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Nationalism and the Contradictions of Modernity[1]

Craig Calhoun

Pursuing uniformity and producing difference in unprecedented ways, defined equally by the slave trade and the post-Reformation ideal of tolerance, modernity has been an epoch of crossed purposes from its outset. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the proliferation of claims to nationhood and the attendant transformations of both collective and individual identities. The idea of national identity has been a crucial part of the democratic project in the struggles of "peoples" against kings. It has equally been the source of fiercely anti-democratic campaigns of irredentism, secession, and the imposition of uniform ideas of what sort of behavior is acceptable among the members of a nation. Bound up with the discourse of nation, national identity and nationalism are distinctively modern ways of reasoning about identities: their "natural" origins, their "categorical" distinctions, their integrity. These had an older European provenance, but in the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries they helped to constitute a global discourse about national identity, sovereignty, and legitimacy. This discourse shapes not only the way in which we try to understand movements for self-determination, but the very production of such movements and the contests over when they gain recognition. Self-determination presumes a self, indeed, a self composed not of a dynasty or a state nor of a disconnected, unintegrated population, but of a people, an organized, meaningfully integrated collectivity.

At the end of the 19th century, the discourse of nationalism helped shape identities and movements not only in Europe but throughout the world. At the same time, it informed the very way in which society came to be conceptualized as the basic unit of analysis in the social sciences. Bounded, discrete, internally integrated societies (and cultures) were understood on the model of nation-states, reflecting nationalist rhetoric as well as institution-building in both Europe and colonies. In social science and politics alike, nations also provided the idea of progress with one of its primary subjects. Along with classes and individuals, nations figured as both the agents and the beneficiaries of potential progress. Progress was assessed by measuring the strength, freedom, or material well-being of nations. Yet, though the idea of nation was implicitly basic to the social science that gained

[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented as the Harold W. Beers Lecture, University of Kentucky, 1997.

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institutionalization during the 1890s, it was seldom the object of explicit or sustained attention. The shaping of social science during the last fin de siècle thus contributed to the surprise of social scientists at the resurgence of nationalism during the current fin de siècle.

Modernity itself was one of the crucial projects taken on in the name of nations. Modernization meant variously strength, freedom, intellectual advancement; it always meant progress. For many intellectuals in Western Europe's advanced capitalist societies, the fin de siècle marked the moment at which faith in modernization lost its innocence. In a curious contradiction, this is part of "high modernism." In much of the rest of the world, however, and indeed for some in Europe, the same time period was a focal point in the commitment of elites to projects of nationalist modernization. A hundred years later, it is impossible to be intellectually serious and still retain an innocent faith in nations as the subjects of progress. It is not helpful, however, to dismiss nationalism as simply backward; rather we need to see how deeply the category of nation is constitutive of modernity. A key question for the current fin de siècle, moreover, is how to conceive of collective projects such as democracy without replicating an uncritical reliance on nations to define the subjects of modernity and progress.

I

Ideas of progress and purpose have shaped the whole modern epoch. One can speak, for example, of the purpose of modernity—or indeed of modernization—in a way in which speaking of the "purpose" of classical antiquity or feudalism would sound odd. Yet what does this mean?

In the modern era, all sorts of phenomena are understood as the results of purposive human action, or as amenable to intentional change, that at other times have been accepted as fated. Likewise, we may speak of the characteristic purposes of people in the modern era. But this by itself does not mean that modernity has purpose. The notion of modernity as purposive is rooted in the idea of progress; the purpose of modernity is to get better. For many early thinkers, progress had an omnibus character. There might be progress in specific domains, such as freedom or science, but it made sense also to speak of overall progress.

During the 19th century, this thinking changed in various important respects. Theories of biological evolution deeply marked the notion of progress, for example, and economic measures of progress became more prominent. But faith in overall, linear progress remained

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strong, at least until it encountered a fin de siècle crisis among some artists and intellectuals (and indeed, such faith recovered afterward, even after the world wars, though it was always dogged by discourses of degeneration). Nineteenth century theorists and politicians differed from their Enlightenment predecessors, however, in focusing much more on identifying specific agents and experiencing subjects of progress. For what beings, they asked, were historical changes to be judged as progress? Not simply individuals, because the alleged progress was experienced across spans of history much longer than individual lives. Claims were put forward for humanity as a whole, and for civilizations, races, classes, and other sorts of collectivities. Perhaps the most compelling and influential, however, were claims on behalf of nations as the basic experiencing—and sometimes acting—subjects of history.

While in the early 19th century nationalist thinking was often explicit, by the end of the century the tendency was common to take nations for granted, subsuming the heritage of nationalist thought tacitly into the concepts of society and culture. One result of this was to naturalize the idea of nation, and to replace a concept that seemed to be essentially contested with others that could more easily be taken for granted.[2] It became common to assume that there was some prepolitical realm in which the social and cultural identities of political agents were constructed, and that this could be kept distinct from the political realm in which struggles would be confined to objective interests and strategies for achieving them, without the very identities of participants always being at stake.

For most 19th century thinkers, the idea of nation gave a primary prepolitical identity to the subjects of progress and modernity generally. When they wrote as though modernity had a purpose, this meant more than just a destiny, for it implied the action of some agency, some will. Thus Fichte spoke on the need to awaken the German nation so that it could actively fulfil its historical destiny, making itself as well as finding itself. For Hegel, there was a global answer: the spirit moves through history like the word once moved upon the Biblical waters. Among other things, this Hegelian spirit is the capacity for full human agency, it is the very capacity to make history and thus contains the manifold possibilities of history. And in this, it finds embodiment in nations as agents of history. Obviously Marx was not willing to believe in so ideal or transhistorically transcendental a

[2]"Essentially contested" is Wilfred Gallie's felicitous term; see *Philosophy and Historical Explanation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967). The definitions of society and culture have been subject to recurrent scholarly dispute, of course, but not to the kind of political contest that renders disputes over nationalism beyond the reach of purely scholarly resolution.

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self-moving subject-object of history. But Marx did share in the belief that history was made, and made moreover by self-transforming human subjects, the classes for whom "all history is the history of class struggle." In his mature work he varied the theme, advancing an account of how the commodification of labor made the working class distinctively the subject of capitalism and the agent of its potential revolutionary transformation. But he remained committed to a view of history that was not just teleological but purposive, one in which increasingly self-aware and competent human actors made the future happen. So too did Comte write of the progress through stages: theological, metaphysical and positive. Spencer (influenced by Lamarck) approached evolution as learning and progress. In other words, the specific progress that modernity brought included a capacity for human beings to exert more purposive control over their worlds.

When Durkheim argued that organic solidarity was stronger than mechanical, or that moral education and the empowerment of occupational associations could overcome anomie and social disintegration, he also addressed modernity as progress that includes growing purposiveness. Weber, in the same vein, sounded a good deal like Marx and more than a little like Hobbes, when he wrote of the state as definitive of modern society, rendering it a cohesive and rational-purposive whole:

> The modern state is an enterprise [Betrieb] just like a factory. This exactly is its historical peculiarity. Here as there authority relations have the same roots. ... The hierarchical dependence of the wage worker, the administrative and technical employee, the assistant in the academic institute as well as that of the civil servant and the soldier is due to the fact that in their case the means indispensable for the enterprise and for making a living are in the hands of the entrepreneur or the political ruler.[3]

The state allows the ruler to exert purpose, but likewise, through the state enables the ruler to act—and ideally achieve progress--on behalf of the nation. Recall that despite his own protestations to the contrary, Weber the politician was not so far distant from Weber the social theorist, and he was committed to what he saw as "the historical tasks of the German nation."[4]

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[3]*Economy and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 1394.

[4]ibid., p. 1391. The influence of Nietzsche is evident in Weber's efforts to think through problems of leadership and the progress of nations. More generally, see David Beetham, *Max Weber and the Theory of Modern Politics*, rev ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 1985); and Wolfgang Mommsen, *Max Weber and German Politics, 1890-1920*, rev ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

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But while the turn of the century sociologists continued to understand modernity through ideas of progress and purpose, they had become ambivalent about the capacity of social actors to guide progress through their purposive action. In common with others in the generation of the 1890s, they developed deep worries that progress might end or become perverted.[5] The idea of progress had already received radical challenge from Nietzsche and was increasingly out of fashion with the esthetes who gave the fin de siècle its name and fame. In The Man Without Qualities, Musil mocked the facile celebration of progress in much the way that Voltaire in Candide mocked the complacent belief that this was the best of all possible worlds. The confident expectation of continuous improvement was under critical re-evaluation, but even more basically, the notion of a common set of criteria for judging such improvement was losing adherents. An increasing chorus of intellectuals granted modernity its material progress but worried about its philistinism. The idea of "the good," argued many, was being lost in more quotidian notions of “goods” or the excess of benefits over costs.[6] Most ideas of progress privileged the latter; intermittent attempts to reclaim the former would punctuate the next century and are current today in communitarianism, parts of conservative thought, and the post-postmodernist turn to ethics.

For the Enlightenment thinkers, emphasis lay on people’s self-conscious efforts to make a better world. Many 19th century social scientists carried forward this faith in purposive action. Some others, however, took evolutionary thought as a cue to treat progress as much less dependent on purpose. This was also a dimension of the thought of Durkheim, Weber and other fin de siècle theorists of modernity. Modernization was not always achieved by conscious struggles, but was also something that happened to people as an unintended consequence of their purposive actions. This is, for example, the basic message of Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, and of a good deal of the rest of his work on rationalization and its consequences. Much the same is true for Durkheim, Tönnies and others who prominently brought forward characterizations of the transformations that wrought modernity: mechanical to organic solidarity, gemeinschaft to gesellschaft, etc. Marx was quintessentially ambivalent on this very point, both ascribing responsibility for progress to the laws of history and demanding voluntary revolutionary action in its behalf. In the 1890s, Marxists were divided precisely over the extent

[5] H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society* (New York: Random House, 1961) is a classic source on the generational experience of the early institutionalizers of social science.

[6] This is the theme of Hannah Arendt's opening essay on "Tradition and the Modern Age," in *Between Past and Future* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1968).

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to which an "evolutionary" path to socialism might adequately substitute for revolution. Evolutionary socialism embodied a faith in progress, reminding us that this had not vanished from Europe at the turn of the century.

The First World War produced a deeper rupture. Though some of the intellectual struggles continued, Maurice Mandelbaum is quite right to suggest that "if there has been any one factor which, more than others, has led to a revolutionary shift in twentieth-century thought and which has involved a break with those nineteenth-century movements which still dominated the earlier years of this century, it has been the loss of belief in Progress."[7] And as Mandelbaum notes, this was not just a change in academic fashions, but one rooted in basic social experiences. "One must take cognizance of the experience of the first World War, especially in Germany, and of the widespread social and political upheaval that began in the 1930s and have continued unabated ever since. Such experiences have left little room for the earlier forms of optimism which, on the whole, dominated Western thought since the Enlightenment."[8]

Social science was institutionalized, thus, not with a simple faith in progress, but at the point of high modernist doubts about the capacity of ordinary people to be the agents of their own progress. This is one reason why it is misleading to counterpose the idea of modernity to putative postmodernity. On the one hand, the ideology of universal progress that is commonly taken as basic to modernity had much more to do with the late 18th century than the late 19th; on the other hand, the late 19th and early 20th centuries are precisely the era of modernism as style and ideological position. Postmodernists, who often refuse to take seriously any goal of historical specificity, thus define their account of the late 20th century unstably against two very different modernities.

II

In the 1890s, the thinkers for whom modernity most conveyed a sense of purpose were not the world-weary sophisticates of fin de siècle

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[7] Mandelbaum, *History, Man, and Reason: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Thought* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), p. 369.

[8] ibid., p. 370. We might note the heroic attempts of some mid-20th century thinkers like Talcott Parsons to recover the stance of naive optimism about progress in the midst of an epoch of devastating conflicts and widespread disillusionment. That Parsons reflects important aspects of his context in postwar America does not fundamentally challenge Mandelbaum's generalization.

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Europe. They were those for whom modernity remained to be appropriated, to whom modernity could still appear as enlightenment bundled together with a host of other forms of progress, and at the same time as occasion for Romantic exaltation of individual action. These thinkers were for the most part outside the centers of European thought. Being a little bit outside was one of the sources of the naive enthusiasm many Europeans both disparaged and envied when looking at Americans. But we grasp the stance better if we try to look at early 20th century modernity from still further outside the metropoles of West Europe.

Though the modern has been identified as the Western, the most active appropriators of the idea of modernity, those who most clearly constitute modernity as project to pursue, have been intellectuals and political activists in the colonial and post colonial world, in East Asia, and indeed, in Europe's own East and other fringes. From China's self-strengthening movement and revolutionaries to Attatürk and even Zionists in Central and Eastern Europe and Spain's generation of 1898 in the West, the pursuit of modernity was a powerful agenda on the periphery of modernity's apparent capital. Here too, a key issue was the question of the subject--the agent--of progress and of modernizing action. If progress demanded agency, there seemed to thinkers of the late 19th century to be three main choices: setting individuals free, empowering the working class, and pursuing the collective good of the nation.[9]

Both class and nation were constructed for the most part as categories of individuals, and indeed often as "superindividuals," bearers of the same sort of unitary identities in the metabiographical space of history as individuals bore in their more immediate and smaller scale contexts.[10] As Benedict Anderson has noted, regardless of the analytic merits of each conception, it has been nation that has

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[9] Though there were hints of panAsian thinking, and foreshadowings of negritude, race did not inform the positive construction of the would-be agents of progress nearly so much as it did the negative arguments as to why some outside Europe and countries of European settlement failed to attain so much progress. At least before national socialism, European usage of race was mainly about "them," while nation referred to "us" (though in very early writings the terms 'race' and 'nation' were often used in closely overlapping senses). See Arendt's classic account of the transformation of racist thought in Nazi ideology; *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 2nd ed., 1951). More generally, see Ivan Hannaford: *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press and the Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1996). In the early 19th century, race and civilization were presented more commonly as candidates for the "subject" of modernity.

[10] Outside Marxism, attempts to construct classes as "superindividual" agents were limited, and more collective, less emergent notions of class dominated in sociology.

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commanded the stronger allegiance, especially measured by the willingness of individuals to die for the collectivity.[11] Sometimes the two came together, as the working class was presented as the historical actor that would save or advance the nation. There was a version of individualism, to be sure, that emphasized competition among individuals to the exclusion of any emphasis on larger units (suggesting, sometimes, the biological distinction between individual and group selection). But for the most part, social Darwinists were greatly interested in the links between the "fitness" of individuals and that of the collectivities they made up. Even most anti-collectivist thought tended to accept the salience of nations, while challenging that of classes. And as World War I drove home, when the chips were down, the idea of the nation became the most basic, operating as a trump card against class and nearly all other collective identities. Nations thus came to be understood, almost everywhere, as both the potential agents of progress and the units for which values or goods could be measured and progress assessed. The discourse of nation gave definition and boundaries to the idea of society, but nations came to be tacitly accepted—even naturalized--to such a degree that the implicit presumption of national identity was accepted even where nationalism was criticized. Nationalism was separated as an ideology from the alleged simple reality of national identity, and seen not as modern but as a carryover from traditional social organization and identities.[12]

This could happen partly because the cosmopolitan nationalism of the 18th and early 19th centuries, including the "Springtime of Nations," gave way to a more reactionary and xenophobic discourse.[13] This was employed in movements many moderns found it easy to dismiss as backward-looking inheritances from a pre-modern era. Even theorists deeply influenced by nationalist ideas often failed to see nations and nationalisms as fundamental categories of modernity as a historically specific era. The idea of nation was reduced to a hidden influence or assumption in much social science, thus, rather than made a major object of theoretical attention. The canonical story of the origins of sociology, for example, rooted the discipline in intellectual responses to domestic changes in European countries—as though those countries were "always already" there, and as though cross-cultural

[11] Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, rev. ed. 1991).

[12] I have reviewed much of the debate on this issue in Calhoun, "Nationalism and Ethnicity," *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 19 (1993), pp. 211-39. See also Alexander Motyl, "The Modernity of Nationalism," *Review of Politics*, 1992.

[13] See Meinecke, Friedrich *Cosmopolitanism and the National State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970); and Micheline Ishay, *The Betrayal of Internationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

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comparisons had not played a crucial part in the invention of sociology.[14] The way in which the "mainstream" of social theory was forged in the 1890s and early 20th century thus helps to explain why scholars in the 1990s were initially baffled by the resurgence of nationalism and related conflict.

The fin de siècle was not just an era of world-weary sophisticates, but a period when the contradictions of modernity began to become widely manifest. High modernist artists responded with both pursuit of radical formal clarity and celebration of ambiguity; Malevich and Joyce are equally typical. Max Weber argued that the advancement of rationality could entrap moderns in an iron cage; Emile Durkheim linked freedom to anomie; Sigmund Freud discovered the sexual unconscious in the midst of some of the most elaborate schemes of cultural repression the world has known.

The late 19th century was not a heroic age for European nationalism, but a sort of interregnum; a calm between the enthusiasms of the mid-19th century and the cataclysms of the 20th. Europe was busy with imperial acquisitions and related conflicts, but for the most part there was peace on the continent (which helped to foster the "progressive" view that nationalism was a problem to be solved by modernization). Nationalism was mobilized, indeed, as much against domestic "fifth columns" of radical workers as against outsiders. But the late 19th and early 20th centuries were crucial years for the building and deepening of the nationalist consciousnesses that would spill over in World War I, the rise of the Navy League in Prussia, the Dreyfus affair in France. The world-weary sophisticates of the fin de siècle were not immune; within two decades, all too many were able to find in nationalism the inspiration to shoot each other, or praise those who did so.

The 1890s were halcyon years for the deployment of nationalism as a rhetoric of identity outside Western Europe. On Europe's Eastern fringe, nationalists sought to shape countries from the decrepit Austro-Hungarian empire. Russians sought to make the empire of the Czar into a modern nation. Turks fashioned Turkey from the center of the old Ottoman Empire, and Egyptians and others pursued similar projects on its periphery. In Spain, the "generation of '98" (though not directly very political) sought to achieve both the Enlightenment and the national identity that more "modern" Europeans

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[14] See Calhoun, *Critical Social Theory: Culture, History, and the Challenge of Difference* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell 1995); Robert Connell, "Why Is Classical Theory Classical?" *American Journal of Sociology,* vol. 102 (1997) #6, pp. 1511-1557; and Randall Collins' critique of Connell, "A Sociological Guilt Trip," *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 102 (1997) #6, pp. 1558-1564.

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had found a century earlier. In East Asia, this was the era in which the Japanese, and only slightly later the Chinese and Koreans, began to use the Western rhetoric of national identity to claim their distinctive, nonWestern place in the world. And this was true not just far afield but as close to home as possible. These were the crucial years in the creation of black nationalism.

One of the central paradoxes of modernity is that an international rhetoric of national identity should become the preferred, early universal, mode of claiming autonomous local cultural identity. As Wilson Moses has remarked, "In its secular form, black chauvinism derives, ironically enough from European racial theory. Like the concept of civilization, racial chauvinism can be traced back to the writings of Hegel, Guizot, Gobineau and other continental racial theorists of the nineteenth century. Indeed it was the German, Herder, who in the eighteenth century, developed theories of organic collectivism upon which Blyden and Crummel later built their own brand of ethnic chauvinism."[15] These roots are of course commonly obscured by claims to complete intellectual autonomy, or the naturalness of the nation. To see that the discourse of nationalism was always international does not mean that all discourses of Third World or subaltern nationalism were merely derivative discourses; they were not.[16] But it does mean that the world was already integrated on a global scale, and that it was within that transnational reality that national identities were forged, and it does mean that this was done often in large part by reproducing or appropriating--albeit sometimes with considerable transformations--the European discourses of enlightenment, romantic individualism, and national identity.

But there was a deeper contradiction in the spread of this discourse and many kindred discourses of modernity. This was the attempt to constitute identities in sharp, categorical terms, to render boundaries clear and identities integral even while the processes of capitalist expansion, slave trade (integrally modern though recently abolished in moves Western thinkers could assure themselves were modernizing), colonization, war, and the globalization of culture all ensured the production of ever more multiplicities and overlaps of identities. The phenomenon of "double consciousness" that W.E.B. DuBois analyzed in the situation of those who were both Negro and

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[15] Wilson Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 25.

[16] See Chatterjee's argument against this view in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (London: Zed Books, 1986).

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American was a resistance to this dominant pattern in the construction of identities.[17] But it was in more than one sense a minority voice.

However common, even ubiquitous, double consciousness really was, the prevailing rhetoric of identity and agency sought singular, integral subjects. Thus lines were drawn on maps and populations understood--at least ideally--to fit as unambiguously as possible within them. Moreover, the loyalties and obligations of individuals to nations were commonly described as unmediated and direct. Unlike traditional kinship systems with their reckoning of identity in a series of nested groups from families outward to larger lineages and clans, and often cross-cut by age-sets and other groupings, modern thought understood individuals to be immediately members of a nation, as though nationality were inscribed in their very bodies. Nationalism launched a war on traditional intermediate associations. And ways of constituting local identities throughout the world, from China to India to Turkey to Spain were all influenced by this discourse of individuals and nations. Even in the manifestly international culture of "the Black Atlantic," produced by the slave trade and maintained by later migrations of people and cultural products, there was a tendency to construct Black identities in essentialist terms. In Paul Gilroy's words, "...original, folk, or local expressions of black culture have been identified as authentic and positively evaluated ...while subsequent hemispheric or global manifestations of the same cultural forms have been dismissed as inauthentic and therefore lacking in cultural or aesthetic value precisely because of their distance (supposed or actual) from a readily identifiable point of origin."[18]

In a wide range of other contexts and for other identities, similar processes were at work, constituting certain versions of collective culture as authentic, claiming certain historical precursors as definitive, The issue is not just the invention of new traditions, in the sense analyzed by Hobsbawm and Ranger, but also the fixing of previously more flexible and continually renewed traditions and the institutionalization both of biases and of powerful agents of cultural regulation.[19] Thus, for example, the creation of modern Turkish identity drew on precursors that could be understood as "always already" Turkish--a mixture of Anatolian culture, Ottoman imperial heritage, and Islam, but it also constituted something new, something

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[17]DuBois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover [1903]1989).

[18]Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 96.

[19]E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

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

In the late 19th century, ironically, precisely as the globalization of political and economic organization and the world wide flows of culture were reaching unprecedented levels, the urge to organize social life in terms of sharp boundaries, national identities, and essentialist cultural categories likewise reached a peak. In Europe, it was in this period that nationalists began effectively to urge immigration controls; in this period they created the standing citizen armies that fought World War I; in this period they opposed socialism in part, as Hobsbawm has suggested, precisely because it was internationalist.[20] It was in this period that modern anti-Semitism took shape. And it was in this period that nationalism became most conclusively identified, in the European context, with movements for secession rather than amalgamation of existing states.[21] No era placed greater emphasis on the autonomy of the nation state or the capacity of the idea of nation to define large scale collective identities. But it did so precisely when and partly because the world was becoming pronouncedly international. In this there may lie some lesson for the present era when the acceleration of global processes of capital accumulation, the rapid global transfer of technology, the almost instantaneous spread of cultural products, and huge waves of migration lead many to imagine the nation state is likely to vanish quickly into the shadows of history.

III

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

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20 Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 123.

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

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rhetoric of national identity, giving the latter its own distinctive inflections.

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

This "culturalist" understanding of large-scale collective identity contrasted sharply with nationalist thought. In the older view, Chinese culture was a singular whole, to which individuals and particular generations might conform better or worse, might measure up more or less well. This is part of what helped to define the famous "generalist" learning of the literati-officials of Confucian China: "his learning was not just valuable for office [or for vocational tasks], but happened to be the body of learning, artistic as well as moral, which was valuable in itself."[22] Where in the older mode of thinking, any innovation had to be justified by demonstration that it was in accord with tradition, in the new approach both innovations and traditional inheritances alike required justification by demonstration that they served the interests of the nation.

One of the key steps in this change was to constitute China as one of a number of like units undergoing "parallel histories."[23] Instead of describing China as a world or as civilization, intellectuals at the end of the 19th century and especially the beginning of the 20th began to adopt the word guo which had previously been used to indicate a kingdom. Within imperial China, there could be a number of such kingdoms; Confucian China could even recognize the existence of barbarian kingdoms in this sense, like tribute-paying Korea. But after the turn of the century, China itself began to be described more and more often as a guo. At first this was sometimes still linked to dynasty; the guo meant literally the object of a particular ruling regime, as in

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22 Levenson, Joseph R. *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), p. 42.

23 As Anderson suggests in *Imagined Communities*, sensibility to parallel histories reflected not only growing awareness of the broader world, but growing familiarity with written narratives, including both histories and novels. The latter were of importance in spreading the notion of simultaneous events embedded within different subnarratives--e.g., organized around different threads of a story or around different characters.

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Qingguo, which reduced the imperial regime to the status of merely one ruling power.[24] In early usage, guo was identified with nobility, who might fall into one or another such large unit, not with ordinary people who were beneath this kind of political identity. Gradually, however, the meaning began to shift towards the notion of people; China became Zhongguo, or in a compound, Zhongguoren, the Chinese nation.[25]

Where a guo had formerly been a political unit, defined only by its power, it became now a repository of ultimate values. But unlike the notion of Chinese or Confucian civilization, which had constituted *the* good, the guo was a being capable of benefiting from a variety of goods. It was valued, but it also *experienced* the value of various specific goods, from wealth to military power.[26] With this redefinition, China could both retain its specific cultural content, and adopt a formal constitution as one of the world's many sovereign nations. A resolution could be offered to the nagging problem of to what extent China could learn from the West without forfeiting her essence. The answer was a variant of the old "Ti-Yong" instruction to rely on Chinese learning for spiritual essence, and Western learning only for practical purposes. But now practical purposes could take more of an upper hand; instrumental criteria could be employed to justify Chinese learning; and lessons could be drawn on any of the many matters in which China was comparable as a nation to the other nations of the world. These possible lessons were among the topics most actively debated in the new periodical press that sprang up in China in the early twentieth century.[27] In China as elsewhere, the rise of literacy and print culture both enabled explorations of international cultural resources and facilitated the

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24 Joseph R. Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), 98-114; Lowell Dittmer and Samuel S. Kim, eds. *China's Quest for National Identity*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

25 "Ren" means people or persons; *Zhongguoren* is more or less "Chinese nation (or kingdom) people." This puts the stress on the collectivity, perhaps, more than the emergent whole (compares to *Zhongguo*). There are a number of other terms and combinations of terms that figured in the Chinese effort to come up with an adequate vocabulary of national identity. For example, the term *minzu*, derived from the traditional word for fellow clan members, was extended to become a term for nation, and might be combined with reference to speakers of Chinese language in terms like *Zhonghua minzu*.

26 Schwartz, Benjamin *In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964).

27 Chow, Tse-tung *The May 4th Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960); Schwarcz, Vera *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Huang, Hui "The Chinese Construction of the West, 1862-1922: Discourses, Actors, and the Cultural Field," Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1996.

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creation of a relatively large-scale domestic public sphere (which was itself crucial to the emergence of nationalist thought).

Nonetheless, too much assimilation of foreign ideas could make even modernizers nervous. In 1934, the Guomindang (or Chinese Nationalist Party) wrote in a handbook that:

> A nation must always remain faithful to its own history and its own culture in order to maintain an independent existence on earth. For a people to keep faith with itself and progress courageously, it ought not to renounce its own old civilization lest it become like a river without a source or a tree without roots. While wishing to assimilate the new knowledge of western civilization, we ought to give it for a base the principles of Confucius. The whole people must learn the doctrine and conform to the thoughts of Confucius.[28]

But though this was a way of talking about being distinctively Chinese, it was a way of doing so that cast this as the specifically local content of one token of a universal type, nation. Indeed, in the pursuit of nation-state development--progress--an entire literature developed of "historical warnings from perished countries."[29] Marxism similarly was simultaneously both a Western import that came with certain understandings of "nations" and stages of history, and an ideology that could be appropriated and remade in the service of largely nationalist Chinese visions and ambitions.[30]

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

Not all states were in comparable positions to exercise central power, and not all could claim to have integrated "their nation" within

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28 Levenson, *Confucian China*,1958, p.106.

29 See Michael Hunt, "Chinese National Identity and the Strong State: The Late Qing-Republican Crisis," pp. 62-79 in Lowell Dittmer and Samuel S. Kim, eds. *China's Quest for National Identity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993) on the historical writings of Yu Danchu.

30 Germaine Hoston, *The State, Identity, and the National Question in China and Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

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their borders. China was (and is) remarkable for the extent of cultural unity obtaining among a very large population.[31] But Chinese national identity was also both ascribed to and chosen by millions of Chinese residing outside the borders of China, people also marked by varying degrees of assimilation to other collective identities--in the Philippines, Hawaii, Indonesia, Malaysia and elsewhere. Many of the principal backers of the Republican Revolution of 1911 were precisely these ambiguous partial outsiders; many others were students returned from study abroad. Both those groups certainly had grounds for the claim to be Chinese, they were also both different from the prototypical and putatively maximally authentic Chinese constructed in literature and nationalist discourse.

The existence of members of the culturally defined Chinese nation lying outside the politically defined Chinese state has been a thorn in the side of Chinese rulers--and other Chinese nationalists--throughout the modern era. They chafed especially when parts of Chinese territory (together with populations of Chinese people) were claimed by European powers or Japan, but also over divisions among ethnic Chinese with divergent political regimes. "Irredentism," or the attempt to restore unified rule to a larger, ostensibly national, territory is thus deeply ingrained in Chinese political thought.

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[31] It is also true that Chinese ideology typically exaggerates this unity. Not only is there deep linguistic diversity among Han Chinese, there are ethnic minorities that are far from tiny. Minorities make up less than ten percent of the Chinese population, but this still amounts to well over eighty million people. Some of the larger minorities have populations larger than most European nations. China's communists first courted national minorities with talk of their self-determination, then reversed themselves on achieving power, as the following text from October 1949 reveals:

> Today the question of each minority's "self-determination" should not be stressed any further. In the past, during the period of civil war, for the sake of strengthening the minorities' opposition to the Guomindang's reactionary rule, we emphasized this slogan. This was correct at the time. But today the situation has fundamentally changed....For the sake of completing our state's great purpose of unification, for the sake of opposing the conspiracy of imperialists and other running dogs to divide China's national unity, we should not stress this slogan in the domestic nationality question and should not allow its usage by imperialists and reactionary elements among various domestic nationalities....The Han occupy the majority population of the country, moreover, the Han today are the major force in China's revolution. Under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, the victory of China's peoples democratic revolution mainly relied on the industry of the Han people.

Quoted in Dru Gladney, "The Peoples of the People's Republic: Finally in the Vanguard?" *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 12 (1990), p. 70.

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The 1997 "reunification" of Hong Kong with the People's Republic of China (together with the return of Macao by Portugal) marks an end to the purely colonial version of this problem. Note, however, the way in which the people of Hong Kong are defined as merely a local variant within the Chinese nation--to be handed back by Imperial Britain--and thus precisely not as a "self" deserving of self-determination. And note how the PRC becomes the representative of the Chinese nation--so that transferring Hong Kong to the state power of the PRC is conceptualized as a "return" even though the PRC was not created until more than a hundred years after Hong Kong became a British colony. The idea of nation defined in terms of prepolitical cultural unity "trumped" the notion of democratic self-determination.[32]

Whether the same will happen in the case of the Republic of China (Taiwan) remains to be seen. Certainly Taiwan is constituted much more substantially than Hong Kong as an autonomous state. But its Guomindang ruling elites (immigrants from the mainland) have drawn sustenance from the same ideology of national unity as their communist counterparts in the PRC. They have contended that there is a single Chinese nation, which in principle should have a single state, but which is temporarily disunified by unfortunate historical accident. Efforts to rethink this are hotly contested by some within Taiwan as well as by the PRC.

Ethnic and other diversity within the nation has been a relatively modest issue in China, though it is a growing concern. It is raised by the intransigence of the Chinese government in the face of rebellions among ethnic minorities like the Uiger in Xinjiang Province, and by peoples like the Tibetans who have national aspirations of their own and are harder to class as simply a domestic ethnic minority. It is raised also and not least because of the pending absorption of Hong Kong into the People's Republic. Yet even as it comes to the fore in China, it pales as an issue by comparison to other former empires like the Austro-Hungarian whose nationalist-fueled collapse helped precipitate World War I, and the Soviet Union, whose collapse has fueled so many of today's nationalist conflicts.

At the end of both Austro-Hungarian and communist rule, the elites that undertook nation-making commonly used a discourse that presented nations as found not made. The essentialist reasoning that dominated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries helped to issue in a collection of states conceived of as representing different national

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[32] See Habermas's discussion of German unification in similar terms; "Citizenship and National Identity: Some Reflections on the Future of Europe," *Praxis International*, 12 (1992) #1.

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groups although none of them was domestically homogenous in ethnic, linguistic or other terms. Urban elites shifted their views of the "folk" cultures of peasants, and promoted vernacular languages. But the essentialist notion of nationality--the notion that clear and necessary criteria for inclusion can be found which are shared among all members and no non-members of the nation--was never as operative on the ground, in the making of everyday life decisions, as in the discourse of state-building and legitimacy-seeking elites. This is why intermarriage rates between different supposedly national groups could remain quite high (30 to 40% of urban marriages since WWII have been "mixed").[33]

IV

The ideologically dominant—though far from typical--modern story of state formation is one of gradual alignments of territory and political power that brought the apparatus of rule in line with the boundaries of pre-existing cultural unity. This story is epitomized by French history. There, over an extended period of time, disparate duchies and other feudal territories were transformed into provinces and knit into an increasing effective centralized power structure concentrated in a primate city. Ironically, the very successful integration of the French nation-state may have predisposed France to its succession of republican revolutions--all of which not only claimed popular legitimacy but were made possible by the concentration of state power in a handful of spatially centralized institutions that could be seized by revolutionaries.[34] In the 1890s, however, what seemed manifest about France was that those who "knew" themselves to be French lived in France, and those who lived in France knew themselves to be French. Were they really "hyphenated" Frenchmen (and women) in the phrase made possible by American usage (which was nearly always derogatory at the turn of the century)? Béarnaise-Frenchmen, Provençale-Frenchwomen? Though it was not dwelled on in the 1890s, we know that for no more than two generations had the majority of Frenchmen spoken French.[35] Clearly, whether by their own choice or not, Jews could be placed in the situation of hyphenated Frenchmen, as the Dreyfus case showed clearly. They must also have experienced a double consciousness. And this was in a France which was often taken

[33] Donia, Robert J. and John V.A. Fine, Jr., *Bosnia and Hercegovina: A Tradition Betrayed* (London: Hurst, 1994), p. 9.

[34] Calhoun, "Classical Social Theory and the French Revolution of 1848," *Sociological Theory*, vol. 7 #2, pp. 210-225.

[35] Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

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as the paradigm nation because of its seemingly manifest internal unity, because the hexagon seemed to be integral.

This felt and perceived unity was also part of the hidden basis for France's vaunted civic nationalism. The celebration of the revolutionary heritage in which all French people putatively shared in the founding moment of a new French nation did indeed facilitate a nationalism tied unusually closely to ideals of citizenship and offering clear openness to assimilation.[36] On the other hand, this very ideology of civic nationalism itself depended on the settledness of the identity French, which was not sharply in contest by the late 19th century either from diverse subpopulations or from French speakers in neighboring states.

To the east, the process of state formation worked out somewhat differently. Only late in the nineteenth century did German state-builders achieve even partial integration of the culturally similar German peoples, and only briefly under the Nazis did this unification reach nearly completely throughout German Europe. In France, a growing national integration was spearheaded by a central state of long standing. In Germany, the central state was added fairly late on top, as it were, of a variety of regions more or less widely understood as "German" in their language and culture. But despite their differences, both French and German stories thematize nationalism as an aspect of amalgamation of disparate regions into a superordinate state. In the territories of the declining Austro-Hungarian Empire, by contrast, nationalist discourse was generally invoked by separatists against the more central power. This is in part because the Hapsburgs self-consciously maintained an empire of the old style; they did not attempt to integrate their dominions into a modern nation-state. That is, they did not attempt to treat their subjects as more or less interchangeable members of the polity, to impose linguistic uniformity, to build an infrastructure rendering communication and commerce easy throughout the realm, to replace narratives of conquest with those of primordial ethnic commonality, or to base claims to legitimacy on the interests or will of "the people."

Imperial rule--in the Austro-Hungarian case or those of most of the rest of the world--is precisely not the attempt to forge a unity between nation and state.[37] Empires are organized through the

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[36] See Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

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

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coexistence--albeit often hierarchically structured--of a number of distinct "peoples" or "communities." These need not enter into any public discourse with each other, nor indeed into many collective activities. Their economic relations are typically matters of market exchange not cooperation in production, and while imperial armies may mobilize members of different ethnic groups, they are generally organized more on the model of mercenaries than citizen-soldiers.

Parts of empires can be transformed into nations by the creation of quasi-autonomous public spheres. This is as characteristic of metropoles as peripheral regions. As the Ottoman empire declined, for example, it was just as novel a project to engender a national consciousness and project of state formation in Turkey as in Egypt, and early projects for pan-Islamic nationalism grew in the same soil. Among the most problematic settings are the frontiers between former or declining empires. The disastrous contemporary situation in the Balkans, thus, is not simply the result of ancient ethnic hatreds, nor entirely produced by the forced integration of Yugoslavia under communism, nor conjured out of nothing by the ideological and military manipulators who have turned the discourse of nationalism into the project of ethnic cleansing. It is rooted in the long history of the region as a frontier in which neither of the relatively stable imperial regimes--Ottoman or Hapsburg--achieved clear hegemony. Local ethnic groups were not only divided by religion and military enlistment, they were in some cases resettled precisely to serve as buffers and prevent both socio-political and military consolidation. As empires receded from this frontier, they left behind not spatially compact and socially integrated nations but fragmented and interspersed ethnic communities. Pockets of Serbs, for example, were located in the middle of Croatian farm districts because their reputation as fighters made the Hapsburgs think they would stiffen defense against the Turks. Even tiny cities like Mostar were miniature metropolises, housing a range of religions and ethnicities. Once they were no longer ruled from distant imperial centers, however, the members of these different ethnic groups were called upon to form their own public discourses to organize collective affairs. In such cases, elites who were previously subordinates in larger imperial hierarchies helped to promote national culture (including language and literature as well as nationalist ideology) partly as a project that would put them on top of the new or newly independent nation. Either the new public spheres would incorporate diverse cultures into regionally compact polities--as attempted most recently by Bosnia-Herzegovina--or the public spheres would be defined on ethnic lines and offer implicit bases for projects of ethnic nationalist reorganization of territory and population--as in the Serbian counterpart. But note that in either case the institutionalization of a public sphere was at the heart of the project of defining the nation,

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whether in terms of the civic institutions of a territorial polity or in terms of ethnic unity.

Nowhere was the formation of national unity really apolitical or entirely a matter of distant past history. But the countries where republican and sometimes democratic constitutions took root--and the countries with the clearest acceptance in international forums--were largely ones where the history of unification itself could be kept at a distance. As Ernst Renan said of France,

> Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality. Indeed, historical enquiry brings to light deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations, even those whose consequences have been altogether beneficial. Unity is always effected by means of brutality ..."[38]

The consequences of the pursuit of national unity by strategies of both forgetting past brutalities and forging ahead with new ones included an implicit repression of differences within such identities and differences cross-cutting them. As Gilroy puts it, "where racist, nationalist, or ethnically absolutist discourses orchestrate political relationships so that these identities appear to be mutually exclusive, occupying the space between them or trying to demonstrate their continuity has been viewed as a provocative and even oppositional act of political insubordination."[39] The insubordination is resented and often repressed not only by established states and agents of institutionalized power, but by those who would organize social movements and popular struggles on behalf of oppressed or disadvantaged groups.

V

Nationalism was not the whole, but only the most important part of the tacit consensus forged in the late 19th century as to what would count as politically appropriate identities. It played a central role in the development of "essentialist" thinking that was also basic to the way race, gender, sexual orientation and other modalities of collective identities came to be constituted. In all cases, the assumption has been widespread both in social theory and in more popular discourses that these cultural categories address really existing and discretely identifiable collections of people--and more surprisingly that it is

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

[39] *Black Atlantic*, p. 1.

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possible to understand each category by focusing on its primary identifier rather than on the way it overlaps with, contests and/or reinforces others.

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

The underlying issues are hard to get at because social and cultural theory did not consistently study the constitution of nations, races, genders or other categories. Rather, a variety of putatively neutral terms--society, culture, subculture--were introduced. Their seeming neutrality obscured the extent to which they reflected the presumptions about categorical distinctiveness that were forged especially with sex, race, and nation in mind. Social scientists came to a remarkable extent to take for granted the objects of their study--notably societies--without reflecting on the extent to which their view of what societies were had been produced largely on the foundation of 19th century nationalist reasoning.

The unravelling of this tacit equation of nation and society has been a key theme of the late 20th century. The problematic nature of these assumptions has been raised most prominently by postmodernism, but also by discussion of globalism and the "clash of civilizations".[40] One problem with the term "postmodern" is that it suggests that these assumptions may once have held, but that something has changed in the world to render identity newly problematic and to render the old fixity of categories obsolete. When the change should be located and whether it happened equally throughout the world is at best only fuzzily suggested.[41] The power of the category of nation was always embedded in modernizing projects, never simply a stable condition of modernity; particular nationalist claims were always subject to contestation.

40 Roland Robertson, *Globalization* (London: Sage, 1992); Benjamin Barber, *McWorld vs. Jihad* (New York: Times Bokkes, 1995); Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York, Simon and Schuster,1996)

41 See Calhoun, "Postmodernism as Pseudohistory," in *Critical Social Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1995).

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Whether it solves any specific problems or not, postmodernism rightly encourages us at the end of the 20th century to revisit the question of the "purpose" of modernity as it figured in the late 19th century. If the last fin de siècle saw the purpose of modernity as progress, at least a large postmodernist current in the present one sees the purpose of modernity as repression.[42] But this is by now so familiar an opposition as to be uninteresting. More telling is the extent to which the postmodernism discourse on the one hand extends certain of the late 19th and early 20th century themes--like the instability of the subject, as interesting to Musil as to Kundera--while on the other hand focusing its attention on themes that were either neglected a hundred years ago or pushed to the margin of social and cultural theory as they were consolidated in that period. One can, thus, point to the considerable extent to which figures like Simmel anticipated themes of postmodernism.[43] But it may be as interesting to ask why in the age when the high modernism of Joyce, Baudelaire and the Bauhaus, was so broadly influential, social theory adopted such a different stance in its own self-presentation.

Modernity of course had many purposes and held out many promises. Peace, freedom, and material progress all figured prominently. All still have their believers. Yet the age of high modernism, including the last fin de siècle, was precisely also the age when disillusionment with modernity first became widespread. This happened mainly in the West, though some of the fin de siecle spirit was visible in Shanghai and Cairo, and revolutionary attacks on imperialism challenged features of modernity even while they remained modernizing. Modernism was, in ways that still are not taken seriously enough, a critical response to much of what we call modernity.

That this doesn't figure much in the historical self-reflections of the social science disciplines is due largely to the success of efforts at canonization and discipline formation that worked systematically to extract the thought of the late 19th and early 20th centuries from its historical context, to cut Durkheim off from Sorel, to insulate Weber from Mann and Lukacs, to minimize Marx. Talcott Parsons thought he could distill the essence of the social thought of the generation that matured in the 1890s into a theory of voluntary but highly structured social action and a general picture of gradual social evolution. But this

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42 See, paradigmatically, Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1979]1984).

43 Compare David Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1985) and Deena Weinstein and Michael Weinstein, *Postmodern Simmel* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

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may tell us more about him and about mid-twentieth century America than about thinkers who came of age at the end of the last century in Europe. And in any case, the era when his optimism (both about the world and about the unity of theory) seemed justified proved brief. It is worth recalling that to a much greater extent, the theorists we associate with the fin de siècle were pessimists or at least committed to an idea of disillusioned realism and opposed to Romanticism even when they drew substantively on its intellectual currents. The great thinkers of the late 19th century, like Darwin and Spencer may have been believers in a simpler and more Providential progress (though it is worth recalling that their age was also Nietzsche's). Freud and Weber and Simmel certainly were not, and even Durkheim hedged his bets on progress well before World War One. Yet surprisingly, especially but not exclusively in America, the social sciences were established as autonomous academic disciplines in such a fashion that reflection on the basic anxieties of twentieth-century life--including the instability of nations and other organizing collective identities--would seem foreign to each, an unscientific interpolation.

Especially under the influence of nationalist ideas, social scientists developed notions of societies as singular, bounded, and internally integrated, and as realms in which people were more or less the same. On this basis, a great deal of modern social theory came to incorporate prereflectively the notion that human beings naturally inhabit only a single social world or culture at a time. People on borders, children of mixed marriages, those rising through social mobility and those migrating from one society to another were all constituted for social theory as people with problems by contrast to the presumed ideal of people who inhabited a single social world and could therefore unambiguously place themselves in their social environments. The implicit phenomenological presumption was that human life would be easier if individuals did not have to manage a heterogeneity of social worlds or modes of cultural understanding. An ideal of clarity and consistency prevailed. This ideal of course reflected broadly rationalist thinking, but it should not be interpreted as limited to rationalistic (or Enlightenment) views. Much of the jargon of authenticity in Romantic and later anti-rationalist thought shares the same idealization of the notion of inhabiting a single self-consistent life world.[44] This notion of the external world mirrored a preFreudian (not to mention preBakhtinian) notion of the potential self-consistent internal life of the individual--one represented in the very term 'individual' with its implication that the person cannot be internally divided.

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44 See Theodore Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

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This notion of inhabiting singular social or lifeworlds as integral beings reflected both assumptions about how actual social life was organized and ideals about how social life ought to be organized. It invoked, in other words, an idea of normality. But the early theorists did not for the most part see their contemporary world as unproblematic on this dimension. Rather, they recognized that people around them faced challenges in trying to come to terms with differences, border crossings and interstitial positions. This led to an understanding of the past as one in which singular social worlds more completely enveloped people; in which society was less differentiated and less complicated. This was for some a golden age, but most social scientists emphasized that for better or worse modernity meant parting with such visions. One powerful version of this argument was Weber's notion of the differentiation of value spheres, itself an elaboration of a Kantian distinction.[45] In modern societies, Weber suggested, the realms of truth (theory), morality (practice), and aesthetics (judgment) must be differentiated; dedifferentiation is a pathology. This view carried forward directly into the work of Horkheimer and Adorno and continues to shape that of Habermas (among many others).

Durkheim took a partially similar tack when he contrasted mechanical to organic social solidarity.[46] He stressed that the older, mechanical form of social solidarity was one rooted in sameness and consensus. The modern organic form was rooted in the division of labor and presupposed functional interdependence based on difference. But, actually existing modern societies were pathological on Durkheim's account, for they lacked the necessary means of reconciling individuals to these differentiated societies. Durkheim conceptualized these means first in social terms--the need for strong groups of intermediate scale like occupational associations--and second in cultural terms--the need for some overarching ideology or collective representations that would reveal the nature of the singular whole of their social world to individual members.

There are obviously senses in which the view that modern social life is distinctively characterized by differentiation makes sense. Social life is organized on an extremely large scale and subgroups that have a high level of autonomy in some respects are at the same time closely interdependent with each other. Whether because it is necessary or simply because it has been historically produced, the distinction among truth, goodness, and beauty (and/or its analogs) does indeed structure a great deal of contemporary discourse.

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45 See "Science as a Vocation," and "Politics as a Vocation," among a number of Weber's works; Kant's three critiques are distinguished on just these lines.

46 See *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York: Free Press, 1985[orig. 1893]).

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Yet there is problematic baggage packed into this way of understanding epochal change. Along with an appreciation of the scale, differentiation, and intensification[47] of modern social life these accounts present us with the presumption that earlier modes of life were basically organized in terms of internal sameness or dedifferentiation. This is what gives Weber's account its special pathos, for example, because Weber sees the differentiation of value spheres as essential to maintaining rationality and as both part of what produces the iron cage and simultaneously a fragile arrangement constantly vulnerable to collapse. His successors who lived through the Nazi era were even more impressed with the threat of dedifferentiation.[48] Durkheim too saw the pathologies of modern people as stemming significantly from the difficulties of coping with this internally differentiated world. And both Durkheim and Weber saw differentiation producing these challenges even without seriously questioning the notion that people would live inside one social world, one society (or subculture) at a time.

Both Durkheim and Weber in this way reflected some emerging features of modern thought that were closely associated with nationalism, though neither produced more than fragmentary analyses of nationalism.[49] They saw human life as 'naturally' involving social worlds of internal sameness and only contingently and with difficulty adapting to worlds of high differentiation. Within the worlds of high differentiation they saw people managing by locating themselves firmly within one or another sphere of social relationships and orientations to action. In Weber's most classic contrast, thus, one opted for science or politics as a vocation, not for both.

But of course Weber's own life suggested otherwise.[50] He wrote purely academic treatises and entered directly into public life and

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47 By "intensification" I mean something like Durkheim's notion of "dynamic density," the capacity for human beings not just to live near each other but to carry on manifold significant relations with each other.

48 This was basic to Frankfurt School critical theory, and remains basic to Habermas's arguments today.

49 Beetham, David, *Max Weber and the Theory of Modern Politics,* rev ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 1985); Mommsen, Wolfgang, *Max Weber and German Politics, 1890-1920,* rev ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

50 This is evident immediately from recognition of the substantial public and political work he did--e.g. helping to draft the Weimar constitution--alongside his scientific or scholarly production. For a deeper sense of the extent to which Weber did not in fact choose sharply between these vocations see Marianne Weber's excellent (and very sociological) biography, *Max Weber: An Intellectual Biography* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1988).

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practical action. He revealed that it was indeed possible to inhabit multiple social worlds and to manage their conjunctures and disjunctures (if not always happily). Modernity may present a number of distinctive challenges of this kind, but we should also be careful not to follow the many classical social theorists whose examination of "other cultures" was conducted in a way that hypostatized both the otherness and the integral unity of cultures. People have long inhabited multiple social worlds at the same time. Multilinguality is as "natural" as monolinguality. Trade has established linkages across political and cultural frontiers. The great religions have spread across divergent local cultures and maintained connections among them. Even in the relatively small scale, low technology societies that most informed Durkheim's notion of mechanical solidarity, people inhabited multiple horizons of experience, for example as members simultaneously of local lineages and far-flung clans. In great civilizations like India that were not organized as singular political units, this was all the more true.

VI

The 20th century arguable reached its fin de siècle in the early 1990s. I would date it not from the great events which inspired so much hope in 1989, but from the bafflement and disappointment that spread as it became clear to what extent the collapse of communism renewed old problems rather than ushering in the end of history. The resurgence of nationalism in the former communist countries helped to draw attention to the fact that nationalism was not simply a fading inheritance of the premodern era. Indeed, nationalism flourished well beyond the range of former communist countries, suggesting that however prominent it was as a "successor ideology" in some, it was not to be explained by the peculiarities of post-communist transitions.

Nationalism turned bloody quite quickly in the 1990s. From the first fighting in Nagorno-Karabhak and other previously obscure regions of the former USSR to the protracted struggles in what was once Yugoslavia, the nationalist fighting was a direct challenge to Western intellectuals, policy-makers and citizens. It challenged faith in progress, of course, which had briefly been revitalized by the fall of communist rule. It also challenged postmodernists, though, despite their rejection of the metanarrative of progress. Not only did the manifest horrors undermine the happy relativism of some, they revealed the continuing power of a very modern form of collective identity, politics and—for many—evil. This led some postmodernists fruitfully to clarify their arguments away from claims that an epoch had

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ended to calls for an end to certain ways of thinking and theorizing deeply implicated in clearly continuing problems.[51]

The resurgence of nationalism around the world also offered a counterpoint to the celebratory politics of identity that had been flourishing, especially since the 1960s. There had been an innocent pleasure to the proliferation of such calls for recognition, and to many of the refigurations of self that ensured. Noticing that a politics of identity could be horrific put the more peaceful and benign movements of the Western democracies under a new light. Rather than easily assuming the possibility of a "springtime of identities" not unlike the mid-19th century Springtime of Nations, many thinkers have begun to treat identity-politics as a more complex phenomenon, potentially liberatory perhaps, but also fraught with dangers. It became clearer that success for one identity movement often infringed on the claims and hopes of others—as with nationalism.

A gloomy fin de siècle attitude has informed some attempts to put the genie of identity politics back in its bottle, lest it produce nothing but endless fragmentation. In The Twilight of Common Dreams, for example, Todd Gitlin evokes a classical image of "progressive" politics and argues that identity movements are increasingly undermining it.[52] Such views are widespread. Yet in a sense they fail to do justice to the difficulty of both the intellectual and political situation. In this current fin de siècle, it is no longer possible to take for granted the "national" subject of modern progress. The identity politics movements flourish partly for this reason. Global integration challenges the tacit assumption of the self of self-determination, not just with trade and production organization across borders, but with global information flows and media corporations, and with global flows of people as migrants especially, but also as travelers. In this context, there is no escape from identity politics. To attempt to unify people at the level of existing states, for class politics or communitarianism or conventional party programs, also requires attempts to convince people that certain understandings of their individual and collective identities should have priority over others. No subject for progress can be taken

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51 Zygmunt Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989) addressed some of these continuing problems in an earlier historical case, developing postmodernist challenges to some core ideas of modernism without getting caught in an illusory claim that the epoch had ended. Resurgent nationalist was of course not the only factor pressing postmodernists to rethink certain themes; many, including Bauman, explicitly eschewed earlier relativisms while pursuing forms of ethnical engagement not tied to modernist universalism.

52 New.York: Holt, 1995.

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for granted, and this is one of the most basic reasons why progress—or more profoundly, the good itself—is so hard to assess.

A key intellectual agenda in the late 20th century, thus, is to find a way to speak of identity and agency in ways that do not tacitly equate society with nation, or presume that one identity is automatically a trump card against others. It is not obvious that today's social scientists will move much farther than their predecessors of the 1890s. One way to do so, however, would be to develop a way of addressing the challenges of cultural and historical difference, that does not render observed differences the bases for hypostatizing "whole" societies or cultures as though they were internally integral.[53] We need to see not only that empirical variable, however, but the practical activity by which ordinary people manage cultural complexity and the interfaces among social worlds.[54] The issue is not just to avoid "essentialist" invocations of integral identity, but to see that just pointing to "social construction" offers little if any analytic purchase. It is not just that collective identities and ways of life are created, but that they are internally contested, that their boundaries are porous and overlapping, and that people live in more than one at the same time.

The prominence of postmodernism generally and a range of more particular challenges to the idea of clearly demarcated and internally coherent identities has not kept contemporary thinkers from imagining the world in those terms. When Samuel Huntington argued that the crucial conflicts of the future would be those between civilizations, thus, he saw civilizations in the same manner as the dominant 19th century discourse saw nations: discrete, internally self-consistent, and perduring tokens of a common type.[55] He wrote of a world minimally marked by multiplicities of identities, though maximally by conflicts over territories. Accounts of the horrors of Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda and other national and/or ethnic conflicts evoke premodern imagery of "tribal warfare." These are all the results,

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53 In something of the same spirit, Sorokin generations ago criticized those who studied cultures with the presumption that these were necessarily cognitively or logically integrated units, rather than seeing such integration as an empirical variable. His criticism had regrettably little effect on developments in sociology. *Social and Cultural Dynamics* (Boston: Porter Sergeant, 1957).

54 See Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992) for a suggestion of this issue. Also, Hannerz, "The World in Creolisation," *Africa*, vol. 57 (1988), pp. 546-59).

55 S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations.* Fouad Ajami's response to Huntington's early article on this theme makes a similar point about how "Huntington has found his civilizations whole and intact, watertight under an eternal sky." See "The Summoning," *Foreign Affairs* Sept./Oct. 1993.

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political leaders assure us on the basis of respectable academic sources, of ancient ethnic conflicts. Because the clashes are primordial we can do nothing about them except to try to reduce the scale of the bloodletting by sending in the Red Cross or embargoing weapons.

Such accounts are, of course, a way of getting ourselves off the hook because they justify inaction. At the same time, though, they point to a deeper sense in which we seek to exculpate ourselves, perhaps unconsciously. This is our effort to disengage such horrors from our image of modernity. It is as though we seek to salvage the remaining vestiges of a tattered idea of progress by relegating the most pressing and substantial conflicts and challenges of contemporary world affairs to the category of "the traditional," against which the late 19th century thinkers identified the modern. Above all, perhaps, with such rhetoric and views we abandon the possibility of recovering any sense of the extent to which modernity did not just happen to us, but was produced and then exported from Europe (and later America) as a project. It has been a project that has produced ill as well as good.

LEFT CURVE no. 22

Marx/Nietzsche:Nihilism, Revolution and the Eternal Returning, Elizam Escobar; **"The essence is good and all the appearances are evil"**: *Interview with Agnes Heller*, Csaba Polony; **Balkan Autopsy**: *Introduction*, Csaba Polony; *Ash Oracles*, Jovica Aćin; **The Plight of Czech Gypsies in the Holocaust and Today**, Paul Polansky; **Interview with Paul Polansky**, Gwen Albert; *Friends with Unwashed Faces* (poem), Vojo Sindolic; **Poetry in the Slovene Language**, Boris A. Novak; **A Selection of 20th Century Slovene Poetry; OSTranenie 97:** *International Forum of Electronic Media at the Bauhaus of Dessau*, Bálint Szombathy; **The Cutting Edge of Imperialism**, John Horvath; **Sourvenirs, Music and Tourism as Appropriation, or Crispian Does the Magical Mystical Tour and Saves the World**, John Hutnyk; **Wiggers and Wannabes: White Ethnicity in Contemporary Youth Culture**, Martin Daws; **Raymond Williams on Cultural Revolution**, E.San Juan, Jr.; *Sisyphus (for Salman Rusdie)* (poem), Esiaba Irobi; *The Hound Arcane* (poem), Jack Hirschman; **Poetry** by David Meltzer, Jeffrey F. Crice, Gwen Albert, Moe Seager, Chris Sia, Gordon Massman, Steve Carter, Jim Quinn, Ryuichi Tamura; **millennium [read]ing of d.h.lawrence's UTOPIA**, B. K. Buckley; **Fellow Traveling at Anzio**, Melvin Seiden; **Crashing into the Walls of the Dream Room**, M.Polderman & I. van Krogten; **Cloning Humans: a mutant future?**, Andi Freeman; **Freedom for Toni Negri**, *Putting an End to the "Years of Lead" in Italy*; 144 pp.

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