

*For Diana*

Nations and Nationalism in  
a Global Era

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*Supra- or Super-Nationalism?*

If the national state is beset by internal crises, it is also threatened by external forces. Its role as the primary economic, political and cultural actor in the world has suddenly been thrown into doubt. Though this question was touched on in chapter 1, it needs to be confronted more thoroughly, especially in the light of recent political developments in Europe.

The national state, it would appear, remains resilient, and national identities, though periodically refashioned, are not about to wither away. In these circumstances, can we seriously entertain the idea of a world without nations or nationalism, a world where national states voluntarily surrender their powers to some continental body or planetary organization which will replace the nation and the national state as the object of loyalty and passion for most people?

The question has taken on a new urgency. The fact that in the western half of Europe the national state appears to be busy divesting itself of its powers while in the eastern half it seems equally eager to reappropriate those same powers after the long Soviet winter of political passivity has heightened the sense of paradox, as have the tragic events in Bosnia on the doorstep of the European Union.

The question is not new. Ernest Renan, in his celebrated lecture delivered in 1882 and entitled *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*, prophesied that there would come a time when Europe would be united in some kind of federation, but added that this was not a political possibility in his day. Over a century later, the question recurs, both in Europe and outside.<sup>1</sup>

It is a caution that applies particularly to the familiar argument that, with the demise of the national state, regional-continental federation is the political form that best expresses and serves the economics of the great transnational companies and the societies of a 'post-national' era. Briefly, this view holds, first, that the national state can no longer serve the needs and interests of business and the market economy of advanced capitalism, and no longer provides the locus of military technology and sovereignty; and second, that the regional-continental federation, which is best suited to the needs of transnational capitalism and as the locus of sovereignty, is especially appropriate for those populations who share a close historical bond and cultural heritage.

The first of these claims need not detain us, since this is familiar territory and has to some extent been covered in chapter 1. Our concern here is not with transnational actors and practices *per se*, only with their impact on the nation and the national state. While it is true that many economic operations and institutions transcend the national state – and have, in fact, always done so – it is equally obvious that national economies remain the standard unit of regulation and allocation of resources. It is difficult at present to see how this might be otherwise, short of a reversion to empire, or a leap into a totally unified world system comprising all humanity as a single political and economic unit. Even in terms of economic, social and political data collection, the national state remains the primary unit of

comparison and 'methodological nationalism' remains the rule.<sup>2</sup>

Empirically, of course, a great number of transnational firms span the globe, and their activities take little account of national frontiers. At the same time, they tend to have bases in one or other industrialized state which acts as the centre of their operations; hence they are vulnerable to the regulations and policies of that state. The resources at the disposal of most transnational companies are undoubtedly vast and in many cases are much greater than the budgets of many small or new states. They do not, however, outstrip those of the most powerful national states nor do they usually control the means of violence at the disposal of even some smaller states. There is also considerable evidence of a transnational stratum of economic actors – financiers, bankers, directors – for whom national barriers are increasingly irrelevant obstacles; yet the politicians whom the transnational elites must in the end influence and persuade remain answerable to other groups within each national state, and through the ballot box, to the general population.<sup>3</sup>

As for military power, the internationalization of command structures has certainly lent some force to arguments that the national state is no longer the primary locus of armed force. This may also be true of the nuclear level of armaments, though recent debates in France, and over North Korea and the Ukraine, suggest a degree of caution. However, at the conventional level at which wars are actually fought, the national state remains the core unit of military technology and violence, and the main supplier and procurer of armaments. Moreover, as long as such force is retained, the national state is essentially sovereign; it can withdraw from agreements and back up its withdrawal with the requisite force, despite severe economic costs. There have been plenty of cases in history of communities prepared to incur such costs in order to be free, even to the point of death.<sup>4</sup>

It is the second claim that I wish to pursue here. Even if the national state retains an important role in both the economic and military aspects of advanced industrial society, might not regional-continental associations and federations serve these needs better in the long run? True, the record to date of these associations and federations is not encouraging; certainly, they have registered little in the way of political success. The union of Syria and Egypt in the United Arab Republic was short-lived, as was the inclusion of Singapore in Malaysia, or the looser union of the three East African states, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Similarly with the stillborn West African federation. In other cases, federation has been under heavy strain: in Belgium, in India and in Canada. In the former Soviet Union, a centralized version of federalism broke down, and it remains to be seen whether some type of looser confederal arrangement will hold. In the case of Yugoslavia, it is difficult to imagine anything being salvaged from the wreckage of Tito's federal party state.

Those cases where federation has stood the test of time, notably the United States, Australia and Switzerland, have depended on a certain degree of initial historical and cultural affinity among the population. They were underpinned by a core *ethnie* or, in the case of the United States, a large fragment thereof. Once again, an ethnic core forms the historical and cultural substratum for a high degree of decentralization and territorial devolution, and underpins the sense of solidarity.

But regional-continental associations and federations have wider functions and deeper bases. Here I am thinking of associations founded upon cultural affinities and embracing an ideology of 'Pan' nationalism. Pan-Arabism, Pan-Africanism, Pan-Turkism, Pan-Latin-Americanism are examples. So were late nineteenth-century Pan-Slavism and Pan-Germanism, which often shaded into Russian and German irredentism. Pan-Turkism too was used for irredentist purposes by the Young Turk regime, and helped to

justify massacres and 'relocation' of Armenians, through appeals to the linguistic and racial affinities of the Turkic-language communities, including the Mongols!<sup>5</sup>

The functions of such 'Pan' nationalisms are ambivalent. On the one hand, they seem to be suggesting a supersession of existing national states in the interests of much larger super-states and super-nations. On the other hand, they underpin the national state by linking it to a wider category of 'protected' states and strengthening its cultural profile and historic identity through opposition to culturally different neighbours and enemies. They provide another set of 'border guards', a new panoply of symbols and myths, memories and values, that set the included national states apart from others. 'We are all Africans' became in the 1960s not only a slogan of the colonized and dispossessed, but also an affirmation of difference and dignity through cultural unity.<sup>6</sup>

From a strictly political standpoint, 'Pan' nationalism must be judged as failures. They have had some uses as political fora and regional influences, but they hardly augur a breakthrough in political or economic relations, which can or will supplant individual national states, if that was ever intended. On the contrary, it can be argued that their function is to normalize, and thereby legitimize, the national state. These wider continental or regional associations depend ultimately on the goodwill and cooperation of their individual members, as could be seen in the case of Saddam Hussein's defiance of the majority in the Arab League on the eve of the Gulf War. But, given that cooperation, associations of culturally cognate states can exert some leverage in international fora and over public opinion, partly through the use of positive stereotypes and partly through bloc votes. Even at the more limited level of interstate economic and ecological projects, cultural affinities and 'Pan' nationalist ideologies can underpin understandings and cooperation, though national states have always cooperated on specific issues and projects which they judged to be in their individual 'national interest'. It is a

mistake to imagine that the national state has ever been as sovereign and independent as it likes to portray itself.<sup>7</sup>

Undoubtedly the rapid growth of telecommunications and the mass media have encouraged the creation of wider regional-continental networks. What needs to be explored is the degree to which regional-continental associations based on 'Pan' nationalisms can generate overarching cultures and identities that compete with, or even replace, national state and ethnic identities. For, as I shall argue, these culturally based regional associations can and sometimes do serve wider social, cultural and philanthropic needs, and so should not be written off, even in the political realm.

### *The European project*

All this needs to be borne in mind when considering the impact on nationalism and the national state of the growing trend to European unity. It is easy to see this relationship in black-and-white terms, as a zero sum: the greater the European unity, the less the national identity of each member national state. Undoubtedly, this perception lies behind the often fierce debates between pro- and anti-Europeans in Britain and elsewhere, though it is bound up with other debates – over democratization, social welfare and enlargement of the European Union. Casting its long shadow across the continent from east to west, the 'spectre of nationalism' refuses to be exorcized.

We can begin by reconsidering the old and well-rehearsed arguments between Europhiles and Eurosceptics. Broadly speaking, Europhiles have been arguing that we must 'create Europe' as a federal – a few would say, unitary – state, and thereby end the thousand years of internecine European strife and the wars of nationalism which have wrought such carnage in the twentieth century. They go on to bolster their case by saying that Europe will thereby be restored to its former

position of 'great power' on the world stage, on a par with America and Japan and perhaps Russia (formerly with the Soviet Union), and that through such unity, the peoples of Europe will enjoy unrivalled prosperity within their tariff boundaries and through the operation of a free internal market in goods and labour. Anti-Europeans counter that the main reason for European unity has been the Cold War, and the need to oppose Soviet Russian and/or American power; that the internal market will benefit some major European powers at the expense of smaller states; that the closed European union will harm the Third World economically; and that a 'European club' will become politically and culturally exclusive. They also point to the enhanced possibility of German economic and political domination of a unified Europe, and the growing trend to racial and ethnic exclusiveness which a unified Europe will be forced to implement. In short, they see European cooperation as beneficial, but European unification as detrimental to the interests and wider values of European peoples. De Gaulle's 'Europe des Patries' remains their ideal.<sup>8</sup>

There is a parallel debate between Euro-optimists and Euro-pessimists. This is an argument about probabilities and mechanisms. For the Euro-optimist, the climate for 'creating Europe' is propitious, and the chances are high, given the European orientations of business and the support of younger generations, provided that the two preconditions of vigorous leadership and well-designed institutions are fulfilled. The Europe of the future is a Europe of institutional networks governed by the norms of a civilized social democracy, balancing market needs with human rights under the aegis of an impartial and all-pervasive bureaucracy, the Commission, and an equally respected judicial branch, the European Court of Justice. A variant of this argument holds that a strong executive must be balanced by a powerful legislature and this means a greater measure of democratic control and accountability over Euro-bureaucracies.

The Euro-pessimists consider the chances of European unification at any but the most superficial (and bureaucratic) level to be fairly remote, and the rising tide of ethnic nationalism to postpone the European project even more. However incisive the leaderships and secure the institutions, they will not avail to forge any genuine European unity at the popular level unless and until there has been a commensurate evolution of popular perceptions, sentiments and attitudes away from the nation and the national state towards an overarching European identity. The Europe of the future, if it should ever emerge, will be one of mass identification and loyalty to the European ideal, alongside or even in place of national allegiances and identities, such that large numbers of the inhabitants of the European continent will not only consider themselves to be first and foremost 'Europeans' but will be prepared to make sacrifices for that ideal.<sup>9</sup>

Behind these arguments lie very different evaluations of what has served to bind individuals in Europe, namely, the nation and national identity. The economic arguments and political hopes and fears often conceal the much more elusive and baffling issue of national culture – the values, symbols, myths, memories and traditions that bind peoples together and confer on them a special significance and destiny. What is the nature of this heritage and culture for each community? How has it changed in the last few decades? And what will be the impact of 'Europe' on these cultures and identities?

There are two points to bear in mind here. The first is the different import of cultural identities at the individual and the collective levels. At the level of the individual, identities are multiple and often situational. As mentioned in chapter 2, human beings have multiple identities – of family, gender, class, region, religion, *ethnie* and nation – with one or other at different times taking precedence over the others, depending on many circumstances. At home we may feel we belong, and in fact belong, to a particular class or region; abroad we may see ourselves, and be seen, as members of a particular

ethnic or national group. For some purposes, religious community will define our identity, for others it will be gender or family. In practice, we tend to slide between these identities with relative ease, according to context and situation. Only occasionally do these multiple identities cause friction; and only rarely do they come into real conflict.<sup>10</sup>

Yet identities are not only 'situational'. They can also be 'pervasive'. At the collective level, it is not the options and feelings of individuals that matter, but the nature of the collective bond. Through socialization, communications and sometimes coercion, we find ourselves bound by particular identities from birth. We may seek to resist their power, but our efforts may prove unavailing. This is frequently the case with ethnic and national bonds. They are good examples of what Emile Durkheim would have described as the general, external and binding quality of social facts. From generation to generation, such bonds exert a powerful presence over our lives, and may remain durable and resilient forces, irrespective of the defection of even large numbers of individuals. The survival of some very ancient ethnic groups and nations despite individual defection and attrition – from the Armenians and Jews to the Chinese and Japanese – is evidence of the persistence of at least some ethnic ties and boundaries over millennia, despite periodic transformations of their cultural contents and enforced mass expulsions and defections of their members.<sup>11</sup>

Theoretically, then, it would be perfectly possible for the peoples of Europe to feel that they had more than one collective cultural identity: to feel themselves Sicilian, Italian and European, or Flemish, Belgian and European (as well as being female, middle class, Muslim or whatever). At the same time, it should also be asked: what is the relative strength of these 'concentric circles of allegiance'? Which of these circles is politically decisive, which has most effect on people's day-to-day lives? And which of these cultural identities and loyalties is likely to be more durable and pervasive?<sup>12</sup>

The second point to note is that European unification, if and when it comes, has meant and can mean very different things, depending on the level sought. In everyday parlance, it often means simply the creation of a common market, without any political connotations. Alternatively, it may signify a commitment to federalism, seen as the fulfilment of economic union. Neither meaning carries any reference to a cultural level of unification. There is often a tacit assumption that federalism entails some measure of cultural convergence, at least in terms of an overarching European identity and community which includes existing national identities. But this is to conflate politics with culture; though they may be closely linked in particular cases, these levels should be kept separate.<sup>13</sup>

The modern trend may be to seek to equate national identity with the national state, but to pool sovereignties is not the same thing as fusing cultures or amalgamating identities; and the creation of a European 'super-state' is not the same as forming a 'super-nation' of Europe. The late eighteenth-century partitions of the Polish state, for example, did not spell the end of a Polish people and a Polish culture. The conquest of the Catholic Irish tribes by the Protestant English and the Union of England and Ireland after 1800 actually strengthened a native Irish culture and a sense of common Irish ethnicity. Nor does economic and monetary union entail the loss of one's culture or heritage. After all, Walloons and Flemish, Scots and English, Basques and Castilians, are bound in economic and political unions, but none of these *ethnies* and nations have lost any of their cultural distinctiveness. We can hardly imagine, then, that a European economic and political union, or a European federation, will abolish or erode the deeply ingrained historic identities and cultures of the very diverse peoples of Europe.<sup>14</sup>

Whether such a political union or federation is as desirable as it is possible is another matter. That the creation in a couple of decades of some form of federative union can be

envisaged for much of the European continent is not in question. How deeply it will penetrate, how far its powers will really encroach on those of its constituent national states in vital matters, is debatable. But all these probabilities should not be confused with the quite separate question of creating a common European culture and a shared European identity.

### A European identity?

There are two contrasting models for the creation of collective cultural identities. The first regards identities as socially constructed artefacts, which can be brought into being and shaped by active intervention and planning. According to this view, the creation of a European cultural identity is part of the active process of forging an institutional framework for a European political community. Just as Germany as a cultural identity was created in the process of forging the Zollverein and the Bismarckian Reich, so the 'European identity' will emerge from the active will and deliberate planning of clear-sighted and strong-minded leaders and elites. In this activist and elite-centred vision, a European identity will spread in much the same way as did aristocratic ethnic culture in 'lateral' *ethnies*, that is, through a process of bureaucratic incorporation of middle and lower classes and of outlying regions by the elite-led centre.<sup>15</sup>

The second model views cultural identities as the precipitate of generations of shared memories and experiences. In this view, a European identity, were it to materialize, would be likely to evolve through a slow, inchoate, often unplanned process, though selected aspects might be the objects of attempts at conscious planning. As Euro-pessimists point out, economic or political unions can be deliberately created by building up common infrastructures and establishing institutions. Cultures and collective identities, on the other hand,

are the product of a host of social, political and cultural traditions, values, memories and symbols at the popular level that have coalesced over time to produce a common heritage and 'mythomoteur', a constitutive political myth, in the same manner as 'vertical', demotic *ethnies*. It is only possible to envisage a truly European cultural identity at this popular level as the outcome of the shared experiences and memories, traditions and values, and unifying myths and symbols of several generations of the peoples of Europe – shared, that is, by all the peoples of Europe. This raises a difficult question: where shall we find such Pan-European popular traditions and values, symbols and experiences?

There are two problems here. The first is the 'top down' nature of European unification to date. The European project has been constructed functionally through the actions and programmes of business, administrative and intellectual elites whose needs could no longer be fully met within the context of the national state and who have sought to build the economic infrastructure and political framework of a wider European union. On this reasoning, mass culture lags behind elite economic and political action, and requires a period of stabilization to catch up with economic and political changes, and thereby fulfil its functions in the division of labour. Where the political elites lead, the masses will follow as a result of the 'downward filtration' of new elite ideas, practices and institutional norms.<sup>16</sup>

The difficulty with this functional approach is its over-reliance on elites and leaderships. This has been amply demonstrated by the popular responses to the Maastricht Treaty's provisions in Denmark, France and the United Kingdom, and by a certain coolness towards 'Europe' in the Scandinavian candidate countries. Governments may lead but their peoples do not always appear eager to follow them into the European Union. There is a calculative quality about attitudes to Europe in many quarters that suggests an absence of deep emotional or cultural bonds between the peoples of the

European continent, and little sense of any distinctive value- and belief-system shared exclusively by the peoples of Europe. Though the desire may exist among many Europeans to cooperate and live and work together, it does not appear to be underpinned by any clear popular idea of what 'Europe' stands for in terms of culture, values, ideals and traditions nor by any vivid sense of belonging to a European family of peoples.

This may well be connected with the second problem, the difficulty of defining the nature of a 'European bond' and its distinctive culture. One clue in the quest for such definition was touched on earlier, in the discussion of 'Pan' nationalisms. These large-scale cultural nationalisms have often tried, usually unsuccessfully, to draw together separate states and their peoples, on the basis of shared cultural criteria and a common cultural heritage, and weld them into a single super-national unity. Nationalist movements of this kind included Pan-Turkism, Pan-Slavism, Pan-Africanism, Pan-Latin-Americanism – and Pan-Europeanism, i.e. the Pan-Europeanism of Coudenhove-Kalergi, Jean Monnet and the European Movement founded in 1948 in The Hague, rather than merely a step-by-step, piecemeal approach to economic union. It is a Pan-Europeanism that starts from the top and works down into society, that looks to leaders and elites, to institutions and norms, to the conscious will and planning of trained and motivated cadres who will go out and spread the message of European unity and create the European bond as the only realistic solution to the many ills with which the peoples of Europe have long been afflicted.<sup>17</sup>

Pan-Europeanism was, and is, a grand vision, one that places culture at the heart of the new Europe and seeks to create by institution and ordinance a new European culture, indeed a new European man and woman. But here lies the problem. Why should anyone choose a 'European' culture and identity over any other? On what basis can such an

appeal be made and why might we expect it to resonate, and among whom?

For Pan-Europeans, the answer is straightforward. There has always been a European culture and identity, however vague and difficult to pin down and formulate. This, after all, forms the basis of their appeal. Although they may speak of a new European culture and new Europeans, they see both as modern versions of something that existed in the past but was destroyed by the national state and its internecine wars and must now be recovered and restored. In the past, European unity was founded on a Christian culture and a Catholic identity; and one should hardly be surprised therefore at the influence of Catholics in the leadership of the European Movement. Medieval Christian culture was essentially Western European, with its main axis along the Rhine from Flanders to Switzerland and Italy, its centres of population and trade in the Hanseatic League cities and its principal political centres in France, the Holy Roman Empire and the Italy of the Popes. It was also essentially an elite culture, a Latin culture of the clergy and nobles and the *haute bourgeoisie*. This is the kind of European past, an expanding, innovative and militant Christian Europe threatened by Muslim Saracens and Turks in the East, that affords a model of unity for the secularized Europe of today.<sup>18</sup>

Of course, nobody is advocating a return to that idealized epoch of Christendom. It is the form, not the content, that provides the model. Modern Europe must find a secular equivalent of the common faith and value-system that bound Europeans of an earlier epoch together. But this only serves to compound the problem: where shall that common faith and value-system be found? Which memories and symbols, myths and traditions, can possess potency and evoke loyalty for the inhabitants of modern 'Europe'?

'Pan' nationalism, in the form of the Pan-European ideal, then, simply underlines the problem without providing any



new solutions. Should one look elsewhere, to the often fragile, invented, hybrid and ambivalent character of many identities and cultures in the late twentieth century? The same ambivalence, hybridity and fragility of the cultural artefact can be found at the European, continental level as on the national level of identity. In this sense, one might well speak of a European 'family of cultures', in the manner of Wittgenstein's concept of a 'language game', for there are several partial, ambiguous and overlapping cultural and political traditions, values and experiences that have over the centuries cross-fertilized many areas and peoples on the European continent. Several of these overlapping inter-European traditions, values, symbols and experiences which have affected the peoples of Europe in different ways and in varying degrees, could be used to construct the 'imagined community' of the new Europe, even if it remains largely an elite affair. Over large areas of the European continent, the elites of most (though not all) of its peoples have adopted such traditions as Roman law and jurisprudence, the Judeo-Christian system of ethical values, Renaissance humanism, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation and the Enlightenment spirit. They and their peoples have also shared, albeit differentially, in such social, political and cultural experiences as the great discoveries and colonialism, the great revolutions, the dislocations of capitalism, industrialism and urbanization, the movements and symbolism of romanticism, realism and nationalism.

Nationalism? The division of Europe into warring nations? What about those other shared mass experiences which owed so much to nationalism, the two interecine European and World Wars? Have not all these traditions, symbols and experiences had their ambivalent, dark and divisive sides? Even at the height of Catholic Christendom, were not minorities such as heretics, lepers and Jews, though inside Europe, put outside European society, often in walled quarters, and did they not thereby define 'Europe' to itself through

the mirror image of the Other? Did not the Renaissance light up some parts of Europe only to leave others in darkness? Did not the truths of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation spawn the bloody massacres of the Wars of Religion? In short, common experiences and traditions, shared symbols and values, have simply highlighted Europe's overlapping diversity, sharpened its ethnic and religious divisions and ambiguities, and revealed a kaleidoscope of distinctive *ethnies* and counter-cultures, of indigestible minorities, immigrants, aliens and social outcasts.<sup>19</sup>

The sheer number of these minorities and the vitality of these divided *ethnies* and their unique cultures has meant that 'Europe' itself, a geographical expression of problematic utility, has looked pale and shifting beside the entrenched cultures and heritages that make up its rich mosaic. Compared with the vibrancy and tangibility of French, Scots, Catalan, Polish or Greek cultures and ethnic traditions, a 'European identity' has seemed vacuous and nondescript, a rather lifeless summation of all the peoples and cultures on the continent, adding little to what already exists; alternatively Europe has become merely an arena, a field force, for conflicting identities and cultures.<sup>20</sup>

Worse, a European identity commands little mass affection or loyalty. It is a bit like virtue. Everyone is for virtue, as Eurobarometer is always telling us; everyone, that is, except the English (and sometimes the French), who seem to be indifferent to, if not downright sceptical of, European virtue. But even committed Europeans cannot summon up that intimacy of feeling, that warmth and even love, that one's *ethnie* or nation can so often inspire. If 'nationalism is love', to quote Michel Aflaq, a passion that demands overwhelming commitment, the abstraction of 'Europe' competes on unequal terms with the tangibility and 'rootedness' of each nation. Thus painters and poets have recorded and praised the beauties of particular places in Europe, or of specific regional, ethnic or national scenes, associated with unique

histories and traditions, but never the 'European landscape' in general. And the same is true of the novelists who depict the panorama of social life in specific villages, towns and countries of Europe.<sup>21</sup>

The abstract quality of a European identity is, of course, no accident. As we saw, to impart warmth and life to that identity would mean dredging up memories best left alone; memories of wars, of expulsions, of massacres by and of the peoples of Europe, let alone of outsiders, recent and painful memories. For Renan, forgetting was as important to the nation as remembering. Selective memory, and a quantity of amnesia, is essential for the survival of nations. But can we choose what we shall forget? How do we wipe away, if wipe we should, the recent memories of the Holocaust? And does the present allow Europeans the luxury of amnesia? The revival of anti-Semitism, neo-Nazi attacks on immigrants and *Gastarbeiter*, the re-enactment of ethnic cleansing on the soil of Bosnia, the spectre of a Balkan war over the very name of Macedonia, all have raised the question of whether the peoples of Europe are being condemned to repeat what they do not care to remember.

There is a more fundamental issue here, the role of memory in collective identity. Can any collective cultural identity come into being or sustain itself through a complete break with the past? Have not the revolutions of the past had to accommodate themselves in some measure to the pattern of values, traditions, symbols and memories of earlier generations of the society in which they erupted? Even where there was no outright restoration of an *ancien régime*, as there was in England, France and latterly in Russia, there were determined attempts to fuse different cultures in a new composite civilization of the kind pursued by Mexico's modern revolutionaries. Even the American case affords no counter-example: the Puritan fathers may have turned their backs on the mother-country, the founders of the republic may have resolved to have as little to do with the Old World as poss-

ible, but they were repeatedly drawn back into its vortex, and are repeatedly reminded of their ancestry and antecedents to this day. This suggests that for collective cultural identity shared memory is as essential to survival as is the sense of a common destiny. 'Forgetfulness leads to exile, while remembrance is the secret of redemption.'<sup>22</sup> By the test of memory, Europe today would fare badly.

### *European myths and symbols*

If the European memory is haunted, if its peoples share only the painful reminders of a nationally divided past, can they perhaps unite around common myths and symbols which signal a deeper solidarity and difference? What potency and meaning can the peoples of contemporary Europe derive from such 'myth-symbol complexes' as we may find? And where shall we look for these myths and symbols?

To the Greco-Roman heritage and Roman law? Certainly, the legacy of classical antiquity is marked throughout present-day Europe – in its roads and the names of its cities, its traditions of sculpture and architecture, its laws and languages, its history and philosophy, its drama and heroic myths, its democratic and imperial traditions, its rationalism and spirit of scientific enquiry. But that legacy was then, and remains, unequally diffused over the continent of Europe. The lands of the Mediterranean were deeply imbued with classical traditions and influences, while the lands of Northern and Eastern Europe were untouched in antiquity, and felt only an after-presence from the Renaissance onwards. Moreover, they were constantly being challenged by other ideals and traditions. The vision of ancient Greece as the 'youth of Europe' may have excited some elites, particularly in the Victorian era, and left its imprint in the civilization of the modern West (including America), but it is now too

remote to strike any deep chord with most of the inhabitants of Europe.<sup>23</sup>

Or should we look to the civilization of Christendom and its Judeo-Christian system of values? Here too the influence is deep – in the traditions of the Churches themselves and the role of the clergy, in the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages, in the wider concern with social justice and social welfare, in socialist ethics and the movements of equality for the oppressed and underprivileged, and in the many voluntary and charitable organizations. But there have also been deep divisions and ambivalent influences: the schism between Orthodoxy and Catholicism, between Catholicism and the Protestant churches, between sects and churches, affecting different areas of Europe in various ways. The myth-symbol complex of Christendom, of a Christian civilization united in the Crusades against the infidel, by its treatment of heretics and Jews within Europe and its wars on Byzantium and Muslims at its verge, through its Wars of Religion right up to its bankruptcy in Nazi Germany, has repeatedly shown itself incapable of providing that moral unity for Europe which it proclaimed and which some Europeans would now like to resurrect. The religious divisions within key areas of the European continent still run deep, even if fewer people are devout believers. Religion-as-badge, religion-as-cement, religion-as-boundary, religion-cum-ethnicity, all can be found in many of the bitter conflicts that still afflict the continent, or as an undertow to more stable, but equally deep cleavages.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps we can find that symbolic and mythological unity in Europe's Indo-European heritage of language and origin? It is true that many of Europe's languages belong to the Indo-European family, and some scholars still maintain the theory of an Ur-language and an original home for the Indo-European-speaking tribes in a distant past. But archaeologists, linguists and historians are divided; there are several languages in modern Europe that do not belong to this group

(Basque, Finnish, Estonian, Hungarian); and, most crucially, after the uses to which the language-group-as-race theory was put by the Nazis, there is little interest among most inhabitants of Europe for the myth of an 'Indo-European heritage' outside some small, but vociferous, groups of revisionist historians, and racists.<sup>25</sup>

What then of Europe's white imperialist tradition and its exclusion of people of colour? Might we not find here that symbolic and mythic unity that has so far eluded us? If the Indo-European myth is a minority affair, the exclusive sense of European superiority based on colour prejudice is decidedly not. Here, certainly, is a potent and explosive set of myths and symbols that could unite 'Europeans' against 'outsiders' and create the mass emotional conditions for the policies of discrimination and exclusion practised by many governments of contemporary European states. This is undoubtedly one of the key elements in the present climate of ethnic fear and moral panic towards immigrants, asylum-seekers, refugees and aliens that some governments, some of the media and some interest groups have orchestrated in recent years in many Western European states. The question is: could such a myth of white European superiority unite Europeans and override internal differences, and can colour serve as the basis of a symbolism of Europeanness?

That it did so in the past, for some European elites at least, and that it has the power to ignite mass outbursts today, is undeniable. But that power is negative: it thrives not on shared values nor on exclusively European characteristics, but on differences that are perceived in varying ways and degrees. 'Whiteness' may end at the borders of the national state or at the edge of a village or urban district. To some, Turks are outsiders, to others Bosnian Muslims, for still others it may be Poles or Serbs or Albanians – or French or Anglo-Saxons. Two issues have given the question of the Other greater salience: immigration and Islam. The issue of immigration reinforces national, not European, identity

perceptions, since it is the national state that controls immigration, the national media that diffuse information and opinions about immigrants, the national labour market that discriminates against them, and the people of the nation who are invoked when immigrants are persecuted or expelled. Hence, the sense of the non-white outsider reinforces national prejudices and national unity, albeit negatively through difference, and in no way contributes to a sense of European unity and identity.<sup>26</sup>

Islam, at first sight, might seem to contradict the tendency to nationalism, since it operates on a continental basis. There is certainly a widespread stereotype of Islam and Muslims that harks back to the Crusades and the long struggle with the Ottoman Turks. This Pan-European stereotype undermines the claims of Turkey, despite its official secularism and current democratic regime, to be 'European' and join the European Union. The Muslim character of much of its population and its historic enemy role make it suspect for most 'Europeans'. On the other hand, Islam also presents challenges to individual European national states and hence fuels their nationalisms. In France, the size of the Muslim community has increased support for Le Pen's movement, while the size of the Turkish and other minorities, denied citizenship in Germany, has sparked violence and racial hatred, stirred up by the neo-Nazi movement. In Britain, too, there have been disturbances occasioned by Islamic issues such as the Rushdie affair, and these in turn have raised the question of a British national identity and its relationship to Englishness.<sup>27</sup>

If the imperialist legacy of white, Christian exclusiveness operates mainly at the national level and reinforces national identifications, can we then find in the history of 'Europe' some measure of commonality and some heroic figures that can serve as an inspiration for a European consciousness? It is something of a vexed question whether we can speak at all of a 'European history', which is not simply a 'history of its

peoples'. Within the continent of Europe, we find a variety of sequences and streams of events which affect its different areas at different times. I have already alluded to certain patterns of culture and some traditions that have variously filtered through the peoples of the continent, but we have seen that even these cannot be pressed too far. The idea that there are any large common themes which the various developments within Europe illustrate greatly overstrains the historical evidence and must be seen as part of the Pan-European mythology which is being constructed by certain interest groups and elites today. This much, at least, is clear from the semi-official history of Europe compiled by Jean-Baptiste Duroselle.<sup>28</sup>

Given this situation, can we yet find some great exemplars of European humanity and heroism? To whom shall we return? To Augustus who mourned the loss of Varro and his legions in the Teutoberg forest and relinquished the other half of Europe? To Charlemagne and his successors whose Holy Roman Empire was equally based in the West and whose medieval ideals have no resonance for modern secular, democratic Europeans? To Napoleon whose ambition and empire was as short-lived, and unattractive, as that of any modern dictator? Should we turn instead to the great 'European' artists, writers and scientists – to a Shakespeare, a Michelangelo, a Beethoven and an Einstein? But their genius is universal, their art and science transcends all boundaries, and as for the lesser talents, they have generally been nationalized, in the Romantic tradition, and their national influence is often greater than any European or global appeal.<sup>29</sup>

There is another problem with these attempts to build Europe around its history, its myths and its symbols. For the most part, the examples come from Western Europe and Italy. The exemplars of Eastern Europe, with significant exceptions such as Copernicus, Chopin, Tchaikovsky and Tolstoy, have little meaning for a predominantly Western-

originating 'Europe', or in cases like Ivan the Terrible or Peter the Great evoke only fear or revulsion. As for the myths and symbols of Eastern Europe, compared to those of the Renaissance or the French Revolution, they are local, unfamiliar and suspect outside the lands of their origin, with the possible exception of the Greek War of Independence. Once again, the predominance of Western Europe is underscored, not just in its centres of wealth and technology, population and trade, but in its science, literature, education and arts, and in the production and dissemination of its popular myths, symbols and traditions.<sup>30</sup>

It would appear, then, that there are hardly any common European myths and symbols that can have meaning and potency for the modern inhabitants of the continent of Europe, and can serve to unify them. There are too many lacunae, too many zones of exclusion and incomprehension, like the lands of the Orthodox Churches with their very different social structures and cultural traditions, outlooks and symbolism, or the many non-Christian minorities and outsiders – from the persecuted Jews of the Middle Ages to the persecuted *Gastarbeiter* of today – who can find little in a Europe that harks back to the ideal of medieval Christendom. The most potent 'myth-symbol complexes' in the continent of Europe are much more powerfully national in origins and context than European, be they the myths and symbols of Roman imperium or the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, the Risorgimento or the Bolshevik Revolution.<sup>31</sup>

Nor can one easily find European holy centres or shrines of pilgrimage for all Europeans. Aachen is too remote, St Paul's, Les Invalides or Wawel too national, and even Rome no longer commands the hearts and minds of peoples in the north and west of Europe. In this respect, nationalism has pre-empted Pan-Europeanism. Its shrines and monuments are everywhere. They occupy the official centre – in the Arches of Triumph and the Tombs of the Unknown Soldier – and the

many popular peripheries. The nation's statuary, its flags and emblems, its temples and memorials, dominate the hills, fill the squares and decorate the town halls, reminding the citizens of their allegiance and evoking their pride. Beside these memorials of stone, what has 'Europe' been able to offer? Can its emblems evoke the same passions as those of its nations?<sup>32</sup>

Can one perhaps speak of commensurable European rites and ceremonies that will fill the hearts and inspire the imaginations of all the inhabitants of the continent, in the same way that Washington, the Constitution and Independence Day can unite the hearts and inspire the imaginations of most Americans in the United States? Perhaps in time, over several generations, such rites will emerge, such ceremonies come into being, centred on the European Parliament in Strasbourg and the seat of the Commission in Brussels. The trouble, however, with all such 'invented traditions', is that their creators cannot be sure that their inventions will find a deeper response in the next generation. In this respect, nationalism is always one step ahead: it has always had its eye on the judgement of posterity, with which it seeks to replace an other-worldly salvation.<sup>33</sup>

Without shared memories and meanings, without common symbols and myths, without shrines and ceremonies and monuments, except the bitter reminders of recent holocausts and wars, who will feel European in the depths of their being, and who will willingly sacrifice themselves for so abstract an ideal? In short, who will die for Europe?

It is not much of an answer to point to a common security and foreign policy which will commit a 'European force' to overseas or European theatres of war, or to the popular response when the first 'European soldiers' are killed. In fact, the European record has not been encouraging to date in this respect. It was the UN led by the United States that undertook the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and it has been NATO rather than the European Union that has taken the initiative

in 1994 in Bosnia, in an ethnic conflict clearly occurring within the borders of the continent of Europe itself. The history of common European defence and foreign policy initiatives has been marked by dissension and misunderstanding, most recently over Bosnia and Macedonia. The European defence units remain small, and there is little popular support for defence integration or for military ventures, even within the heartlands of Europe, and even less at Europe's borders, variously defined as stretching from Ireland to Macedonia and the Baltic states or from France to the Caucasus and the Urals.<sup>34</sup>

Military sacrifices, too, are inevitably portrayed in a national rather than European context. However they are officially presented, such sacrifices are interpreted by press and people alike as those of the nation, and any real mourning will be reserved for fellow-nationals, not for 'Europeans'. The ethnic nation has always presented itself as the 'family of families', the summation and union of every family within the community. Its myth is that of the 'super-family' of shared fictive descent and common 'blood'. This means that over the generations, members of an ethnic community or nation have learnt to see and feel themselves as part of a large, extended family; so national defence is felt to be a necessary sacrifice for one's kith and kin, for one's family.<sup>35</sup>

Compared with this vivid and tangible, if fictional, national family, the European 'family of cultures' appears pale and skeletal. Like a shell, in which the nations, regions and *ethnies* of Europe can take shelter, the European project affords a framework for working out problems and securing benefits for the peoples of Europe, but it appears to constitute no deep bond, no living force, no community of faith. This may indeed be one of its chief attractions for all those regions and minority *ethnies* that loudly proclaim their allegiance to the new Europe; under the European umbrella, the primary loyalties of the people will return to where they belong, away from the powerful national states and back to the neglected

and oppressed *ethnies*. 'L'Europe des Ethnies' expresses this goal succinctly. But, on the obverse of the same coin is inscribed 'L'Europe des Patries'.<sup>36</sup>

#### A 'European super-nation'?

Neither goal fulfils the Pan-European dream. For Pan-Europeans, Europe is neither a cooperative venture between the existing national states, nor an umbrella protecting the many *ethnies* and regions which are straining at the leash of the national state. It is a genuinely 'supra-national' union, which would truly transcend the narrow outlook of the nation and obliterate the ugly face of nationalism. But would such a union in fact transcend the nation and supersede nationalism, as the Pan-Europeans so devoutly hoped? Or would we be witnessing the growth, not of some novel 'supra-national' unit, but of another old-new nation writ large, a European 'super-nation', with its own flag, anthem and capital in Brussels, its passports, coinage and bank, its parliament, defence forces and foreign policies, universities and academies, annual festivals, ceremonial parades and processions, monuments for the fallen, memorials for its founders, and its museums of European history and folklore? And would not such a super-nation merely compound the problems of a world of nations? In that case, European unification, far from sounding the death-knell of nationalism, would raise it to a new level of power and legitimacy.<sup>37</sup>

This is the fear, not merely of the nationalists of existing national states, but of Euro-pessimists for whom 'Europe' can only arise in the image of the nation and with the same features and gestation that gave birth to the nation. They argue that, while so large and diverse a union will have some novel features – those, in fact, of a polyethnic nation – it must, like any long-term human association, develop those

fundamentals of collective identification – of shared memory, myth, value and symbol – that any cultural grouping must generate if it is to survive for several generations. In the European context, the only way in which a truly united Europe could emerge is through the slow formation of common European memories, traditions, values, myths and symbols, in the image of the *ethnie* and the nation.

But, as explained above, in these respects the concept of Europe is deficient. While some cultural and political traditions are to hand, they are marked by ambivalence and uneven penetration, and there are no overarching shared memories, myths and symbols which can unite Europeans, apart from the unusable ideals of medieval Christendom or imperialism. Even more to the point, any attempt to construct a European identity around these shared cultural elements must compete with the pre-existing and deeply rooted ethno-national myths, symbols, values and memories of the nations and *ethnies* which make up the conventionally designated geographical area of Europe.

It is this ethno-symbolic competition that makes the achievement of European unity so unlikely in the foreseeable future at the cultural and social psychological levels. While some mobile elites may have broken loose from ethno-national attachments, in the tradition of medieval and early modern European aristocracies, popular attachments and mass allegiances to nations and national states remain deep-rooted and are reinforced by a variety of modern bureaucratic and cultural mechanisms, including the national education system, the national media, a national language and literature, national legal codes, as well as the more elusive yet pervasive factors of landscape, art, music, dress, food, recreations and folklore. These cultural elements are not simply populist inventions of manipulative intellectuals, nor just folkloristic vestiges of a former way of life, a romantic and nostalgic attachment to a distant idealized past – though both elements may also be present on occasion. They

are components of entrenched modes of popular culture which, though they have recently undergone a more rapid pace of change, retain many of their distinctive qualities and characteristics. They are also components of a received national identity which, though also undergoing considerable modification, is still able to unite the mass of the people of that nation around a shared understanding of common values, memories, traditions and symbols.<sup>38</sup>

From this standpoint, the creation of larger 'super-national' entities out of sharply differentiated popular national identities must remain problematic. To transfer the national identities and identifications of the majority of the populations of these national states and nations and attach them to a new set of shared European myths, memories, values and symbols involves a feat of cultural and social psychological engineering, in tandem with relevant institutional frameworks, that in the past was possible only with the dissolution of existing collectivities and units of association, or through mass religious movements. Since neither of these conditions seems likely to obtain in the foreseeable future and there is the meantime the national state remains resilient and there is no sign of any diminution in ethnic awareness and self-determination, there would appear to be little cultural and emotional space for a new Pan-European level of popular super-national identification to develop.

### Conclusion

We can look at the European and other projects of unification in two ways: as heroic, if doomed, attempts to supersede the nation, and as new, emergent types of national community. It may be that we are witnessing another turn in the long cycle of formation and dissolution of human associations. Recorded history has always seen the oscillation of competing kinds of social and political unit, with larger units

being forged out of the conquest or union of smaller units, or dissolved again into their constituent parts. The history of the great empires, followed by feudal interregna, affords the paradigm of this historical movement. Contrary to earlier beliefs, it seems unlikely that the transition to a modern, industrial type of society can break this mould, or alter the patterns of coalescence and dissolution. In this as in other respects, politics and culture have their own rhythms of change which cannot be reduced to technological and economic movements.

The difference is that in modern societies, the two movements, of coalescence and of dissolution, go hand in hand, spurred by the same forces of vernacular mass mobilization, cultural politicization and communal purification discussed earlier. This returns us to our initial paradox: the coexistence of unifying and divisive, enlarging and fragmenting trends in contemporary society and politics. I intimated at the outset that both were the product of the same general forces in modern society, and I can now spell these out more fully.

The argument I have been advancing is that attempts to create large-scale unity in Western Europe or elsewhere, whereas in most other areas of the world great multinational empires and states are dissolving into their constituent ethnic parts, result less from different levels of economic and political development than from the sheer variety of historical trajectories and the very different ethno-historical cultures of various regions and peoples. Of course, different levels of economic, technological and political development exert an important influence; but they are themselves as much the product as the producer of these diverse trajectories, ethno-histories and cultures.

In chapter 3 I described how the two most important historical routes to nation-formation in the modern world, the 'lateral' or aristocratic and the 'vertical' or demotic, greatly influenced the subsequent forms and contents of the nations that were forged out of different kinds of *ethnie*. In

the one case, an elite ethnic culture was diffused outwards and downwards throughout the population by a strong and incorporating bureaucratic state, a process that was particularly prominent in Western Europe. In other parts of Europe and Asia, a popular vernacular culture of subordination and oppression remained as a living repository, an active resource, to be mobilized and politicized by native intelligentsias.

The same processes of bureaucratic incorporation by strong states and vernacular mobilization of the rural and urban masses by ethnic intelligentsias can be found in every continent, from Russia and Japan to Ethiopia, India and Mexico. The varied permutations of these historical processes help to account for the very different forms that ethno-nationalism has taken in different parts of the world, and provide the basis for the insistent assertion of cultural distinctiveness and ethnic division which accompanies a growing global interdependence. Indeed, that very interdependence, by bringing disparate cultures into close proximity and revealing their differences openly, encourages ethnic and historical comparison and the proliferation of fragmenting ethnic nationalisms. When to this is added the power of modern mass telecommunications to amplify and broadcast these cultural differences and historically unique characters, our initial paradox falls into place.

Similarly, the growing interdependence of state systems in various regions of the world, as well as at the United Nations, highlights the differences of cultures and binds many people more closely to an ethno-history and heritage that they feel may be under threat. The sense of irreplaceability of one's own culture values becomes more acute when global uniformities become more salient. But it is not just a question of popular or elite reaction to perceived threats. The desire to preserve ancient values and traditions is no antiquarian nostalgia; it is the spur to a restoration of a lost community, to reliving its 'golden age', to renewing the community by



purifying it of alien elements and to reappropriating its distinctive cultural heritage.

We are back with the underlying modern quest for cultural authenticity. Autonomy, the key to dignity in the modern world, requires authenticity; freedom depends on identity, and destiny on shared memory. So the desire to participate in a modern world of wide opportunities and technological expertise, requires the forging of separate moral communities with incommensurable and authentic identities. But, if the secret of identity is memory, the ethnic past must be salvaged and reappropriated, so as to renew the present and build a common future in a world of competing national communities.

It is not easy to foresee an early end to the dual process of renewal through separation and interdependence. These processes are interrelated and self-reproducing. There appears to be no easy way to break out of the circle. The very fact that ethno-histories are so unevenly diffused, that cultures are unequally politicized and that peoples are differentially mobilized in a world of mass communications and economic interdependence, suggests that, even if wider projects like European unification take root, they may well adopt some of the characteristics of existing ethnic nationalisms, spawning new and more dangerous rivalries. In these circumstances, we are unlikely to witness the early demise of national communities of history and destiny with their promise of collective immortality through the judgement of posterity.

## *In Defence of the Nation*

The idea that nations and nationalisms are likely to be here for some time to come, and that this has to do with nationalism's capacity for ensuring dignity and immortality, may seem both pessimistic and perverse when we consider the excesses and outrages for which nationalists are held responsible throughout the world. Commentators are fond of attributing to nationalism many of the conflicts which infest our planet, and they tend to assume that a world without nations will be free of the attendant ills of racism, fascism and xenophobia. A world without nations, they claim, will be a more stable and peaceful, as well as a more just and free world – a dream that is in fact common to liberals and socialists for whom the nation was at best a necessary stage in the evolution of humanity and at worst a violent threat and distraction.

I want to conclude by briefly examining the arguments against nationalism and demonstrating why the nation and nationalism remain the only realistic basis for a free society of states in the modern world.