

# NATIONALISM

Five Roads to Modernity

LIAH GREENFELD

L I A H   G R E E N F E L D

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## Acknowledgments

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**T**oday, with nationalism reinvigorated and wreaking havoc in parts of the globe where it long since has been considered a phenomenon of the past, I do not feel the need to justify my decision to write a book about it. The importance of nationalism in our world has been proven to us again, and it is imperative that we make a new effort to understand it. My interest in nationalism, however, predates its recent newsworthiness. It dates back to the fall of 1982, when I made this country my home and changed nationality for the second time. This change made me acutely aware of the constructed nature of national identity and the profound differences, reaching to every sphere of social existence, between nations defined in individualistic and civic terms—to use the categories I arrived at later—and those defined as ethnic collectivities.

I began writing this book in the fall of 1987, when a fellowship from the John M. Olin Foundation allowed me to take a year of leave and devote my undivided attention to the subject. Another year of full-time research and writing—made possible in 1989–90 by the German Marshall Fund of the United States and a stay at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, financed in part by a grant from the MacArthur Foundation—allowed me to complete it.

During these years I have incurred many debts. I cannot adequately express my gratitude to my colleagues, sociologists, historians, and political scientists, who shared with me their insights and offered support and encouragement. Daniel Bell spent an entire month in effect editing the manuscript line by line. I would like him to know how touched and honored I felt by this degree of attention. I am forever in his debt. I am also indebted to Nathan Glazer for valuable comments on the original manuscript; to David Riesman for his untiring interest and for being ever willing to give advice; and to the chairman of the Harvard Department of Sociology, Aage Sørensen, for his theoretical sensitivity, intellectual tolerance, and constant personal support. Among the other colleagues at Harvard, Wallace MacCaffrey, Patrice Higonnet, and Richard Pipes read, respectively, chapters on England, France, and Russia, and shared with me their expert knowledge; David Landes found time to read the entire book and made useful sugges-

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Edward Shils, at the University of Chicago, has been a constant example of intellectual dedication and integrity. He encouraged me and made me strive for perfection. I know that the result falls short of this ideal, but I hope he will approve of what I have done.

At the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, where I spent one of the most productive and intellectually satisfying years of my life, I am particularly grateful to Michael Walzer for reading the entire original manuscript in a remarkably short time and providing detailed comments on it; to Clifford Geertz for making most helpful suggestions on the presentation of the argument; and to Albert Hirschman for a very sensitive, personal reading of the German chapter. Among scholars elsewhere with whom I had the privilege of discussing the subject of this book are the sociologists Bernard Barber, Peter Berger, Daniel Chirot, S. N. Eisenstadt, Peter Etzkorn, Suzanne Keller, Kurt and Gladys Lang, S. M. Lipset, and Edward Tiryakian; the scholar of English literature Heather Dubrow; the American historians John Murrin, Fred Siegel, and Richard John; the historians of Germany Jeffrey Herf, Thomas Nipperdey, and Peter Paret; and the Russian historians George Liber and Phillip Pomper. To some of them my debt is not only scholarly: they have been my friends, and their moral support and personal concern for me could not be more important. The two anonymous readers for Harvard University Press also deserve my thanks for their careful and appreciative readings and detailed comments.

I have greatly benefited from the advice of my colleagues, but in certain cases I left some very good advice unheeded. Since the author proposes and other agencies dispose, my prime consideration in preparing the manuscript for publication has been reducing its length, while preserving the integrity of the central argument. For this reason, with very few exceptions, I decided not to engage in explicit arguments with other scholars who have dealt with the subjects I treated, and refrained from spelling out the implications of my treatment for certain, rather important related areas of study. The first among these implications has to do with the theory of state-formation. If my argument regarding the nature and development of nationalism is correct, much of this theory (as a generous reader indeed remarked), so central in contemporary sociology and political science, should be subject to revision. The problem of ethnicity, and its significance in the age of nationalism, also requires greater articulation. The difference between ethnicity and ethnic nationalism is largely semantic. In nations defined in ethnic terms, every ethnic minority is considered a nationality (for this reason, the Soviet Union,

for instance, never defined itself as a nation, but as a union of nations). Cultivation of ethnic identity is the form ethnic nationalism takes in civic nations; ethnicity is the name under which the latter is known in them. These subjects have been touched upon at different points in the book, but I would like to take them up independently and explore them further at a later time.

Also in the interest of saving space, I have significantly compressed the original material in the notes, limiting it to essentials and in many cases combining several references in a paragraph into one. In a few places I did the same for references spread over several paragraphs, if they referred to the same source or dealt with the same subject matter. I apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused.

These acknowledgments would not be complete if I did not mention my students. The undergraduates Ben Alpers, Phil Katz, and Justin Daniels, who worked on aspects of Russian, French, and American nationalism respectively, under my supervision, forced me to sharpen my ideas both when they followed my advice and when they disputed it. My graduate students, always willing to listen, to question, and to offer suggestions, have been a source of support in many ways. In particular, Marie-Laure Djelic and Paula Frederick were of great assistance in the final editing of the manuscript and its preparation for the publisher.

Anna Grinfeld helped in organizing the notes, and Natalia Tsarkova helped with the index. The printing-out of the final version would have been impossible without the expertise and patience of Nancy Williamson. Jacqueline Dormitzer made the copy-editing process a pleasure. Some of my earlier work on nationalism was published in *Research in Political Sociology and Survey*. In addition, chapter 1 incorporates portions of my paper "Science and National Greatness in 17th Century England," published in *Minerva* 25 (Spring–Summer 1987); and a portion of chapter 3 appeared as "The Formation of the Russian National Identity: The Role of Status Insecurity and *Ressentiment*" in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32:3 (July 1990), published by Cambridge University Press. The editors of all these journals made valuable suggestions. My thanks are due to all of them.

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# INTRODUCTION



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**T**his book is an attempt to understand the world in which we live. Its fundamental premise is that nationalism lies at the basis of this world. To grasp its significance, one has to explain nationalism.

The word “nationalism” is used here as an umbrella term under which are subsumed the related phenomena of national identity (or nationality) and consciousness, and collectivities based on them—nations; occasionally it is employed to refer to the articulate ideology on which national identity and consciousness rest, though not—unless specified—to the politically activist, xenophobic variety of national patriotism, which it frequently designates.

The specific questions which the book addresses are why and how nationalism emerged, why and how it was transformed in the process of transfer from one society to another, and why and how different forms of national identity and consciousness became translated into institutional practices and patterns of culture, molding the social and political structures of societies which defined themselves as nations. To answer these questions, I focus on five major societies which were the first to do so: England, France, Russia, Germany, and the United States of America.

### The Definition of Nationalism

The specificity of nationalism, that which distinguishes nationality from other types of identity, derives from the fact that nationalism locates the source of individual identity within a “people,” which is seen as the bearer of sovereignty, the central object of loyalty, and the basis of collective solidarity. The “people” is the mass of a population whose boundaries and nature are defined in various ways, but which is usually perceived as larger than any concrete community and always as fundamentally homogeneous, and only superficially divided by the lines of status, class, locality, and in some cases even ethnicity. This specificity is conceptual. The only foundation of nationalism as such, the only condition, that is, without which no nationalism is possible, is an idea; nationalism is a particular perspective or

a style of thought.<sup>1</sup> The idea which lies at the core of nationalism is the idea of the “nation.”

### *The Origins of the Idea of the “Nation”*

To understand the nature of the idea of the “nation,” it might be helpful to examine the semantic permutations which eventually resulted in it, as we follow the history of the word. The early stages of this history were traced by the Italian scholar Guido Zernatto.<sup>2</sup> The origin of the word is to be found in the Latin *natio*—something born. The initial concept was derogatory: in Rome the name *natio* was reserved for groups of foreigners coming from the same geographical region, whose status—because they were foreigners—was below that of the Roman citizens. This concept was thus similar in meaning to the Greek *ta ethne*, also used to designate foreigners and, specifically, heathens, and to the Hebrew *amamim*, which referred to those who did not belong to the chosen monotheistic people. The word had other meanings as well, but they were less common, and this one—a group of foreigners united by place of origin—for a long time remained its primary implication.

In this sense, of a group of foreigners united by place of origin, the word “nation” was applied to the communities of students coming to several universities shared by Western Christendom from loosely—geographically or linguistically—related regions. For example, there were four nations in the University of Paris, the great center of theological learning: “l’honorable nation de France,” “la fidèle nation de Picardie,” “la vénérable nation de Normandie,” and “la constante nation de Germanie.” The “nation de France” included all students coming from France, Italy, and Spain; that of “Germanie,” those from England and Germany; the Picard “nation” was reserved for the Dutch; and the Norman, for those from the Northeast. It is important to note that the students had a national identity only in their status as students (that is, in most cases, while residing abroad); this identity was immediately shed when their studies were completed and they returned home. While applied in this setting, the word “nation,” on the one hand, lost its derogatory connotation, and on the other, acquired an additional meaning. Owing to the specific structure of university life at the time, the communities of students functioned as support groups or unions and, as they regularly took sides in scholastic disputations, also developed common opinions. As a result, the word “nation” came to mean more than a community of origin: it referred now to the community of opinion and purpose.

As universities sent representatives to adjudicate grave ecclesiastical questions at the Church Councils, the word underwent yet another transformation. Since the late thirteenth century, starting at the Council of Lyon in 1274, the new concept—“nation” as a community of opinion—was applied

to the parties of the “ecclesiastical republic.” But the individuals who composed them, the spokesmen of various intraecclesiastical approaches, were also representatives of secular and religious potentates. And so the word “nation” acquired another meaning, that of representatives of cultural and political authority, or a political, cultural, and then social *elite*. Zernatto cites Montesquieu, Joseph de Maistre, and Schopenhauer to demonstrate how late this was still the accepted significance of the word. It is impossible to mistake its meaning in the famous passage from *Esprit des lois*: “Sous les deux premières races on assembla souvent la nation, c’est à dire, les seigneurs et les évêques; il n’était point des communes.”<sup>3</sup>

### *The Zigzag Pattern of Semantic Change*

At this point, where Zernatto’s story breaks off, we may pause to take a closer look at it. To an extent, the history of the word “nation” allows us to anticipate the analysis employed in much of the book. The successive changes in meaning combine into a pattern which, for the sake of formality, we shall call “the zigzag pattern of semantic change.” At each stage of this development, the meaning of the word, which comes with a certain semantic baggage, evolves out of usage in a particular situation. The available conventional concept is applied within new circumstances, to certain aspects of which it corresponds. However, aspects of the new situation, which were absent in the situation in which the conventional concept evolved, become cognitively associated with it, resulting in a duality of meaning. The meaning of the original concept is gradually obscured, and the new one emerges as conventional. When the word is used again in a new situation, it is likely to be used in this new meaning, and so on and so forth. (This pattern is depicted in Figure 1.)

The process of semantic transformation is constantly redirected by structural (situational) constraints which form the new concepts (meanings of the word); at the same time, the structural constraints are conceptualized, interpreted, or defined in terms of the concepts (the definition of the situation changes as the concepts evolve), which thereby orient action. The social potency and psychological effects of this orientation vary in accordance with the sphere of the concept’s applicability and its relative centrality in the actor’s overall existence. A student in a medieval university, defined as a member of one or another nation, might derive therefrom an idea of the quarters he was supposed to be lodged in, people he was likely to associate with most closely, and some specific opinions he was expected to hold in the course of the few years his studies lasted. Otherwise his “national” identity, probably, did not have much impact on his self-image or behavior; outside the narrow sphere of the university, the concept had no applicability. The influence of the equally transient “national” identity on a participant at a Church Coun-

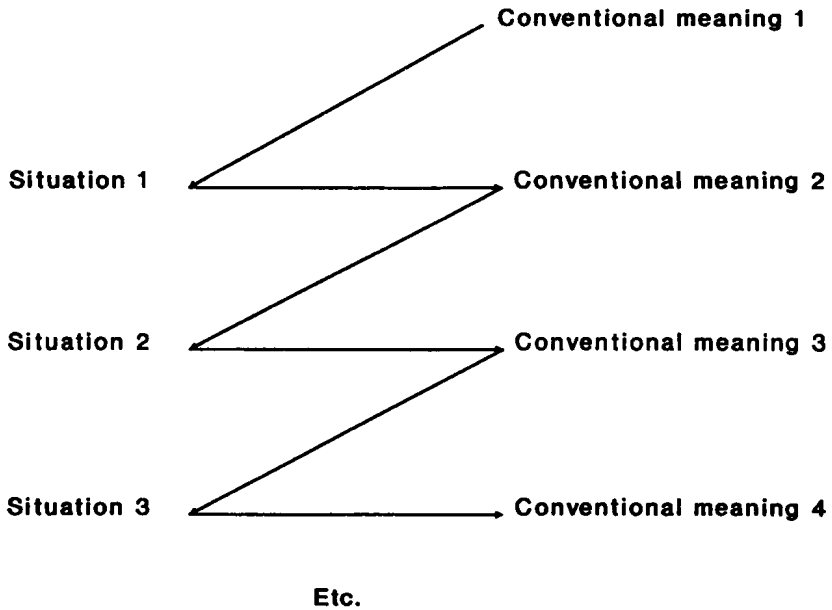


Figure 1 The zigzag pattern of semantic change

cil could be more profound. Membership in a nation defined him as a person of very high status, the impact of such definition on one's self-perception could be permanent, and the lingering memory of nationality could affect the person's conduct far beyond conciliar deliberations, even if his nation no longer existed.

#### *From "Rabble" to "Nation"*

The applicability of the idea of the nation and its potency increased a thousandfold as the meaning of the word was transformed again. At a certain point in history—to be precise, in early sixteenth-century England—the word "nation" in its conciliar meaning of "an elite" was applied to the population of the country and made synonymous with the word "people." *This semantic transformation signaled the emergence of the first nation in the world, in the sense in which the word is understood today, and launched the era of nationalism.* The stark significance of this conceptual revolution was highlighted by the fact that, while the general referent of the word "people" prior to its nationalization was the population of a region, specifically it applied to the lower classes and was most frequently used in the sense of "rabble" or "plebs." The equation of the two concepts implied the elevation of the populace to the position of an (at first specifically political) elite. As a

synonym of the "nation"—an elite—the "people" lost its derogatory connotation and, now denoting an eminently positive entity, acquired the meaning of the bearer of sovereignty, the basis of political solidarity, and the supreme object of loyalty. A tremendous change of attitude, which it later reinforced, had to precede such redefinition of the situation, for with it members of all orders of the society identified with the group, from which earlier the better placed of them could only wish to dissociate themselves. What brought this change about in the first place, and then again and again, as national identity replaced other types in one country after another, is, in every particular case, the first issue to be accounted for, and it will be the focus of discussion in several chapters of the book.

National identity in its distinctive modern sense is, therefore, an identity which derives from membership in a "people," the fundamental characteristic of which is that it is defined as a "nation." Every member of the "people" thus interpreted partakes in its superior, elite quality, and it is in consequence that a stratified national population is perceived as essentially homogeneous, and the lines of status and class as superficial. This principle lies at the basis of all nationalisms and justifies viewing them as expressions of the same general phenomenon. Apart from it, different nationalisms share little. The national populations—diversely termed "peoples," "nations," and "nationalities"—are defined in many ways, and the criteria of membership in them vary. The multiformity which results is the source of the conceptually evasive, Protean nature of nationalism and the cause of the perennial frustration of its students, vainly trying to define it with the help of one or another "objective" factor, all of which are rendered relevant to the problem only if the national principle happens to be applied to them. The definition of nationalism proposed here recognizes it as an "emergent phenomenon," that is, a phenomenon whose nature—as well as the possibilities of its development and the possibilities of the development of the elements of which it is composed—is determined not by the character of its elements, but by a certain organizing principle which makes these elements into a unity and imparts to them a special significance.<sup>4</sup>

There are important exceptions to every relationship in terms of which nationalism has ever been interpreted—whether with common territory or common language, statehood or shared traditions, history or race. None of these relationships has proved inevitable. But from the definition proposed above, it follows not only that such exceptions are to be expected, but that nationalism does not have to be related to *any* of these factors, though as a rule it is related to at least some of them. In other words, *nationalism is not necessarily a form of particularism*. It is a political ideology (or a class of political ideologies deriving from the same basic principle), and as such it does not have to be identified with any particular community.<sup>5</sup> A nation coextensive with humanity is in no way a contradiction in terms. The United

States of the World, which will perhaps exist in the future, with sovereignty vested in the population, and the various segments of the latter regarded as equal, would be a nation in the strict sense of the word within the framework of nationalism. The United States of America represents an approximation to precisely this state of affairs.

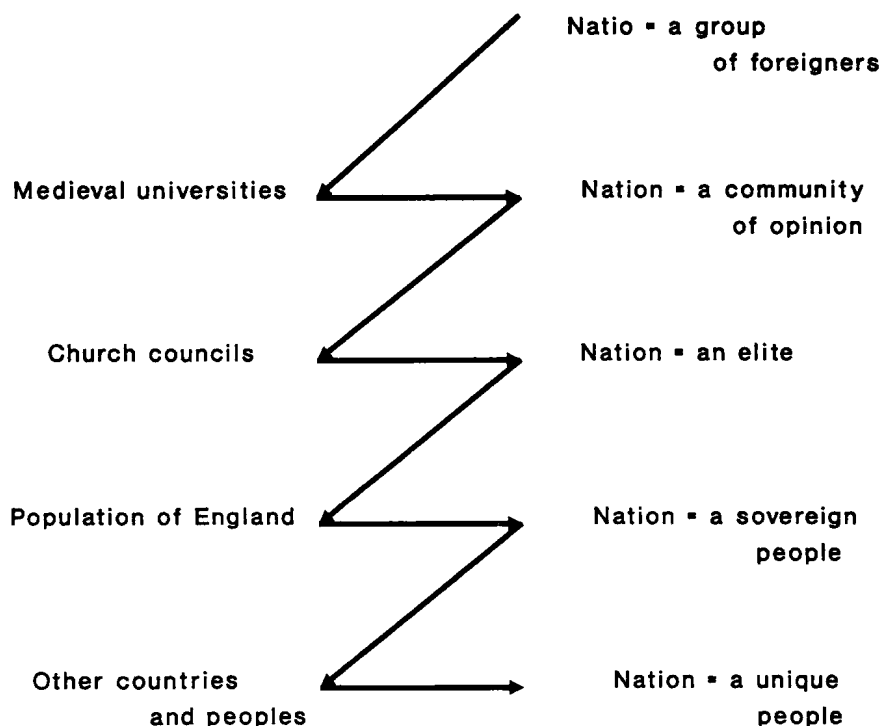
### *The Emergence of Particularistic Nationalisms*

As it is, however, nationalism is the most common and salient form of particularism in the modern world. Moreover, if compared with the forms of particularism it has replaced, it is a particularly effective (or, depending on one's viewpoint, pernicious) form of particularism, because, as every individual derives his or her identity from membership in the community, the sense of commitment to it and its collective goals is much more widespread. In a world divided into particular communities, national identity tends to be associated and confounded with a community's sense of uniqueness and the qualities contributing to it. These qualities (social, political, cultural in the narrow sense, or ethnic)<sup>6</sup> therefore acquire a great significance in the formation of every specific nationalism. The association between the nationality of a community and its uniqueness represents the next and last transformation in the meaning of the "nation" and may be deduced from the zigzag pattern of semantic (and by implication social) change.

The word "nation" which, in its conciliar and at the time prevalent meaning of an elite, was applied to the population of a specific country (England) became cognitively associated with the existing (political, territorial, and ethnic) connotations of a population and a country. While the interpretation of the latter in terms of the concept "nation" modified their significance, the concept "nation" was also transformed and—as it carried over the connotations of a population and a country, which were consistent with it—came to mean "a sovereign people." This new meaning replaced that of "an elite" initially only in England. As we may judge from Montesquieu's definition, elsewhere the older meaning long remained dominant, but it was, eventually, supplanted.

The word "nation," meaning "sovereign people," was now applied to other populations and countries which, like the first nation, naturally had some political, territorial, and/or ethnic qualities to distinguish them, and became associated with such geo-political and ethnic baggage. As a result of this association, "nation" changed its meaning once again, coming to signify "a *unique* sovereign people." (These changes are shown in Figure 2.) The last transformation<sup>7</sup> may be considered responsible for the conceptual confusion reigning in the theories of nationalism. The new concept of the nation in most cases eclipsed the one immediately preceding it, as the latter





*Figure 2* The transformation of the idea of the nation

eclipsed those from which it descended, but, significantly, this did not happen everywhere. Because of the persistence and, as we shall see, in certain places development and extension of structural conditions responsible for the evolution of the original, non-particularistic idea of the nation, the two concepts now coexist.

The term “nation” applied to both conceals important differences. The emergence of the more recent concept signified a profound transformation in the nature of nationalism, and the two concepts under one name reflect two radically different forms of the phenomenon (which means both two radically different forms of national identity and consciousness, and two radically different types of national collectivities—nations).

### *Types of Nationalism*

The two branches of nationalism are obviously related in a significant way, but are grounded in different values and develop for different reasons. They