

NATIONALISM AND THE TWO FORMS OF  
COHESION IN COMPLEX SOCIETIES

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THE role of amnesia in the formation of nations is perhaps most vigorously affirmed by Ernest Renan: 'L'oubli et, je dirais même, l'erreur historique sont un facteur essentiel de la création d'une nation . . .'<sup>1</sup> Renan, like other theorists of nationalism, does also invoke common memories, a shared past, as one of the elements which binds men and helps form a nation. But a deeper and more original perception is to be found in his view that a shared amnesia, a collective forgetfulness, is at least as essential for the emergence of what we now consider to be a nation. Antiquity, he had noted, knew no nations in our sense. Its city states knew patriotism, and there were of course imperial and other large agglomerations: but not nations.

Renan believed nations to be a peculiarity of Europe as it developed since Charlemagne. He correctly singled out one, perhaps *the*, crucial trait of a nation: the anonymity of membership. A nation is a large collection of men such that its members identify with the collectivity without being acquainted with its other members, and without identifying in any important way with sub-groups of that collectivity. Membership is generally unmediated by any really significant corporate segments of the total society. Subgroups are fluid and ephemeral and do not compare in importance with the 'national' community. Links with groups pre-dating the emergence of the nation are rare, tenuous, suspect, irrelevant. After listing various *national* states—France, Germany, England, Italy, Spain—he contrasts them with a conspicuously un-national political unit of his time, Ottoman Turkey. There, he observes, the Turk, the Slav, the Greek, the Armenian, the Arab, the Syrian, the Kurd, are as distinct to-day as they had been on the first day of the conquest. More so, he should have added, for in the early days of conquest, it is highly

<sup>1</sup> Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* (1882).

probable that Turkish-speaking tribes absorbed earlier Anatolian populations; but when the Ottoman empire was well established, a centrally regulated system of national and religious communities excluded any possibility of a trend towards an ethnic melting-pot.

It was not so much that the ethnic or religious groups of the Ottoman empire had failed to forget. They were positively instructed to remember:

The Ottoman Empire was tolerant of other religions . . . But they were strictly segregated from the Muslims, in their own separate communities. Never were they able to mix freely in Muslim society, as they had once done in Baghdad and Cairo . . . If the convert was readily accepted, the unconverted were excluded so thoroughly that even today, 500 years after the conquest of Constantinople, neither the Greeks nor the Jews in the city have yet mastered the Turkish language . . . One may speak of Christian Arabs—but a Christian Turk is an absurdity and a contradiction in terms. Even today, after thirty-five years of the secular Turkish republic, a non-Muslim in Turkey may be called a Turkish citizen, but never a Turk.<sup>1</sup>

Yet overall, Renan's perception of what it is that distinguishes the modern nation from earlier collectivities and polities seems to me valid. His account of how nations came to be important seems to me inadequate and incomplete. It is basically historical, and seeks to explain why the national principle prevailed in Western Europe, and not yet (at the time he wrote) in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. He invokes the circumstances of the Teutonic conquests: Franks, Burgundians, Lombards, Normans, often arrived without a sufficient number of women, and eventually intermarried with the locals; and moreover, they adopted the religion of the conquered. Next, powerful dynasties enforced the unity of large societies; the King of France, he notes, did so by tyranny and by justice. Switzerland, Holland, America, Belgium were formed by the voluntary union of provinces, even if in two cases the union was subsequently confirmed by a monarchy. Finally, the eighteenth century changed everything. Though he had ironized the idea that a large modern nation could be run along the principles of an ancient republic, he nevertheless retains a good deal of the return-to-antiquity theory of the French Revolution: 'L'homme était revenu, après des siècles d'abaissement, à l'esprit antique, au respect de lui-même, à l'idée de ses droits. Les mots de patrie et de citoyen avaient repris leur sens.'

<sup>1</sup> Bernard Lewis; *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (2nd edn., OUP, 1968), pp. 14 and 15.

To sum up: that crucial required amnesia had been induced by wifeless conquerors, willing to adopt the faith and often the speech of the vanquished; by effective dynasties; sometimes by voluntary association; and the principle of amnesia and anonymity within the body politic was finally confirmed by the eighteenth century revival of the ideas of rights and of citizenship. And it is the glory of France, he observes, to have taught mankind the principle of nationality, the idea that a nation exists through itself and not by grace of a dynasty. It is also the case that he exaggerated somewhat the extent to which France had become culturally unified in his time. Eugene Weber tells us convincingly<sup>1</sup> that the process was far from complete. But the fact that it was in the process of completion is significant. Whether it supports Renan's explanation, or a modified one, is another matter.

Renan's theory of nationality and nationalism in effect has two levels. His main purpose is to deny any naturalistic determinism of the boundaries of nations: these are *not* dictated by language, geography, race, religion, or anything else. He clearly dislikes the spectacles of nineteenth-century ethnographers as advance guards of national claims and expansion. Nations are made by human will: 'Une nation est donc une grande solidarité, . . . elle se résume . . . par . . . le consentement, le désir clairement exprimé de continuer la vie commune. L'existence d'une nation est un plébiscite de tous les jours . . .' This is one level of his argument: a voluntaristic theory of nationality and the nation state. Paraphrasing T. H. Green, he might have said: will, not fact, is the basis of a nation. Green, when he said that will, not force, was the basis of the state, then had to go on to say that Tsarist Russia was a state only by a kind of courtesy. Renan was obliged to concede that the ethnic groups of antiquity and pre-modern times generally, often barely conscious of themselves, and too unsophisticated to *will* a cultural unity or to crave state protection for it, were not really 'nations' in the modern sense—which is indeed the case.

The second level is the answer to the question, how did the nations which he did have in mind, roughly European nations West of the Trieste-Königsberg line, come into being? He notes the anonymity which prevails in these large collectivities and their shared amnesia, and credits them to the wifelessness of Teuton conquerors, the brutality of centralizing monarchs, direct affirmation of will amongst the Swiss and Dutch, and a belated affirmation by the Italians . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Peasants into Frenchmen* (Chatto & Windus, London, 1979).

Be it noted that the theory is profoundly unsatisfactory at both levels, and yet at each level it contains an important and valid insight. Will, consent, is not an exclusive characteristic of modern nations. Many utterly un-national groups or collectivities have persisted by consent. Amongst the wide variety of kinds of community or collectivity which has existed throughout history, consent, coercion, and inertia have coexisted in varying proportions. Modern national states have no monopoly of consent, and they are no strangers to inertia and coercion either.

Similarly, at the second level, the processes invoked—wifeless and conversion-prone conquerors, strong ruthless centralizing rulers—are in no way a speciality of Western European history. They have occurred elsewhere, and plentifully. No doubt they had often had the effects with which Renan credits them in Europe, destroying kin-links, eroding continuities of social groups, disrupting communities, obliterating memories. But, after the cataclysm and trauma, when the deluge subsided, when social order was re-established, internal cleavages and discontinuities reappeared, justified by new, probably fictitious memories . . . . New ones are invented when the old ones are destroyed. Most societies seem allergic to internal anonymity, homogeneity, and amnesia. If, as Renan insists, Frenchmen have obliterated the recollection of Gaulish, Frankish, Burgundian, Norman, etc., origins, this does not distinguish them from those whom he singles out for contrast: the Anatolian peasant also does not know whether his ancestor had crossed the Syr-Darya, or whether he had been a Celt, Greek, Hittite or any other of the local proto-inhabitants. His amnesia on these points is at least as total as that of his French peasant counterpart. An Islamic folk culture stands between him and any fond memories of the steppes of Turkestan. And his ancestors too had known invaders and centralizing monarchs—on occasion more effective ones than those who had ruled and unified France. The Orientalist Renan should have known better than that.

What distinguished Western Europe are not those invasions and centralizing efforts which happen to have preceded the modern national state—though they may have contributed to a situation which, accidentally, resembled in some small measure that fluid anonymity which characterizes membership of a modern 'nation', and may have helped prepare the ground for it. What distinguishes the areas within which nationalism has become the crucial political principle is that some deep and permanent, profound change has taken place in the way in which society is

organized—a change which makes anonymous, internally fluid and fairly undifferentiated, large-scale, and culturally homogeneous communities appear as the only legitimate repositories of political authority. The powerful and novel principle of ‘one state, one culture’ has profound roots.

If Renan was misguided about the origin of the phenomenon which he correctly identified, his hand was also a little unsure in tracing its central feature, in his famous ‘daily plebiscite’ doctrine. Religiously defined political units in the past were also recipients of the ritually reaffirmed loyalty of their members; they were the fruit, if not of a plebiscite every day, then at least of a plebiscite every feast-day—and ritual festivities were often very frequent. Conversely, even the modern national state does not put its trust entirely, or even overwhelmingly, in the daily plebiscite and the voluntary reaffirmation of loyalty; these are reinforced by a machinery of coercion.

And yet here, too, Renan discerned something distinctive and important. The modern nationalist consciously wills his identification with a culture. His overt consciousness of his own culture is already, in historical perspective, an interesting oddity. Traditional man revered his city or clan through its deity or shrine, using the one, as Durkheim insisted so much, as a token for the other. He lacked any concept of ‘culture’, just as he had no idea of ‘prose’. He knew the gods of his culture, but not the culture itself. In the age of nationalism, all this is changed twice over; the shared culture is revered *directly* and not through the haze of some token, and the entity so revered is diffuse, internally undifferentiated, and insists that a veil of forgetfulness should discreetly cover obscure internal differences. You must not ignore or forget culture, but oblivion must cover the internal differentiations and nuances *within* any one politically sanctified culture.

Can we go further and complete his account, developing his insights and avoiding his misunderstandings?

The present lecture commemorates A. R. Radcliffe-Brown. My contention is that the problem high-lighted and solved only in part by Renan does indeed have a definitive solution, and moreover one which can be reached only by a systematic use of a distinction which pervaded Radcliffe-Brown’s thought, and dominated the anthropological tradition to which he had contributed so much. Renan had correctly singled out a problem: there is something quite distinctive about the principle of cohesion and of boundary-definition, which animates the modern national

state. He identified this distinctiveness (correctly) in terms of internal amnesia, and a little misleadingly in terms of voluntary assent; and he explained it, somewhat irrelevantly, by invoking its allegedly and questionably unique historical antecedents, rather than in terms of persisting social factors which perpetuate it. It seems to me that we can go further and do better, and that we can best do so with Radcliffe-Brown's tools, applying them to a problem which had not preoccupied him.

The tools I have in mind are simple, indeed elementary, and are pervasively present in the discourse of anthropologists: they are, essentially, the distinction between structure and culture. It may perhaps be said that Radcliffe-Brown's contribution here was above all to give his students a sense of what a social structure was, and why it was important, and how it should be investigated, rather than to help formulate a logically satisfactory verbal definition of it. But he did not consider this matter of definition to be trivial. On the contrary:

While I have defined social anthropology as the study of human society, there are some who define it as the study of culture. It might perhaps be thought that this difference of definition is of minor importance. Actually it leads to two different kinds of study, between which it is hardly possible to obtain agreement in the formulation of problems.<sup>1</sup>

'Structure' he defined as a system of relatively, though not completely, stable social 'positions', to be distinguished from more volatile 'organization', seen as a system of more transitory activities.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in his view, the system of military ranks forms a structure, whilst the temporary deployment of this or that soldier on a given task merely exemplifies 'organization'. Their reallocations from one activity to another constituted a kind of Radcliffe-Brownian motion which did not affect the overall structure. His terminology was not altogether consistent: in the general essay on social structure, 'role' occurs in the definition of structure itself; whereas in the subsequently written general introduction, roles are said to distinguish mere organization as distinct from structure.

I do not think this terminological instability matters much. The underlying idea is clear, simple, and forceful and, as Radcliffe-Brown saw and stressed, had profound implications for the whole practice of social inquiry. Karl Marx is credited with the observation that if appearance and reality did not diverge, science

<sup>1</sup> *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, first published 1952), p. 189.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 11 and the whole of ch. X.

would be unnecessary. The trouble is—how are we to distinguish appearance and reality, and to identify reality? The importance of the structure–culture distinction, so pervasive in the tradition to which Radcliffe–Brown contributed, springs from the fact that it implicitly contains an entire programme for locating this boundary in the social life of men.

The distinction between structure and culture has profound affinities both to the contrast between primary and secondary qualities, so important in British empiricist philosophy (and surviving in other terminological guises), and also to the central Marxist distinction between base and superstructure. It indicates the areas which the investigator is bidden to seek out, and the areas accessible to comprehension, comparison and generalization. The implicit programme and recipe are: it is structure, the relatively stable system of roles or positions, and the tasks and activities allocated to them, which really makes up a society. It is in this area that we may hope to compare one society with another, and perhaps discern generalizations valid for a whole range of societies. By contrast, the system of tokens which, in the idiom of one society or another, constitutes the signals by means of which these various roles, positions, or activities are brought to the attention of its members is only of secondary importance.

Though this stratified approach to phenomena has a certain very broad affinity to Marxism, it also differs from it in at least two very important ways. Marxism possesses a relatively specific, highly contentious, and interesting theory of what constitutes that system of primary elements: they are constituted by the means and relations of production. The kind of structuralism exemplified by Radcliffe–Brown never drew any such sharp and restrictive boundary around the system of primary roles or positions. This is a matter of considerable importance, in so far as the crucial difference between Marxists and others hinges on whether or not, for instance, the means of coercion and relations of coercion are *also* allowed to be independent elements of a social order. Are they part of the basic structure? A coherent Marxism precludes it, and indeed derisively refers to the ‘Idealist theory of violence’; but happily there is nothing whatever in Radcliffe–Brown’s theory or practice to exclude it.

The second great difference is that Radcliffe–Brown’s position contains no theory whatever of a historic sequence of social structures and of the mechanisms by which they replace each other. The two contrasts are linked: the Marxist identification of the deep or primary structure is at the same time meant to be

a specification of the area within which the processes take place which lead to the replacement of one structure by another. Marxist interest in social structure is inspired by an interest in change, which it holds to be a law of all things: it is consequently in some embarrassment when facing social structures (for instance nomadic ones, or the 'Asiatic mode of production') which appear to be stagnant.

My contention is that the problem which intrigued Renan, the emergence of that distinctive social unit, the national and often nationalist state, is a precise example of this kind of replacement of one structure by another; and that it cannot be explained by invoking historical events alone, but only by highlighting the difference between the two contrasted structures.

The argument is, in a way, paradoxical. It employs the structure-culture contrast, it pays heed to the Radcliffe-Brownian admonition that attention to either of these two elements will lead us to quite different problems. But it argues that the essence of this particular *structural* change is, precisely, that in the course of it, the role of culture itself in society changes profoundly. This is not a mere matter of replacing one culture, one system of tokens, by another: it is a matter of a structural change, leading to a totally new way of using culture.

One might put it the following way. Culture does mirror structure—but not always in the same kind of way. There are radically different *ways* in which the system of tokens and signals (culture) can be related to the system of roles or positions constituting a society.

Let me make the argument concrete by sketching contrasted models of two different kinds of society:

(1) Consider first a fairly stable, but complex, large and well-stratified traditional society. At its base, there is a large number of rural, servile, inward-turned food-producing communities, tied to the land, and obliged to surrender their surplus produce. Above them, a self-insulated ruling elite of warriors/administrators controls the means of coercion and the channels of communication, and is legally entitled to act as a cohesive body (a right denied to the peasant category). This enables it to maintain its domination. Alongside it, there is a parallel religious hierarchy, comprising both monastic communities and individual officiating priests, who provide ritual services to other segments of the population. In between the rural communities on the one hand and the military-clerical elite, there is a layer of craftsmen and

traders, some settled in small pockets in the countryside, some even perpetual migrants, and others living in more concentrated urban agglomerations.

The technological and administrative equipment of this society is fairly stable. Consequently its division of labour, though quite elaborate, is also fairly constant. In the majority of cases, the recruitment to the many specialized positions within this intricate structure is by birth. Though the skills required are often considerable, they are best transmitted on the job, by a kinsman to a junior member of the group, sometimes by master to apprentice. They do not presuppose an initial generic training by an unspecialized centralized educational system.

The clerical hierarchy possesses a near-monopoly of literacy, and the language which it employs in writing is not identical with any living spoken idiom, and is very distant from some of the dialects employed in daily life by various social groups. This distance and the resulting unintelligibility to non-initiates constitutes no disadvantage, but, on the contrary, enhances the authority of the doctrine and the rituals which are in the care of the clerisy. It strengthens the aura which surrounds the spiritual arcana. A stratified intelligibility reinforces a stratified society.

In this overall situation, there are no factors making for linguistic and cultural homogeneity, and there are on the contrary various factors making for diversity. The immobility and insulation of the rural peasant groups encourages the diversification of dialects, even if initially neighbouring settlements had spoken the same tongue, which often they had not. The manner in which the polity has expanded—by conquest—means that in any case it contains peasant communities speaking diverse languages, but the rulers are completely indifferent to this, as long as the peasants remain docile. Higher up in the structure, there is a complex proliferation of diverse ranks and statuses, in principle rigid and hereditary, and in fact fairly stable. The externalization of this relatively stable and accepted hierarchy, by means of differences in speech and cultural style, is a considerable convenience for the society as a whole and to its members: it avoids painful ambiguity, and constitutes a system of visible markers which underwrites and ratifies the entire hierarchy and makes it palatable.

Systems of this kind sometimes experience clerisy-led and inspired campaigns for religious unification. The clerisy wishes to affirm its monopoly of magic, ritual, and salvation, and eliminate free-lance shamanism which tends to persist, especially amongst the rural population. Religious monopoly may be as dear to it as

coercive and fiscal monopoly is to the political elite. But what is virtually inconceivable within such a system is a serious and sustained drive for linguistic and cultural homogeneity, sustained by universal literacy in a single linguistic medium. Both the will and the means for such an aspiration are conspicuously lacking.

(2) Consider now a wholly different kind of social structure. Take a society with the following traits: it too has a complex and sophisticated division of labour, but one based on a more powerful technology, so that food-production has ceased to be the employment of the majority of the population. On the contrary, agriculture is now but one industry amongst others, employing a fairly small proportion of the population, and those employed in it are not locked into inward-looking rural communities, but are fairly continuous with other professional groups, and occupational mobility from and into agriculture is roughly as common and as easy as are other kinds of lateral occupational mobility.

The society in question is founded on a realistic and well-based expectation of economic growth, the material betterment of all or most of its members. The power of its technology has not merely enabled a small minority in its midst to grow enough food to feed everyone: it also possesses an inherent potential for growth which, over time, allows everyone to become richer. This anticipation plays a central part in securing social consensus and assent: the division of spoils loses some of its acerbity if the total cake is growing. (It also constitutes a grave danger for this society, when, for one reason or another, this growth is arrested.) But compared with many previous societies, this one is often permissive and liberal: when the Danegeld Fund is growing steadily, when you can bribe most of the people most of the time, it may be possible to relax the more brutal traditional methods of ensuring social conformity.

A society that lives by growth must needs pay a certain price. The price of growth is eternal innovation. Innovation in turn presupposes unceasing occupational mobility, certainly as between generations, and often within single life-spans. The capacity to move between diverse jobs, and incidentally to communicate and co-operate with numerous individuals in other social positions, requires that members of such a society be able to communicate, in speech and writing, in a formal, precise, context-free manner—in other words they must be educated, literate and capable of orderly, standardized presentation of messages. The high educational level is in any case also presupposed both by the

type of highly productive economy and by the expectation of sustained improvement.

The consequence of all this is the necessity of universal literacy and education, and a cultural homogeneity or at least continuity. Men co-operating on complex tasks involving high technology must be able to read, and to be able to read the same idiom. Men on the move between diverse jobs, in enterprises with distinct and independent hierarchies, can only co-operate without friction if the baseline assumption is one of a rough equality: all men as such are equal, and ranking is *ad hoc* and task-specific. Inequality is temporarily vested in individuals, in virtue of wealth, role-occupancy, or achievement; it is not permanently vested in entire hereditary groups.

This is the general profile of a modern society: literate, mobile, formally equal with a merely fluid, continuous, so to speak atomized inequality, and with a shared, homogeneous, literacy-carried, and school-inculcated culture. It could hardly be more sharply contrasted with a traditional society, within which literacy was a minority and specialized accomplishment, where stable hierarchy rather than mobility was the norm, and culture was diversified and discontinuous, and in the main transmitted by local social groups rather than by special and centrally supervised educational agencies.

In the modern environment, a man's culture, the idiom within which he was trained and within which he is effectively employable, is his most precious possession, his real entrance-card to full citizenship and human dignity, to social participation. The limits of his culture are the limits of his employability, his world, and his moral citizenship. (The peasant's world had been narrower than his culture.) He is now often liable to bump against this limit, like a fly coming up against the window-pane, and he soon learns to be acutely conscious of it. So culture, which had once resembled the air men breathed, and of which they were seldom properly aware, suddenly becomes perceptible and significant. The wrong and alien culture becomes menacing. Culture, like prose, becomes visible, and a source of pride and pleasure to boot. The age of nationalism is born.

It is worth adding that, at the very same time, it becomes increasingly difficult for men to take religious doctrine seriously. This is ultimately a consequence of that very same commitment to sustained economic and hence also cognitive growth, which also leads to social mobility and homogeneity. Perpetual cognitive growth is incompatible with a firm world-vision, one endowed

with stability, authority, and rich in links with the status-system, ritual practices, and moral values of the community, links which reinforce all parts of the system. Cognitive growth cannot be fenced in and insulated, it is no respecter of the sacred or of anything else, and sooner or later it erodes all the cognitive elements of any given vision, whether by outright contradiction or merely by placing them *sub judice*, thereby destroying their standing. So at the very same time that men become fully and nervously aware of their culture and its crucial relevance for their vital interests, they also lose much of the capacity to revere their society through the mystical symbolism of a religion. So there is both a push and a pull towards revering a shared culture *directly*, unmediated in its own terms: culture is now clearly visible, and access to it has become man's most precious asset. Yet the religious symbols through which, if Durkheim is to be believed, it was worshipped, cease to be serviceable. So—let culture be worshipped directly in its own name. That is nationalism.

Nationalist theory pretends that culture is *given* to the individual, nay that it possesses him, in a kind of ideological *coup de foudre*. But, in the love of nations as in the love of men, things tend to be more complex than the mystique of spontaneous passion would allow. The industrial world had inherited from the agrarian age an endless wealth of dialects, of cross-cutting nuances of speech, faith, vocation, and status. For reasons which I have tried to sketch briefly, those elaborate, often baroque structures had served agrarian humanity very well. The multiple cross-cutting links helped give the system such stability as it enjoyed. But all these nuances and ambiguities and overlaps, once so functional, become obstacles and hindrances to the implementation of the newly overriding imperative, a literate homogeneous culture, and of an easy flow and social mobility, a seamless society. Not all the old cultures, let alone all the old subtleties and shading, can conceivably survive into the modern world. There were too many of them. Only some survive and acquire a new literate underpinning, and become more demanding and clearly defined. The new primary ethnic colours, few in number and sharply outlined against each other, are often *chosen* by those who adhere to them, and who then proceed to internalize them deeply.

So Renan was right. There is indeed a perpetual plebiscite, a choice rather than fatality. But the choice does not ignore the given cultural opportunities and resources. It takes place, not every day perhaps, but at each *rentrée des classes*. And the anonymity, the amnesia, are essential: it is important not merely

that each citizen learn the standardized, centralized, and literate idiom in his primary school, it is also important that he should forget or at least devalue the dialect which is *not* taught in school. Both memory and forgetfulness have deep social roots; neither springs from historical accident. Renan boasted that it was the French who taught the world through the Revolution that a nation can will itself, without the benefit of a dynasty. He had not really gone far enough. A culture can and now often does will itself into existence, without the benefit not only of a dynasty, but equally of a state; but in this situation, when devoid of a political shell, it will then inevitably strive to bring such a state into being, and to redraw political boundaries so as to ensure that a state does exist, which alone can protect the educational and cultural infrastructure, without which a modern, literate culture cannot survive. No culture is now willingly devoid of its National Theatre, National Museum, and National University; and these in turn will not be safe until there is an independent Ministry of the Interior to protect them. They constitute, as does an independent rate of inflation, the tokens of sovereignty.

Our argument is that there are two great types or species of the division of labour, of social structure, *both* of them being marked by very great complexity and size, but which differ radically in their implications for culture, in the manner in which they make use of culture. Bipolar theories of social development, or dualistic typologies of human societies, contrasting all simple with all complex societies, have tended to confuse and conflate them. Yet when it comes to understanding the kind of social solidarity associated with nationalism, this distinction is of paramount importance.

One of these, which may be called advanced agrarian-based civilization, makes for great cultural diversity, and deploys that diversity to mark out the differential situations, economically and politically, of the various sub-populations found within it. The other, which may be called growth-oriented industrial society, is strongly impelled towards cultural homogeneity within each political unit. When this homogeneity is lacking, it can be attained by modifying either political or cultural boundaries. Furthermore, this social form is marked by the overt use of culture as a symbol of persisting political units, and the use of its homogeneity to create a sense (part illusory, part justified) of solidarity, mobility, continuity, lack of deep barriers, *within* the political units in question. In simpler words, agrarian civilizations do not engender nationalism, but industrial and industrializing societies do so.

This relationship is supremely important, but to assert it is not to claim that it is absolute and free of exceptions. Pre-industrial political units use all kinds of diacritical marks to distinguish their adherents and subjects from those of their neighbours and enemies, and from time to time they may also use cultural differences for this end. But this is contingent, accidental, and constitutes an exception rather than a rule. They may also on some few occasions display a tendency towards that anonymity and individualization which in our argument only receive their stable social base with industrialism; and it may well be that it was precisely those societies which acquired the cultural traits of industrialism by accident, and prior to the coming of industrial production, which also constituted the social matrix of industrial society. The argument linking scripturalist Protestantism with the coming of modernity owes much of its great plausibility to this very point: a population of equal individuals/clerics, each with a direct line to the sacred, and free of the need for social and stratified mediation, seems particularly well suited for the newly emerging world. The fact that this universalized private line uses a written text favours that general diffusion of literacy and of a standardized idiom which the modern world requires.

Just as pre-industrial societies may contingently acquire some crucial traits of industrial culture, so some industrial societies may lack them. The factors which make for the implementation of the 'one state, one culture' principle are indeed strong and pervasive, but they are not the only factors operative in our world, and sometimes other forces may prevail or lead to some kind of compromise. On occasion, mobility, continuity and communication may be attained, despite differences of language, in the literal sense. People may 'speak the same language' without speaking the same language, for instance. Sometimes, sheer force may impose a solution; and sometimes the advantages conferred by preserving a well-established polity may outweigh the disadvantages of a partial violation of the nationalist principle. But these are exceptions: in general, we live in a world in which the new type of division of labour engenders a powerful and, in most cases, successful nationalist groundswell.

If this is so, it is curious that this supremely important side-effect seems to have escaped those two supreme theoreticians of the division of labour, Adam Smith and Émile Durkheim. Let us take them in turn and in chronological order.

Both of them are of course very preoccupied with the growth of

towns, the natural home of an advanced division of labour. Adam Smith has for very long been stolen by the economists and treated as their proprietary founding father. Social scientists who are not economists have, it seems to me, been somewhat too complaisant about this appropriation. So the idea has spread that Adam Smith's Hidden Hand is primarily concerned with *economic* effects: it augments production and wealth, but if we are concerned with other social benefits, we had better look to later, more sociological thinkers. For Smith, according to this misleading image, the free operation of the Hidden Hand in the economy needs to be protected from harmful political interference: so the crucial relation between economy and polity is a negative one, hinging on the harm which the political interference may do to the economy.

This *laissez faire* lesson is indeed present in Smith, and it is the one which has been most heeded. But it is very far from the full story. His Hidden Hand is at least as active and significant in political sociology. It is not, as you might expect, that a strong yet liberal state, by terminating feudal anarchy and permitting relatively untrammelled trade, has made the growth of wealth possible: the real connection is the other way round. The growth of manufacture and trade destroys the feudal order. On this point Smith, like his disciple Marx, is an economic determinist: it was the base, the relations of production, which allegedly modified the political superstructure:

... commerce and manufactures gradually introduced order and good government, and with them, liberty and security of individuals, among inhabitants of the country, who had before lived in a continual state of war with their neighbours, and of servile dependency on their superiors. This, though it has been the least observed, *is by far the most important of all their effects.*<sup>1</sup>

Adam Smith goes on to remark that, to his knowledge, only he and David Hume had noticed this supremely important connection.

The basic mechanics of this development are, in his view, simple. In barbarous conditions of low productivity and ineffective government, rural proprietors are, it appears, pushed into the employment of retainers for the simple and negative reason that there is nothing else on which they can spend their surplus. The resulting power-relations are ratified, not caused, by feudal law.

But happily, cities emerge in the interstices of the feudal system. Initially, their inhabitants are almost as servile as those of the countryside. But, as it is advantageous for the monarch to grant

<sup>1</sup> *The Wealth of Nations*, bk. III, ch. IV. The italics are mine.

them liberties in return for their becoming their own tax-farmers, they eventually prosper. The more the king is in conflict with the barons, the more he protects the townsmen. Eventually, they prosper so much as to supply the market with luxuries which seduce the barons and destroy their power. The barons, in Smith's view, seemed to have lacked all political sense, and were easily corrupted:

All for ourselves, and nothing for other people, seems in every age of the world, to have been the vile maxim of the masters of mankind. As soon, therefore, as they could find a method of consuming the whole value of their rent themselves, they had no disposition to share them with any other persons. For a pair of diamond buckles perhaps, or for something as frivolous and useless, they exchanged the maintenance, or what is the same thing, the price of the maintenance of a thousand men for a year, and with it the whole weight and authority which it could give them.<sup>1</sup>

Smith seems to have anticipated the Highland Clearances. His theory of the reduction of the feudal class by trinkets and baubles is not entirely convincing. Were they really such fools? Were they really willing to sacrifice their power base, even before it had been demonstrated to them that they were unable to use it anyway? A page earlier, Smith himself had commented that

It is not thirty years ago since Mr. Cameron of Lochiel, a gentleman of Lochaber in Scotland, without any legal warrant whatever . . . used . . . nevertheless to exercise the highest criminal jurisdiction over his own people . . . That gentleman, whose rent never exceeded five hundred pounds a year, carried, in 1745, eight hundred of his own people into the rebellion with him.

One suspects that such gentlemen did not begin to buy diamond buckles, even if available on £500 a year, till the failure of the rebellion had brought home to them the uselessness of their retainers. In a society in which you may not use your retainers, but can readily convert diamonds into other forms of wealth which do exercise social leverage, it is perfectly rational to prefer diamond buckles to thugs. The buckles were not a seduction of the gullible, they were a perfectly appropriate substitute for the old forms of influence, a good way of indulging a rational liquidity-preference.

Though this part of Smith's argument is unconvincing or incomplete, his main point is entirely cogent. It is this: if the laird uses his money to maintain a man, he thereby builds himself a power base. (Such rural power bases then set off the vicious circle of weak central government and local power.) If, on the

<sup>1</sup> *The Wealth of Nations*, bk. III, ch. iv.

other hand, he spends the same money on luxury articles, the multiplicity and anonymity of the craftsmen and traders who had contributed to the final products create no political bond between them and him whatsoever. The *kind* of trade he had in mind engenders no patronage links. Thus it is the anonymous, single-shot and many-stranded, nature of market relations which is the true foundation of liberty and good government.

... the great proprietors ... (h)aving sold their birthright ... for trinkets and baubles, fitter to be the playthings of children than the serious pursuits of men ... became as insignificant as any substantial burgher or tradesman ... A regular government was established in the country as well as in the city, nobody having sufficient power to disturb its operations in the one, any more than in the other.<sup>1</sup>

In the previous chapter, Smith expresses surprise that the rot, from the viewpoint of the feudal rulers and the monarchy, should ever have been allowed to start. Why should kings have granted those liberties to towns, which were eventually to shift the entire basis of the social order? A good question. His answer is that it was in their short-term interest. In anarchic circumstances, where taxes were hard to collect, urban centres, grateful for some protection, might be glad to pay them to the monarch voluntarily. They gained some protection and he was spared the toils and perils of tax-collection. Clearly this account of the involuntary conception of urban capitalism in the womb of feudalism was largely taken over into Marxism.

What is interesting, however, from our viewpoint, is a certain insularity on the part of Adam Smith. He is most sensitive to the difference of ethos and structure between Glasgow and the Highlands, between economically enterprising townsmen and economically timid lords (so that the former make far better rural developers); but ethnicity does not attract his attention. Neither the ethnic distinctiveness of the Highlands, nor the (far more significant) ethnic *continuity* between the burghers and government, elicit any comments from him.

Strangely enough, in one as well informed as he was, he does not comment on one extremely well-diffused device which had once been open to the monarch, when he granted trading privileges and even internal legal autonomy to the trading burghers. There exists a political device which will provide the ruler with a docile and taxable town, but will also ensure that, even when it prospers,

<sup>1</sup> Bk. III, ch. iv.

it can be no threat to him. Why not grant such rights only to ethnic, linguistic or religious minorities, preferably such as those endowed with a stigma, and thus excluded from political aspirations, and who can be relied upon to remain, in all probability, in great need of royal protection? This method had served well in other parts of the world, and prevented that conquest of rural society by the urban, in whose beneficial political consequences Smith rightly rejoiced. Perhaps the expulsion of the Jews made its contribution to the development of medieval England, by ensuring that the burghers who remained were culturally continuous with the majority and the rulers, and so unhampered by political disability.

Smith did notice some of the traits and contrasts which enter into our account of the new order: anonymity and mobility. We have seen his comments on the latter. Old families, he notes, are very rare in commercial countries. By contrast, amongst uncommercial nations, such as the Welsh, the Highlanders of Scotland, Arabs, or Tatars, they are very common. Why, he exclaims, a history written by a Tatar Khan (Abulghazi Bahadur Khan, brought back and translated by some Swedish officers imprisoned in Siberia during the Northern War and published in Leyden in 1726) contains scarcely anything *other than* genealogies! Here Smith may have been supplied with some misleading information: fortunes amongst Eurasian nomads are most unstable and precarious, due to vagaries of weather and the fates of flocks. This precisely is a key argument against the 'feudal' interpretation of their societies. They can only talk in terms of genealogies, but fortune is most fickle with their lineages for all that. However, Smith's overall conclusion was sound.

Having seen so much, why did he fail to link the new division of labour to ethnicity? I can only suggest that he was misled by the fact that the milieu he knew best and was most interested in had entered the new division of labour *already* well endowed with a very fair measure of ethnic homogeneity.

Perhaps the error of Durkheim is the same as Smith's: both see the progress of the division of labour in bipolar terms. It is not enough to contrast a well-developed division of labour with its absence, with mechanical solidarity and homogeneity. If we do so, we face the extraordinary paradox that it is in the modern world, within which in one sense the division of labour has gone further than anywhere else, that we also find the powerful drive towards cultural homogeneity which we call 'nationalism'. These societies

are not segmentary, yet they display a marked tropism towards cultural and educational similarity.

Hence, genuinely homogeneous traditional societies, displaying a 'mechanical solidarity' within which everyone does much the same and men do not differentiate themselves much from each other, must be contrasted with two quite distinct and rival options. One is a large society within which diverse groups of men do quite different things, and within which this group diversification is neatly confirmed by cultural differences between the groups in question. Groups complement each other and fit into an interdependent whole, but do not identify with each other culturally. The other is the kind of society which we have entered or which we are entering, in which a very special kind of acute diversity of professional activity is accompanied, surprisingly, by a strongly felt push towards cultural similarity, towards a diminution of cultural distance. Activities are diversified, but they are all codified in writing in a mutually intelligible idiom. Communication between men is intense (which is what interested Durkheim), and this presupposes that they have all learned the same code. This facilitates not merely their contacts, but also their mobility and job-changes: retraining is feasible if each skill is recorded in the same style and language. In this kind of society, cultural distance becomes politically and socially offensive. Once, it had been nothing of the kind—quite the reverse. It had helped everyone to know his place. Now, in a musical-chairs society, it would only inhibit a movement which is essential to the life of the society.

The phenomena in which the division of labour, alias organic solidarity, manifests itself, are borrowed by Durkheim from both kinds of division of labour at once.<sup>1</sup> He fails to distinguish them. Intensity of interaction, urbanization, the augmentation of the means of communication and transmission, specialization of function . . . The trouble was perhaps that Durkheim's treatment was abstract, theoretical, and unhistorical (whereas Renan was too historical and not theoretical enough). But the tacit implication of Durkheim's abstract approach is that all progressions towards the division of labour are basically alike; and that they are reasonably continuous. In other words, what is excluded is the possibility of radically diverse paths, leading to different *kinds* of division of labour, and also the exclusion of *jumps* in the history of the division of labour. In fact, bifurcations and discontinuities are most important for the understanding of the distinctive nature of modern, nationalism-prone society. Smith had been more

<sup>1</sup> *De la division du travail social* (PUF, 10th edn. 1978), bk. II, ch. II.

concrete, more historically anchored than Durkheim: but he also seemed to assume that laggard societies would either remain backward, or follow the same path of development as the one he had analysed.

Durkheim apparently had an aversion to Renan.<sup>1</sup> But he might have benefited from following Renan, at least so far as to spare more thought for Ottoman Turkey, or indeed for India and caste. In the chapter in which he considers the causes of the division of labour, he does reflect on Russia and China—but only to say that great populousness and genuine social density (an elusive notion) are not one and the same thing. Imperial China and Tsarist Russia, it would seem, are but cases of mechanical solidarity writ large. The same is implied for ancient Israel, notwithstanding the fact that, in the fourth century BC, it was more populous than contemporary Rome, which, however, was more developed. Durkheim's observations about Russia were at any rate congruent with the views of the Populists, though they were made in a very different spirit. The aversion of Kabyles for specialists (which can easily be paralleled in other societies of the same very broad region) is also invoked, and of course fits his argument admirably. The deep contempt and distaste which members of the dominant stratum of segmentary societies often feel for the specialists whom they tolerate in their midst (even on occasion for the religious specialists whom they nominally revere) reappears in the nineteenth-century romantic cult of the peasant and the simple soul, preached by intellectuals with a kind of self-hatred. Durkheim stood such populism on its head and endeavoured to give specialization a higher moral dignity, by making it the basis of a superior form of social cohesion. But he failed to see that it achieved such dignity only when professional specialization *and* mobility were fused with cultural standardization. The mobility made the standardization necessary; the standardization made specialization, at long last, morally acceptable. That is our social condition.

One feels he should have paid more heed to societies containing groupings such as castes or *millets*, in which the division of labour is great, but does *not* engender all that social density, that cumulative and historically continuous interaction, which is central to his picture. Both these great thinkers are, in their own way, unilinearists, or at any rate bipolarists. They argue in terms of one line of development, or of one grand opposition. From the Highlands (paralleled by Tatars, Arabs, and early European

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Steven Lukes, *Emile Durkheim, His Life and Work* (Allen Lane, London, 1973), pp. 71, 72.

barbarians) to Glasgow; or from the Hebrews, Kabyles, Greeks, and Romans to France. If this be an error and these two giants committed it, no wonder that variants of it reappear in so many of their successors.

Forms of complex division of labour can and do exist which, though they may help a social system to survive, do not engender a feeling of community—rather the reverse. The distinctive, mobile, and literacy-sustained division of labour, which does lead to the modern sense of national community, is historically eccentric. Some of Durkheim's perception about the role of interaction and 'density', misguidedly applied to complex societies in general, but in fact only applicable to their modern industrializing variant, seem to receive interesting confirmation from perhaps the most thorough attempt yet made to apply quantitative historical methods to early nationalism, namely the work of Miroslav Hroch.<sup>1</sup>

Hroch investigated the origins of early nationalists in a whole set of small European nations—Czechs, Lithuanians, Estonians, Finns, Norwegians, Flemings, and Slovaks. His findings<sup>2</sup> certainly confirm Durkheim's views, if we treat nationalist activists as indices of organic solidarity. But an interesting aspect of Hroch's conclusions is that these activists were most heavily concentrated in small towns with artisan productions, centres of prosperous agricultural production beginning to supply a distant market; but *not* in areas directly affected by industrialization proper. This finding does not destroy the theory linking nationalism and industrialization, but may well require some refinement of it.

Having consigned the Tsarist Russia of his day to a segmentary stage (remarking that 'the segmentary structure remains very marked, and hence, social development not very high'), one wonders what Durkheim would have made of the Soviet Union. Its national policy and aspirations, and to some extent its achievement, conspicuously highlight our central contention that the division of labour and 'organic solidarity' are multi-dimensional notions, and cannot be plotted along one single continuum. The professional division of labour has obviously increased enormously since the Tsarist days when the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of the Russian Empire were peasants. But, at the same time, public policy is obviously eager to counteract any *ethnic*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Die Vorkämpfer der nationalen Bewegung bei den kleinen Völkern Europas* (Universita Karlova, Prague, 1968), also Hroch's 'K otázce územní skladbyrodního hnutí', *Československý časopis historický* (1972), 513.

<sup>2</sup> *Die Vorkämpfer*, p. 168, 'K otázce', p. 535.

division of labour, and to strive for and demonstrate that the composition of diverse Soviet republics and nationalities is parallel rather than complementary. Consider for instance a passage from a volume which is the first of the fruits of a major study of ethnicity in the USSR, namely a study of the Tatar ASSR:

In the contemporary stage the social structure of the Tatar nation has attained correspondence with the all-Union social-class and social professional structure.

The approximation of the social structure of Tatars to that of the Russians expressed itself in the equalization of the proportions of basic social groups . . .<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, policy does not seek the extreme amnesia noted by Renan, but does very much aim at avoiding the kind of ethnic specialization which marked the Ottoman empire and perpetuated ethnic distinctiveness. If Soviet policy and aspirations in this sphere can be summed up briefly, it is that ethnicity should be cultural, and should not reflect structural differences.<sup>2</sup>

The aspiration is to endow the total society with the fluid type of organic solidarity, ensuring that ethnic-cultural boundaries within it should cease in any way to be structural markers. This would mean organic solidarity for the Union as a whole, and within each constituent republic, but mechanical solidarity for the relationship *between* republics. This aim is clearly reflected in the main orientation of Soviet social anthropology ('ethnography' in the local terminology): at a time when many western anthropologists react to the diminution of the archaic world by turning themselves into micro-sociologists, and making micro-structures into their speciality, their Soviet colleagues single out *culture* as their distinctive field in the modern world.<sup>3</sup>

The division of labour, or social complementarity, is then something pursued at the level of individuals, and avoided at the level of ethnic groups, of social sub-units. It is precisely this crucial distinction which fails to be highlighted by Durkheim's work. The alternatives facing mankind are not simply binary, between being alike and being members of similar subgroups on the one hand, and being both individually and collectively differentiated and complementary on the other. There are at least three options:

<sup>1</sup> *Sotsial'noe i natsional'noe*, ed. Yu. V. Arutyunyan, L. M. Drobizheva, O. I. Shkaratan (Nauka, Moscow, 1973), p. 311.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance L. M. Drobizheva, *Dukhovnaya obshchnost' narodov SSSR* (Mysl', Moscow, 1981); V. I. Kozlov, *Natsional'nosti SSSR* (Finansy i statistika, Moscow, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Yu. V. Bromley, *Etnos i etnografiya* (Nauka, Moscow, 1973).

being alike and members of similar groups; being different in virtue of being members of differing and complementary groups; and being different *individually*, in virtue of the absence of any significant sub-groups. Adam Smith thought primarily in terms of a transition from the first to the third stage, and largely ignored the second. Durkheim thought in terms of a transition from the first stage to something which combined features of the second and the third.

My main point is very simple. Advanced agrarian societies with a fairly stable technological equipment and status system, and industrial societies oriented towards growth and endowed with a fluid system of roles, *both* have a complex division of labour. But their form of social cohesion and their use of culture to enhance it, are almost diametrically opposed. Any sociological theory or typology which fails to highlight this difference cannot be adequate.

Bipolarism will not do in this field. The division of labour can only be plotted on an (at the very least) bifurcated diagram, with possibly only one starting point, but two quite different paths and end-points. Perhaps some paths lead through *both* kinds of complex division of labour. But a stable, agrarian-based division of labour has cultural consequences which are markedly different from those of a growth-addicted and industrial society. There is only one kind of society which really permits and fosters that anonymity and amnesia which Renan rightly singled out as an attribute of modern nations, and which overlaps with Durkheim's 'density'. It is engendered, not by the division of labour as such, but by one distinctive species of it. It may be that both Smith and Durkheim were misled by the fact that the society which engendered industrialism was already endowed, by some strange historical freak, with some of its cultural corollaries before the event.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this is indeed a clue to the understanding of the emergence of industrialism.

But to return to Radcliffe-Brown. He was right when he said that concern with society, and concern with culture, lead to quite different questions. But the problem of nationalism obliges us to ask both of them. We have to ask what kind of structure it is which does, and does not, lead to a self-conscious worship of culture, no longer mediated by an externalized Sacred, *and* to the compulsive standardization of culture within the political unit. To answer that question we need to operate with the Radcliffe-Brownian structure-culture opposition, but we also need to rethink radically our assumptions about the division of labour.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Alan MacFarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1978).