizens with a sense of purposefulness, confidence and dignity by encouraging them to feel »at home«. It enables them to decipher the signs of institutional and everyday life. The activity of others – the food they prepare, the products they manufacture, the songs they sing, the jokes they tell, the clothes they wear, the looks on their faces, the words they speak – can be recognized. That familiarity in turn endows each individual with a measure of confidence to speak and to act. Consequently, whatever is strange is not automatically feared; whatever diversity exists within the nation is more or less accepted as one of its constitutive features. The borders between a national identity and its »neighbouring« identities (of class, gender, religion, race, for example) are vaguely defined and its security police and border guards are unreliable and tolerant.¹⁰ There is even some acceptance of the fact that members of the same nation can legitimately disagree about the meaning and extent of their nationhood. This tolerance of difference is possible precisely because nationhood equips members of a

8. Klaus von Beyme, »Social and economic conditions for ethnic strife in the Soviet Union«, in Alastair McAuley (ed.), *Soviet Federalism, Nationalism and Economic Decentralisation* (Leicester and London, 1991), pp. 89-109; and Adam Michnik, »Nationalism«, *Social Research*, volume 58, number 4, (Winter 1991), pp. 757-763.

9. The contours of national identity are well examined in Philip Schlesinger, »On national identity: some conceptions and misconceptions criticized«, *Social Science Information*, 26, 2 (1987), pp. 219-264; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford 1983); and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Revised edition; London and New York, 1991)

10. The spatial metaphor of boundaries is developed in Fredrik Barth, »Ethnic Groups and Boundaries«, in *Process and Form in Social Life: Selected Essays of Fredrik Barth* (London 1981), pp. 198-227.

nation with a sense of belonging and a security in themselves and in each other: they can say »we« and »you« without feeling that their »I«, their sense of self, is slipping from their possession.

Whenever they are denied access to a shared sense of nationhood citizens tend to experience the world as unfriendly and alien – in the extreme case of enforced exile they experience the nasty, gnawing and self-pitying and self-destructive *Hauptweg* described by Thomas Mann and others – and this renders them less capable of living democratically. After all, democratic regimes are the most demanding of political systems. In contrast to all forms of heteronomous government democracy comprises procedures for arriving at collective decisions through public controversies and compromises based on the fullest possible and qualitatively best participation of interested parties.¹¹ At a minimum, democratic procedures include equal and universal adult suffrage within constituencies of various scope and size; majority rule and guarantees of minority rights, which ensure that collective decisions are approved by a substantial number of those expected to make them; freedom from arbitrary arrest and respect for the rule of law among citizens and their representatives; constitutional guarantees of freedom of assembly and expression and other civil and political liberties, which help ensure that those expected to decide or to elect those who decide can choose among real alternatives; and various social policies (in fields such as health, education, child care and basic income provision) which prevent market exchanges from becoming dominant and thereby ensure that citizens can live as free equals by enjoying their basic political and civil entitlements. Expressed differently, democracy requires the institutional division between a certain form of state and civil society. A democracy is an openly structured system of institutions which facilitate the flexible control of the exercise of power. It is a multilayered political and social mosaic in which political decision-makers at the local, regional, national and supranational levels are assigned the job of serving the *res publica*, while, for their part, citizens living within the nooks and crannies of civil society are obliged to exercise vigilance in preventing each other and their rulers from abusing their powers and violating the spirit of the commonwealth.

Although democracy in this sense does not require citizens to play the role of full-time political animals – too much democracy can kill off democracy – it is always difficult to generate or to sustain its momentum. That task is rendered even more arduous in contexts lacking traditions which are home to the virtues

11. John Keane, *Democracy and Civil Society. On the Predicaments of European Socialism, the Prospects for democracy and the problem of Controlling Social and Political Power* (London and New York, 1988) and *The Media and Democracy* (Oxford, 1991).

of democratic citizenship: prudence, common sense, self-reliance, courage, sensitivity to power, the knack of making and defending judgements in public, the ability to (self-) criticize and to accept criticism from others in turn, and the capacity to join with others in dignity and solidarity to resist the enervating miasma of fear. The last-mentioned quality is especially important in the democratic transformation of despotic regimes, when fear of power corrupts those who are subject to it and fear of losing power corrupts those who exercise it.

Shaking off fear is always a basic condition of democracy and it is normally assisted by citizens' shared sense of belonging to one or more ethical identities, national identity being among the most potent of these. Fearlessness is not a naturally occurring substance. It is a form of courage or »grace under pressure« (Aung San Suu Kyi) developed wherever victims of political lies and bullying and violence make a personal effort to throw off personal corruption and to draw on their inner and outer resources to nurture the habit of refusing to let fear dictate their actions. Grace under pressure normally precedes and underpins attempts to institutionalize democracy. To be effective, it must be practised in small daily acts of resistance that in turn feed upon citizens' sense that they speak a common language and share a natural habitat and a variety of customs and historical experiences.

Consider Poland: The experience of more than a century of foreign domination after the partitions of 1772, 1793 and 1795, by which Poland was carved up by the Russian empire, the Habsburg Monarchy and the kingdom of Prussia, nurtured a distinctive national consciousness among the nobility (*szlachta*) of that country. During the nineteenth century, these Poles considered themselves (and were widely regarded) as fighters for the freedom of humanity, as a nation martyred in the cause of democratic liberty. Their shared sense of nationhood merged with the ability to act gracefully under pressure; to be Polish meant the refusal to be bullied and intimidated by power. The leader of the revolt of 1794, Tadeusz Kosciuszko, a friend of Thomas Paine's, was a hero to all European democrats and his name was celebrated in America and even in Australia, whose highest mountain is named after him. The Polish legions organized by Henryk Dabrowski took as their slogan »for our liberty and yours« (*za nasza i wasza wolność*) and Polish patriots played a prominent part in the 1848 revolutions in Hungary, Germany and Italy. Today, the national identity crystallized in such experiences surprises and even perplexes many people who are not Polish. The Poles are sometimes seen as brash and crafty anarchists who have a deeply romantic soul traceable to poets such as Adam Mickiewicz, who viewed Poland as the Christ of Nations, crucified so that it could be resurrected and all other nations could be redeemed. Traces of such arrogance are indeed still evident in various parts of today's political spectrum

in Poland, especially in the call for a »Catholic State of the Polish Nation«. But, overall, the messianic fervour with which certain nineteenth-century Poles reacted to misfortune and oppression has receded. A striking feature of contemporary Polish national identity is its embrace of the language of democratic freedom; as Adam Michnik remarked in the mid-1980s, the Polish struggle for freedom against military dictatorship and communist empire was simultaneously a struggle for the freedom of humanity.¹²

The rise of nationalism

The preceding analysis appears to confirm the eighteenth-century doctrine of national self-determination. It implies that Paine and others were correct in thinking that the defense of »the nation« and the struggle for democracy against political despotism are identical, that when the winds of national feeling blow, the people, like beautiful birds, grow wings and fly their way to a land of independence. And yet the experience of the French Revolution, which inspired Paine's *Rights of Man*, casts doubt upon any such conclusion. For a time, the rise of Louis Napoleon seemed to reveal a political weakness specific to the French. Paine drew this conclusion and returned to America, wings under his arms. Only in our time, after the logic of the French revolution has been broadly repeated in so many countries, has it become possible to discern the operation of a new aspect of modernity, the unfolding of a process in which the French Revolution proved to be a fundamental watershed. The Revolution destroyed forever the faith in the divine and unchallengeable right of monarchs to govern and it sparked a struggle against the privileged classes in the name of a sovereign nation of free and equal individuals. Those acting in the name of the sovereign nation were ever more tempted to emphasize faithfulness to *la patrie*, that is, citizens' obligations to their state, itself the guarantor of the nation, itself said to be »one and indivisible«. The motto of the *ancien régime*, »Un roi, une foi, une loi« (»One king, one faith, one law«) was replaced by »La Nation, la loi, le roi« (»The Nation, the law, the king«). Thenceforward the Nation made the law which the king was responsible for implementing. And when the monarchy was abolished in August 1792, the Nation became the titular source of sovereignty. »Vive la Nation!« cried the French soldiers one month later at Valmy, as they flung themselves into battle against the Prussian army. Everything which had been royal had now become national. The nation even had its own emblem, the tricoloured national flag, which replaced the white flag of the house of Bourbon. The new spirit of *nationalism* had surfaced, bringing with it a lust for the power and glory of the nation-state which

12. Jan Jozef Lipski, »Two Fatherlands - Two Patriotisms«, *Survey*, volume 26, number 4 (Autumn 1982), pp. 159-175.

finally overwhelmed the democratic potential of the revolution. The first nationalist dictatorship of the modern world was born.

The formation of a despotic regime sustained by nationalist appeals to the nation was an utterly novel development – Europe's Greek gift to itself and to the rest of the world.¹³ Since that time, and despite its extraordinary global impact, the eighteenth-century doctrine of national self-determination has been subject to a smouldering crisis, whose contemporary resolution necessitates both a fundamental re-thinking of that doctrine, a more complex understanding of the relationship between national identity and nationalism, and greater clarity about the nature of democratic procedures.

Max Weber once defined democracy for the benefit of General Ludendorff, and with his approval, as a political system in which the people choose a leader who then says, »Now shut your mouths and obey me«. ¹⁴ The impatience with ongoing public clashes of opinion and disagreement implied in this definition of democracy misses one of its quintessential features. Democratic procedures tend to maximize the level of reversibility or »biodegradability« of decision making. They invite dispute and encourage public dissatisfaction with currently existing conditions, even from time to time stirring up citizens to anger and direct action. Under enduring despotisms – Salazar's Portugal or Brezhnev's Russia – things are otherwise. Time appears to stand still. Individuals continue to be born, to mature, to work and to love, to play and to quarrel, to have children and to die, and yet everything around them becomes motionless, petrified and repetitious. Political life becomes utterly boring.

In fully democratic systems, by contrast, everything is in perpetual motion. Endowed with liberties to criticize and to transform the distribution of power within state and civil institutions, citizens are catapulted into a state of permanent unease which they can cope with, grumble about, turn their backs on, but never fully escape. The unity of purpose and sense of community of pre-democratic societies snaps. There is difference, openness and constant competition among a plurality of power groups to produce and to control the definition of reality. Hence there are public scandals which unfold when publics learn about events which had been kept secret because if they had been made public ahead of time they could not have been carried out without public outcries. Under democratic conditions the world feels as if it is gripped by

13. Jacques Godechot, *La Grande Nation* (2nd edition; Paris, 1983); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge and New York, 1990); Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nations and States. An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism* (London 1977); and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York 1991).

14. Cited in Marianne Weber, *Max Weber: A Biography* (New York and London, 1975), p. 653.

capaciousness and uncertainty about who does and should govern. Existing relations of power are treated (and understood) as contingent, as lacking transcendental guarantees of absolute certainty and hierarchical order, as a product of institutionally situated actors exercising power within and over their respective milieux.

It is this self-questioning, self-destabilizing quality of democratic regimes which not only provides opportunities for the advocates of national identity to take their case to a wider public. It also increases the magnetism of anti-democratic ideologies such as nationalism. Democratic conditions can severely test citizens' shared sense of the unreality of reality and chronic instability of their regimes, to the point where they may crave for the restoration of certainty about »reality« by suppressing diversity, complexity and openness within and between the state and civil society. Democracies never reach a point of homeostatic equilibrium. They are dogged permanently by public disagreements about means and ends, by uncertainties, confusions and gaps within political programmes, and by hidden and open conflicts, and all this makes them prey to forms of post-prison psychosis (Havel), morbid attempts to simplify matters, to put a stop to pluralism and to foist Unity and Order onto everybody and everything.

The events of the French Revolution revealed this dynamic for the first time, confirming the rule that whenever believers in a nation assemble they risk being seduced by the language and power fantasies of nationalism. The distinction between national identity and nationalism – overlooked by many commentaries on the subject, including Eric Hobsbawm's *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*¹⁵ – is fundamental in this context. Nationalism is the child of democratic pluralism – both in the sense that the existence of open state institutions and a minimum of civil liberties enables nationalists to organize and to propagate their nationalism, but also in the less obvious sense that democracy breeds insecurity about power and sometimes fear and panic and, hence, the yearning of some citizens to take refuge in sealed forms of life.

In the European region, nationalism is at present among the most virile and magnetic of these closed systems of life, or what I prefer to call ideologies.¹⁶ Like other ideologies, nationalism is an upwardly mobile, power-hungry and potentially dominating form of language game which makes falsely universal claims. It supposes that it is part of the natural order of things and that the Nation is a biological fact, all the while hiding its own particularity by masking

15. Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge 1990).

16. John Keane, »The Modern Democratic revolution: Reflections on Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*«, in Andrew Benjamin (ed.), *Judging Lyotard* (London and New York 1992), pp. 81-98.

its own conditions of production and by attempting to stifle the plurality of non-national and sub-national language games within the established civil society and state in which it thrives.

Nationalism is a scavenger. It feeds upon the pre-existing sense of nationhood within a given territory, transforming that shared national identity into a bizarre parody of its former self. Nationalism is a pathological form of national identity which tends (as Milorad Pavić points out in *Dictionary of the Khazars*) to destroy its heterogeneity by squeezing the nation into the Nation. Nationalism also takes advantage of any democratizing trends by roaming hungrily through civil society and the state, harassing other particular language games, viewing them as competitors and enemies to be banished or terrorized, injured or eaten alive, pretending all the while that it is a universal language game whose validity is publicly unquestionable, and which therefore views itself as freed from the contingencies of historical time and space.

Nationalism has a fanatical core. Its boundaries are dotted with border posts and border police charged with the task of monitoring the domestic and foreign enemies of the Nation. In contrast to national identity, whose boundaries are not fixed and whose tolerance of difference and openness to other forms of life is qualitatively greater, nationalism requires its adherents to believe in themselves and to believe in the belief itself, to believe that they are not alone, that they are members of a community of believers known as the Nation, through which they can achieve immortality. Nationalism requires them and their leader-representatives (as Ernest Renan put it in *Qu'est-ce qu'une Nation?*) to participate in »un plebiscite de tous les jours«. This level of ideological commitment ensures that nationalism is driven by a bovine will to simplify things - by the kind of instruction issued by Bismarck: »Germans! Think with your blood!«

If democracy is a continuous struggle against simplification of the world, then nationalism is a continuous struggle to undo complexity, a will not to know certain matters, a chosen ignorance, not the ignorance of innocence. It thereby has a tendency to crash into the world, crushing or throttling everything that crosses its path, to defend or to claim territory, and to think of land as power and its native inhabitants as a »single fist« (Ayaz Mutalibov). Nationalism has nothing of the humility of national identity. It feels no shame about the past or the present, for it supposes that only foreigners and »enemies of the nation« are guilty. It revels in macho glory and fills the national memory with stories of noble ancestors, heroism and bravery in defeat. It feels itself invincible, waves the flag and, if necessary, eagerly bloodies its hands on its enemies.

At the heart of nationalism - and among the most peculiar features of its »grammar« - is its simultaneous treatment of the Other as everything and

nothing. Nationalists warn of the menace to their own way of life by the growing presence of aliens. The Other is seen as the knife in the throat of the Nation. Nationalists are panicky and driven by friend-foe calculations, suffering from a judgement disorder that convinces them that the Other nation lives at its own expense. Nationalists are driven by the feeling that all nations are caught up in an animal struggle for survival, and that only the fittest survive. Every other speech of Jörg Haider of the FPÖ in Austria insinuates that »East Europeans« are endangering the state, the constitution and democracy. Neo-Nazis in the new half of Germany shout »Ausländer 'raus!«, liken Poles to hungry pigs, attribute shortages of bicycles to the Vietnamese and the lack of food to the Jews, and accuse Turks of taking over German communities. French supporters of Jean-Marie Le Pen warn of the Arab »invasion« of France. Lithuanian anti-semites whisper the old stories about the Jews who once sacrificed Christian children and used their blood to make Passover bread, and recall the same blood libelous tales of Jewish grain merchants and millers who put glass in their flour to make Gentile women bleed when they kneaded the dough. Croatian nationalists denounce Serbians as četniks or as Bolshevik butchers who murder their victims and mutilate their bodies; Serbian nationalists reciprocate by denouncing Croats as Ustaše fascists who are hellbent on eliminating the Serbian nation. Both curse Muslims as foreign invaders of a land in which they have in fact lived for five centuries.

Yet nationalism is not only fearful of the Other. It is also arrogant, confidently portraying the Other as inferior rubbish, as a worthless zero. The Other is seen as unworthy of respect or recognition because its smelly breath, strange food, unhygienic habits, loud and off-beat music, and incomprehensible babbling language places it outside and beneath Us. It follows that the Other has few if any entitlements, not even when it constitutes a majority or minority of the population resident in the vicinity of Our Nation. Wherever a member of the Nation is, there is the Nation. It is true (as Lenin emphasized) that the nationalism of a conquering nation should be distinguished from the nationalism of those whom they conquer, and that conquering nationalism always seems uglier and more culpable. It is also true that nationalism can be more or less militant, and that its substantive themes can be highly variable, ranging from attachment to consumption and a treasured form of currency to boundary-altering forms of political separatism. Yet despite such variations nationalists suffer from a single-minded arrogance. This leads them to taunt and spit at the Other, to label them as wogs, *Scheiss* and *tapis*, to discriminate against them in institutional settings, to prohibit the public use of minority languages (»linguicide«), or even, in the extreme case, to press for the expulsion of the Other for the purpose of creating a homogeneous territorial nation.

This murderous *reductio ad absurdum* of nationalism surfaced on the southern fringes of Europe during and after World War I, with the mass extirpation of Armenians from Turkey in 1915 and, after the crushing defeat of the Greek army by the Turks in Anatolia in 1922, the expulsion by Greece of some 400,000 Turks and a reciprocal expulsion by the Turks of perhaps 1.5 million destitute and panic stricken Greeks from the lands of Asia Minor, where they had lived with others since the time of Homer.¹⁷ The herding and murdering of nations was repeated by Stalin and by Hitler, who insisted on the elimination of the Jews and others and organized the transfer of South Tyrolians and other German-speaking peoples living outside the *Vaterland* to Germany itself. The same bizarre and bloody process has lately reappeared in the armed defense of »Serbian autonomous republics« and the military occupation by Serbia of Kosovo in former Yugoslavia. The Kosovo region in fact proved to be the testing ground of Serbian expansionism. Its nationalist spokesmen, tossed between the horns of arrogance and fear common to all nationalists, attacked Albanian Kosovars as dirty, backward Muslims who are not a genuine Yugoslav nation (*nacija*) but a mere unimportant nationality (*nacionalnost*) of non-Slavs. At the same time, they viewed Kosovars as fanatical conquerors, calling for »the severing of the right hand of all those who carry the green flag of Islam« (Vuk Drašković) in the historic cradle of the Serbian Nation, where King Lazar and his army were slaughtered while defending Christendom and civilization against the crescent and scimitar of all-conquering Islam. This same view of Muslims as worthless invaders is currently tearing Bosnia-Herzegovina to shreds. European Muslims – the Jews of the late twentieth century – are shot at, herded at gunpoint from their burning homes, summarily executed in nearby houses or marched in columns to railway sidings past rotting corpses to concentration camps, where they are raped or castrated, and then made to wait, with bulging eyes and lanternous faces, for the arrival of their own death.

National self-determination?

This confusion cannot be undone by speculative arguments between those who conclude that »nationalism is the ideology of the twenty-first century« (Conor Cruise O'Brien) and their opponents who rely on the equally broad brushed conclusion that »the Owl of Minerva is now hovering over nations and nationalism« (Hobsbawm). Such generalizations understate the uneven patterns of distribution of European nationalism, simplify its multiple causes, and shortcircuit the normative and strategic problem of how to disarm nationalism. As I see it, there is an urgent need to stretch the limits of the contemporary

17. See Charles B. Eddy, *Greece and the Greek Refugees* (London 1931), and C.A. Macartney, »Refugees«, in *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (London 1931), volume 13, pp.200-205.

sociological and democratic imagination, to think differently about the intertwined problems of nationalism, national identity and democracy, and to consider how the limits of democracy can be overcome in practice by inventing new democratic methods of preventing the growth of democracy's own poisonous fruits.

Solving the problem of nationalism by democratic means is possible, but not easy. The thesis presented here is that since democratic mechanisms facilitate the transformation of national identity into nationalism, democracy is best served by abandoning the doctrine of national self-determination and regarding a shared sense of national identity as a legitimate but *limited* form of life. This thesis contains a paradoxical corollary: national identity, an important support of democratic institutions, is best preserved by restricting its scope in favour of *non-national* identities that reduce the probability of its transformation into anti-democratic nationalism.

In the European context it is now possible to envisage – by means of this thesis – a cluster of four interdependent mechanisms which together can curb the force of nationalism and at the same time guarantee citizens' access to their respective national identities:

1. The first of these remedies is to decentre the institutions of the nation-state through the development of interlocking networks of democratically accountable sub-national and supra-national state institutions. Their combined effect, if rendered accountable to their citizens, would be to improve the effectiveness and legitimacy of state institutions and, more pertinently, to complicate the lines of political power, thereby reducing the room for manoeuvre of single nation-states and frustrating the nationalist fantasy of securing nations through strong, sovereign states that are prepared in principle to launch war on their neighbours or to crush their domestic opponents in the name of national preservation or salvation.

In effect, this remedy involves renewing – but at the same time democratizing – the more complex patterns of political power typical of the late medieval and early modern periods. The modern process of European state-building entailed the eclipse of numerous units of power – free cities, principalities, provinces, estates, manors, and deliberative assemblies – such that the five hundred or so political units that dotted the region in 1500 were reduced to around 25 units in 1900. There are now signs of a reversal of this process of building centralized state institutions. One symptom of this »scattering« of political power is the renewed interest in local government as a flexible forum for conducting local politics and competently administering local policies, partly in response to the declining effectiveness of macroeconomic management and the retreat of the national welfare state in western Europe.¹⁸

The same decentring of the nation state »downwards and sideways« is evident in the vigorous development of regional ideas and regional power in areas such as Catalonia, Wallonia, Emilia-Romagna, Andalucia, Scotland and the Basque region. Especially striking is the rapid growth and competitive success of industrial regions comprising interdependent networks of firms caught up in a process of double convergence (Sabel). Large firms increasingly attempt to decentralize into looser networks of operating units, subsidiaries and subcontractors producing more specialized products through more flexible production methods. Meanwhile, small firms attempt to build themselves into the wider forms of loan finance, marketing facilities, research and development and other common services for which large firms were once renowned, and which are now provided increasingly at the regional level.¹⁹

Finally, the trend towards a *Europe des regions* has been supplemented by the accelerating growth of supra-national political institutions such as the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, and the European Court of Justice. An earlier phase of experiments with inter-governmental negotiations and economic cooperation has been complemented by a process of treaty-making and a drive to political and legal union which, although still highly undemocratic and controversial, is likely to prove as consequential for the political shape of Europe as the Congress of Vienna in 1814, the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, or the Yalta Summit in 1945.

Member states of the European Community are required increasingly to accept the *acquis communautaire*, the body of treaties, laws and directives which have been agreed by its makers; there is a relative shift away from policy making by consensus towards qualified majority voting; and a consequent quickening pace of Euro-legislation in all policy fields. In 1970, for example, the Council of Ministers, on which each member government has a representative, adopted 345 regulations, decisions and directives (the three types of Community law); by 1987 that total had reached 623, and it has risen further since that time. From standards of central heating and housing to the purity of beer and wine, the cleanliness of beaches and the conditions of women's employment, the populations of the EC are increasingly touched and shaped by European political integration. This process arguably hastens the decline of nation state sovereignty and facilitates the birth of a post-national Europe, in the sense that it adds to the pressure on nationalist movements, parties, governments and leaders to recognize the fact and legitimacy of countervailing

18. Richard Batley and Gerry Stoker (eds.), *Local Government in Europe: Trends and Developments* (London, 1991)].

19. See Charles Sabel, »Flexible specialisation and the re-emergence of regional economies«, in P. Hirst and J. Zeitlin (eds.), *Reversing Industrial Decline? Industrial Structure and Policy in Britain and her Competitors* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 17-70.

political powers, even in such sensitive matters as »national economic policy« and the resolution of so-called »national conflicts«.

2. The formulation and application of internationally recognized legal guarantees of national identity is a vital adjunct of the breaking down of the sovereignty of the nation state. Such formal guarantees were pioneered in the four Geneva Conventions commencing in 1929 and expressed forcefully in the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man ratified by the United Nations in December, 1948: »Everyone is entitled to the rights and freedoms set forth in this declaration, without distinction of any kind such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, *national* or social *origin*, property, birth, or other status.« (italics mine)

The Badinter proposals for resolving the Yugoslav crisis extend and refine this principle of guaranteeing citizens« entitlement to national identity by means of international supervision, thereby departing from the old Paineite maxim that all sovereignty appertains to the territorially bounded nation. The EC report coordinated by the former French Justice Minister and President of France's Constitutional Court, Robert Badinter, called for applications for EC recognition of the statehood of the various Yugoslav republics and shortly thereafter recommended the recognition of Slovenia, Croatia and Macedonia, subject to their government's acceptance of formal guarantees of the civil and political freedoms of national minorities, the acceptance of international arms control agreements, and no forcible redrawing of existing nation-state boundaries.

The report, implemented only in part and plagued by war, has far-reaching implications for the subject of nationhood, nationalism and democracy. It supposes that governments have a primary obligation to respect the wishes of their populations, but it does not fall back on the old premise that each nation requires a sovereign state covering the territory in which it lives. »Where the sentiment of nationality exists in any force«, wrote J.S. Mill, »there is a *prima facie* case for uniting all the members of the nationality under the same government, and a government to themselves apart.« The Badinter report spots a murderous difficulty lurking in this early modern doctrine of national self-determination: If the political boundaries of the earth are to be fixed by the criterion of nationhood then, since nations do not see eye to eye (why otherwise have state borders?) and do not live in discrete geographic entities, then there will be no end to boundary disputes. Every border is seen as necessarily faulty and as capable of improvement through the annexation of some outlying territory in which one's own nation is living; and since this annexation must normally be imposed by the conqueror upon the conquered, the struggle for »national autonomy« contains the seeds of »territorial cleansing«, pushing and shoving, refugees, statelessness, pogroms and war. The report correctly under-

stands that in the European context civil wars sparked off by nationalist pressures, rather than war between homogeneous nation-states, have become the major threat to regional stability.

The Badinter report also reminds Europeans of the increasingly multi-national character of their states. Of course, most European states have always been multi-national, but recently that fact has been accentuated by large-scale migrations. The permanent entry into western Europe of more than 15 million non-EC people during the past half-century has ensured that mono-national states no longer exist, and that even the oldest and most culturally »homogeneous« of civil societies in countries or regions such as Spain, England, Portugal, France and Germany are now vertical mosaics of nationalities which do not humbly accept their position as satellites of the currently dominant national identity. The report challenges the early modern assumption that national loyalties are exclusive, and that democracy is therefore only possible in a nationally homogenous state.

The report calls instead for a new compromise between nations *within* states. It sees that the peaceful and democratic functioning of European states and societies necessitates reliance upon supra-national monitoring and enforcement mechanisms and it urges recognition of the new principle that the various nations of any single state are entitled to their nationhood, and thus to live differently, as free equals. The Badinter report »de-politicizes« and »de-territorializes« national identity. It recaptures something of the eighteenth-century view, championed by thinkers like Burke and Herder, that nationality is best understood as a cultural entity, that is, as an identity belonging to civil society, not the state. It sees national identity as a *civil* entitlement of citizens, the squeezing or attempted abolition of which, even when ostensibly pursued by states in the name either of higher forms of human solidarity or of protecting the »core national identity« (Isaiah Berlin), serves only to trigger off resentment, hatred and violence among national groupings.

3. Of equal importance as a guarantor of national identity and democracy against nationalism is a factor that has been barely discussed in the literature on the subject: the development of a pluralist mosaic of identities within civil society. This third antidote to nationalism is as effective as it is paradoxical. It presumes that the survival and flourishing of national identity is only possible within a self-organizing civil society, which, however, provides spaces for citizens to act upon *other* chosen or inherited identities, thus *limiting* the probable role of national identity in the overall operation of state and civil institutions and political parties, communications media and other intermediary bodies. The paradox bears a striking parallel to the question of religious tolerance: the practice of a particular religion in a multi-religious society

requires – if bigotry and bloodshed is to be avoided – the principle of freedom of religious worship, which in practice entails recognition of the legitimacy of *other* religions and, hence, the need for secularism which simultaneously guarantees the freedom *not* to be religious. The same maxim ought to be carried over into matters of national identity, for it is clear that to model either state institutions or civil society solely on the principle of national identity means privileging one aspect of citizens' lives, devaluing others, and contradicting the pluralism so vital for a democratic civil society, thus rendering those citizens' lives nation-centred and one-dimensional and, thus, susceptible to the rise of nationalism.

The straitjacketing effect of nation-centred politics in Croatia has been well-described by Slavenka Drakulić: »Nationalism has been forced on people like an ill-fitting shirt. You may feel that the sleeves are too short and the collar too tight. You might not like the colour, and the cloth may itch. But you wear it because there is no other. No one is allowed *not* to be Croatian.«²⁰ The converse of this point is that an open, self-governing civil society protected by various tiers of state institutions requires the cultivation of a complex habitat of nested spaces in which citizens can protect themselves against the dangers of »uprootedness« in a democracy by learning how to belong to a variety of organizations which enable them to put down roots, thereby preserving particular memories of the past, a measure of stability in the present, and particular expectations for the future. These spaces can further counteract nationalist pressures by helping citizens to overcome their own parochialism. Through their participation in the relatively local organizations of civil society, citizens find the most effective cure of their localism by learning about the wider world, coming to see that their sense of national identity – thinking and feeling themselves to be German, Irish or Turkish – is not essentially superior to that of other nations, and that nationality is only one possible identity among others.

4. Perhaps the most difficult to cultivate antidote to nationalism is the fostering of an *international* civil society in which citizens of various nationalities can intermingle, display at least a minimal sense of mutual understanding and respect, and generate a sense of solidarity, especially in times of crisis, for example during natural disasters, economic collapse or political upheaval.

During the second half of the eighteenth century, this friendship among citizens of various nations was called cosmopolitanism. Exposure to foreign contacts came in a variety of overlapping and sometimes contradictory ways: young men sent abroad to study; foreigners invited and welcomed as teachers; involvement in European wars which took »nationals« elsewhere in Europe; increased travel among the »respectable« classes and regular diplomatic rela-

20. Slavenka Drakulić, »The Smothering Pull of Nationhood«, *Yugofax* (31 October 1991), p. 3.

tions with courts; expanding commerce; and the ever faster and wider circulation of foreign fashions in philosophy, letters, instruction, dress and social intercourse. A history of eighteenth-century cosmopolitanism has yet to be written, but it is clear that in the writings of Pietro Verri, Immanuel Kant, Thomas Paine and others the »true cosmopolite« and the »loyal patriot« were one and the same figure.²¹ There was seen to be no contradiction between feeling oneself to be a citizen of the wider world [nb the Greek roots of *kosmopolites* from *kosmos*, world and *polites*, citizen] and wanting to enlighten and to transform that little corner of the European world where one had been born or had been brought by destiny to live, work, love and to die. The phase of early modern cosmopolitanism soon declined. Paine continued until his last breath to champion the cause of republican democracy around the world and Kant still looked at the history of the world in *weltbürgerlicher Absicht*, but these figures were among the last voices of a declining age. With the French revolution the era of cosmopolitanism declined and into its place stepped nationalism, nation-state building and nation-state rivalry. Some continued to work for »internationalism«, guided by the principle that »in proportion as the antagonism between classes within the nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end« (Marx and Engels). But slowly and surely the word *patriot* became charged with all the hatred and love of modern nationalism, while the word *cosmopolite* became the symbol of an ideal political unity that in practice could never be achieved.

A pressing theoretical and political question in today's Europe is whether a new form of the old cosmopolitanism is developing in tandem with the process of supra-national political integration in the west and the attempted dismantling of totalitarian regimes in parts of central-eastern Europe. Is the growth of an international civil society in Europe possible or actual? Raymond Aron is among those who have answered firmly in the negative: »Rights and duties, which in Europe, as elsewhere, are interdependent, can hardly be called multinational. In fact, they are quintessentially national... Though the European Community tends to grant all the citizens of its member states the same economic and social rights, there are no such animals as 'European citizens'. There are only French, German, or Italian citizens.«²²

21. The Italian case is examined in Franco Venturi, *Italy and the Enlightenment. Studies in a Cosmopolitan Century* (New York, 1972). See also Thomas J. Schlereth, *The Cosmopolitan Ideal in Enlightenment Thought: Its Form and Function in the Ideas of Franklin, Hume and Voltaire, 1694 - 1790* (Notre Dame and London, 1977); Eugen Lemberg, *Geschichte des Nationalismus in Europa* (Stuttgart, 1950), pp. 123-127; Joseph Texte, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Cosmopolitan Spirit in Literature: A Study of the Literary Relations between France and England during the Eighteenth Century* (London and New York, 1899).

22. Raymond Aron, »Is Multinational Citizenship Possible?«, *Social Research*, Winter 1974, pp. 652-653.

Aron's conclusion is based not only on the legal tautology that individuals can only become citizens because they belong to a sovereign state which is the sole guarantor of citizenship rights and duties. It also does not take account of the growth of multi-national states and societies and the trend towards the definition of the rights of *European* citizenship, available to all who live within the European Community region. If and when the Maastricht Treaty of Union is finally ratified and implemented, this trend will be greatly strengthened. Citizens of any state resident in another member state will be entitled to vote and to stand for office at the levels of local government and the European parliament. Citizens will enjoy the rights to information across frontiers, to petition the European Parliament, and to make use of a Parliamentary Ombudsman. And they will be entitled, when travelling abroad, to full diplomatic protection by any other member EC state.

These projected entitlements provide further evidence that Europe - at least the Europe of the European Community - is witnessing the slow, unplanned, blind and painful birth of a new species of political animal, the European citizen. This trans-national citizenry is not yet constitutionally guaranteed. Its »informal« or pre-legal status renders it less than fully visible, ensures its strength as a normative ideal, and makes it vulnerable to countervailing trends. The habitat of the new European citizen is an emerging international civil society of personal contacts, networks, conferences, political parties, social initiatives, trade unions, small businesses and large firms, friendships, local and regional forums. Within this non-governmental habitat, individuals and groups of various nations and persuasions take advantage of new communications technologies - fax machines, answerphones, satellite broadcasting - which break down the apparently »natural« barriers of geographic distance and state borders, increase the physical and cultural mobility of people, and even simulate the possibility of being simultaneously in two or more places. The new European citizens intermingle across frontiers for various purposes without making a cult of national origins, national identity, and »foreigners«. These citizens see and feel the importance of the *metaxu* (Simone Weil). They value nests, such as national identity, in which citizens are warmed and nourished and gain confidence in themselves. Yet they also recognize otherness as a right and a duty for everybody. These new citizens maintain that in the contemporary world identity is more a matter of politics and choice than fate. They have an allergic reaction to nationalism and deep empathy for people suffering discrimination or enforced exile from their cherished nations or territories. They are humble about their national identity, interested in others, concerned for their well-being, and consequently unwilling to indulge the feelings of revenge and narcissistic satisfaction characteristic of nationalists. European citizens are late modern cosmopolitans.

No doubt the internationalization of civil society is destroyed by nationalism and genocidal war, as in south-central Europe, where for many people daily life is now a non-citizens« hell of expulsion, terror, and bloodshed. These social exchanges among a plurality of citizens can also be squeezed or suffocated by the power of transnational corporations (such as Ford, Volkswagen and Sony) seeking to co-ordinate their national markets, to trim and discipline their workforces, and to dominate European social life through profit-driven matrix management and marketing. It is also true that xenophobes and other anti-democratic forces are taking advantage of the new European habitat. Nevertheless the long-term growth of European-wide exchanges among citizens whose social and political views are predominantly pluralist and republican is among the most remarkable features of contemporary Europe. Within these exchanges, there are few traces of Marxian class struggle politics and nineteenth-century dreams of abolishing state institutions, and nationalism is considered an anathema. Instead there is an underlying belief that not only Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals, but indeed the world beyond, should be a coat of many colours, a region marked by a precarious, non-violent yet permanently contested balance between governors and citizens.

Sometimes this new democratic republicanism erupts dramatically, as in the velvet revolutions of 1989-1991. At other times, it is expressed through vague references to citizenship rights and duties across frontiers (as in the Maastricht Treaty of Union). But most often the formation of a European civil society is an undramatic, nearly invisible process that seems unworthy of the attention of journalists, intellectuals and policy makers. It clearly requires detailed sociological investigation. For could it be that this new European citizenry, providing that it is not stillborn and that it is nurtured with adequate funding and legal and political guarantees, will prove to be the best antidote yet invented to the perils of nationalism and the poisonous fruits of democracy?