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Understanding Nationalism

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INTRODUCTION

NATIONALISM AND THE COGNITIVE SCIENCES

FROM THE RISE OF Nazism through the anticolonial movements of mid-twentieth century to the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the current war in Iraq, nationalism has been one of the most important social forces in recent history. Wimmer refers to nationalism as “the most powerful ideology in the history of modernity” (32). Dittmer and Kim cite Steven Rosen’s 1969 *Survey of World Conflicts*, which explains that, at the time, “nationalist and ethnic conflict accounted for some 70 percent of 160 significant disputes with a probability of culminating in large-scale violence.” A decade and a half later, the situation was much the same, perhaps worse. In connection with this, they cite Ernest Gellner’s 1983 *Nations and Nationalisms*, stating that “there may be as many as eight hundred irredentist movements in the contemporary world” (“In Search” 8).

By the end of the 1980s, however, it had become something of a commonplace among many writers that nationalism was dead. The main argument for the disappearance of nationalism was the growth of globalization. But the relation between the two is not that simple. For example,

in a 2003 essay, István Mészáros argued that global integration remains inseparable from a nation/state system. It may be true that the nation is less crucial as an economic unit than it was in the recent past. As Habermas put it, “Individual states are less and less able to control the national economies” (292). However, the insularity and uniformity of national economies was probably never as great as we commonly imagine. As Mann notes, “Transnational relations are not merely ‘postmodern’; they have always undercut the sovereignty of all states. . . . Neither the capitalist economy nor modern culture has ever been greatly constrained by national boundaries” (298; see also Amin 24–27).

More important, nationalist feelings and nationalist conflicts have hardly disappeared, nor has their intensity diminished. In 1991, Benedict Anderson wrote that “the ‘end of the era of nationalism,’ so long prophesied, is not remotely in sight. Indeed, nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time” (3). Wimmer notes that “in three-quarters of all wars worldwide between 1985 and 1992 ethno-nationalist factors predominated” (85). Around the same time, Michael Mann argued that “The nation-state is . . . not in any *general decline, anywhere*” (298; emphasis in original). In their 1995 collection, published at perhaps the height of the claims that nationalism is dead, François, Siegrist, and Vogel noted that there had been much talk about “the end of the nation” (“Die Nation” 22; my translation). However, they point to a striking countertrend—“nationalism again growing virulent throughout Europe” (13). Eight years later, Chaim Gans pointed out that “It is a well-known fact that cultural nationalism has enjoyed a revival in many parts of the world in the last fifteen years” (1). More recently still, Avieli Roshwald noted that “the break-up of the Soviet Union, the Yugoslav wars, China’s growing preoccupation with the Taiwan question, and the surge of collective emotion in the United States following the September 11 attacks have highlighted nationalism’s enduring power” (1). As I write, in 2008, the “end of the nation” seems no nearer than it did when Anderson was writing in 1991, or when Gellner was writing in 1983. People around the world continue to kill one another in the name of patriotism. To a great extent, the crucial allegiances that drive people to both heroic and despicable actions remain national. Human emotions, motivations, commitments, and consequent actions—these are what make nationalism a topic of continuing, indeed vital concern, not the insularity or autonomy of national economic systems. To take a prominent recent example, the U.S. government insisted that it must invade Iraq in order to protect its national interests. Many Americans supported the war precisely because they felt devotion to the nation.

Many Iraqis attack U.S. forces out of loyalty, not to Saddam Hussein, but to Iraq (see, for example, Jamail). Nationalism is hardly unimportant in these cases because the economies of the two nations are interrelated or because Iraq's national autonomy is limited by its relation to other nations.¹

As the distinction between economic autonomy and personal allegiance suggests, "nationalism" has many different meanings.² One critical task in discussing the theoretical and practical problems of nationalism is to explain just what constitutes nationalism. That is, in part, the task of the first chapter. However, it is important to set out a preliminary definition here, especially as my use of the word *nationalism* in some ways goes against common usage. Most authors today confine the idea of the nation to modern states (see Anthony Smith, "Nationalism" 191–92). Many confine it to specifically democratic states or at least states in which there is some assertion of popular self-determination. For example, Mitchison distinguishes nationalism from ethnicity most significantly by the "stress" on "popular political sovereignty" ("Some" 164). There is nothing wrong with this usage in itself. However, it leaves us without any straightforward way of referring to the attitudes expressed by, say, the eleventh-century Persian *Shâhnâme*, which celebrates Iran and lionizes those who are willing to fight and die in Iran's conflicts with its enemies. Moreover, the presumption of much writing on nationalism is that modern nationalism is discontinuous with the various personal commitments to states and state-based communities that went before.³ My contention is precisely the

1. Indeed, that economic interrelation and that political limitation are likely to enhance nationalist feeling—as anyone familiar with the history of colonialism could have predicted. For example, Dreyfus recently pointed out that there has been an upsurge in Iraqi nationalism, due in part to the attempt to partition Iraq, further degrading national political autonomy, and in part to "American pressure to force the partial privatization of Iraq's oil" (6), thus further degrading national economic autonomy. More generally, drawing on Hannah Arendt's work, Graham MacPhee writes that "the decline of the nation-state as the operative unit of political sovereignty" gives rise to a "tendency to manage the resultant social disorientation and crises by appealing to nationalism" (200–201). Along the same lines, David Sirota recently observed that "full-throated nationalism is now lodged in the ideological center of American Politics," in part as a response to "global economic policies written by, and for, a transnational elite" (32).

2. Indeed, the ambiguity of the term nationalism is recognized as a significant problem in discussions of the topic. See, for example, chapter 1 of David Brown and citations.

3. There are certainly exceptions to this. For example, David Kaplan writes that, "although they did not generate the mass horizontal allegiance of nationalism, many empires did foster a sense of a larger identity that transcended smaller scale clan, ethnic, or religious ties. For instance, the Roman Empire became more of a political community over time, leading to where residents felt themselves part of a common civilization and offered their willing allegiance" (39–40; see also Breuilly, "Approaches to Nationalism" 153 and, most significantly, Roshwald 8–44). I would only add that even "smaller scale clan, ethnic, or religious"

opposite.⁴ In my view, the similarities between modern, democratic nationalism and earlier commitments to states and state-based communities are more extensive and more consequential than the differences.

I use “nationalism,” then, to refer to *any form of in-group identification for a group defined in part by reference to a geographical area along with some form of sovereign government over that area*. This definition is roughly in keeping with general principles of international law. As summarized by Levi, “There is far-reaching agreement on some conditions that must exist before a group is entitled to being a state. There must be a territory, though it need not be contiguous. There must be a population, though its size seems to be irrelevant. And there must be a government in control of territory and population” (66). The main difference is that I am referring to a sense of identification rather than a political structure. I should explain that, by “geographical area,” I do not necessarily mean an area marked by strict boundaries. There can be considerable leeway in the degree to which boundaries are considered precise and fixed. Writers on nationalism often stress that strict boundaries are a modern phenomenon (see, for example, Anderson 170–78 on maps). This is significant, and points to one difference between the modern period and earlier periods.⁵ However, the vagueness of boundaries does not mean that earlier societies lacked a sense of national territory. By “sovereign government,” I mean a structure of social authority that supersedes other forms of social authority when conflicts arise (e.g., there is a structure of social authority defined by a family, but in cases of conflict with the legal system, the authority of the legal system supersedes that of the family). Sovereignty in this sense need not involve any form of popular participation in governance. Finally, I take it to be obvious that the sovereignty in question also need not be actual or current. It may be an imagined or desired form of sovereignty. Thus, nationalism may inspire an anticolonial movement to establish a state.

As I am using the term, then, nationalism has been around as long as there have been complex, hierarchically structured, nonnomadic societies.

identifications share crucial features with nationalism. Cognitively, the differences are almost insignificant.

4. I do not mean that the specific nations formed today are continuous with earlier ethnic groups (cf. Anthony Smith *Ethnic*). That is sometimes the case, sometimes not. But, either way, it is irrelevant to my concerns. My point is that the general structures are continuous in relying on the same cognitive processes and involving the same fundamental principles of social psychological dynamics.

5. On the other hand, boundaries are not absolute, even in the modern period. There is much more fluidity and complexity in our geographical identifications than one might imagine, as the essays collected by Herb and Kaplan make clear.

Moreover, it has always followed the cognitive and affective principles of in-group/out-group division.⁶ It is very likely that the development of print, mass literacy, and other factors have greatly expanded the extent and intensity of nationalist feeling. Moreover, that expansion was far from insignificant. It made nationalism a popular force in modern society, a force with consequences that engage large bodies of people for extended periods. Writers interested in broad geopolitical patterns may reasonably restrict their use of the term nationalism to modernity, when the effects of nationalist ideas and feelings became particularly widespread and systematic. But, if print and other factors contributed to the scope and durability of nationalist feeling, they did not create such feeling, giving it its first appearance on earth. They necessarily bore on preexisting cognitive and affective processes. My interest is in those processes—the motives that drive nationalism and the patterns of understanding and inference that organize it. Thus, I necessarily view nationalism as operating over a much longer time scale. Even if nationalist feelings and ideas in the past were less expansive and stable, and less systematically consequential for political economy, they are continuous with modern nationalism. Indeed, without these prior motivations and understandings, it would be very difficult to see how modern nationalist motives and understandings could have developed, no matter how much literacy spread or what other technological and social changes occurred.

The mention of “cognitive and affective processes” leads us to the topic of theory and to the fundamental theoretical presuppositions of this work, presuppositions drawn from cognitive neuroscience. Up to now, the academic study of nationalism has been largely historical. Certainly, historical research is crucial. However, it is insufficient in two ways. First, it indicates why nationalism changes, why it becomes widespread in certain periods, why some nationalist movements succeed and others fail. But it does not indicate why nationalism is possible in the first place, how it has any existence at all that may then be affected by historical change.⁷ The second problem is related. History leaves out the micro-level that must always underlie social trends.⁸ Specifically, research on the human mind and the

6. On these principles see my *Culture* 95–104 and citations.

7. For example, Snyder brilliantly analyzes factors that contributed to differences between Belarussian and Lithuanian nationalisms. But these factors would not, so to speak, have any effect on stones. They have effects on people, and they do so because of human cognitive and emotional processes—processes that simply do not fall within the scope of historical works, such as Snyder’s.

8. As Bloom puts it, “whatever the configuration of socio-economic and political realities, and no matter how powerful and determining they may appear, there always remains the

human brain suggests that a great deal of our social behavior is shaped by aspects of our cognitive architecture. In order to have significant consequences, nationalism must work itself out through attention, inference, feeling, understanding, and other aspects of cognition and emotion that are repeated with adequate consistency across individuals. It is, after all, the ideas and actions of individuals that, collectively, make up a functional (or, for that matter, dysfunctional) society. Conversely, no social patterns can develop if they would be inconsistent with the structures and processes that govern human thought and action.

More exactly, in considering human cognitive architecture (i.e., the general organization of the human mind as it emerges from the operation of the human brain), we need to distinguish structures, processes, and contents. Structures are the basic systems that organize the mind. For example, there are perceptual systems (visual, auditory, etc.), memory systems (for meanings, personal experiences, skills), and so forth. Processes are the operations performed by these systems. Thus, the storing and retrieval of personal memories in “episodic memory,” the development of meanings (e.g., the averaging of individual experiences that generates prototypes), and the circulation of information in “working memory” are all cognitive processes. Finally, contents are the objects of processes. Thus, individual episodic memories (which are stored or retrieved in episodic memory) are contents, as are particular skills, particular semantic prototypes, and so on. Among contents, we need to distinguish those that are representational and those that are procedural. Representational memories are possible objects of certain processes, prominently including attentional focus. Procedural memories are possible objects of other processes—most important, those that involve enactment. More simply, representations are things we might think about whereas procedures are things we might do or, rather, the skills that allow us to do things.

Structures and processes are universal. At least some contents are universal as well. Technically, then, studies of nationalism have focused almost entirely on contents. Moreover, even that study has been rather narrow, for it has concentrated almost entirely on variable contents rather than cross-culturally constant contents. This is unsurprising for cognitive reasons. Our minds are designed to focus our attention on difference, on

psychological dimension” (4; emphasis in original). Bloom goes on to say that there has been a “lack of clarity” regarding this dimension (4). In responding to this situation, Bloom himself draws on psychoanalytic and other theories that, however insightful, were formulated before the recent advances in cognitive neuroscience and related fields. The same point applies to David Brown, who states bluntly that “the psychological dimension [of nationalism] demands more attention” (23).

variation. As Frijda points out, “Strangeness per se motivates cognitive activity: It is one of the situational meaning components shaping the feature of interestingness” (214). Specifically, our “orienting reaction,” which includes attentional focus, occurs “in response to novel or unexpected stimuli” (131; see also, Kahneman and Miller 148, on when we ask “why questions”). But one cannot understand variable contents without understanding the larger architectural principles that encompass them. Studying the different histories of nationalisms without understanding their shared cognitive underpinnings is in some ways like studying vocabulary items in different languages (largely the result of historical accidents) without studying the universal principles of linguistic structure.⁹

In the following pages, I will, of course, consider cultural and historical particulars. Moreover, when discussing specific cases, my primary interest is in the modern period and particularly in the present. Again, in my view, nationalism is longstanding, even if it assumes different forms in different periods. However, I will not be focusing on ancient nationalisms. Rather, when I turn to particular cases—ancient or modern—I will be exploring nationalisms that have had significant impact on the world today. Indeed, my focus is even narrower than this suggests. The bulk of my analyses take up current American nationalism, because it is simply the most globally consequential nationalism right now. Nationalism in, say, the Yüan dynasty is of interest primarily to a particular group of Sinologists.¹⁰ In contrast, contemporary American nationalism—particularly in a time of unbounded war¹¹—is of concern to virtually everyone on the planet. I take up analyses of other nations only when there are no suitable American instances of relevant magnitude. Here, too, I have selected cases that have had significant impact on the world as it is now.

On the other hand, my overriding concern throughout the following pages is not with historical, cultural, or other particulars, even in the case

9. In saying this, I do not mean to imply that historically particular studies of nationalism are not worthwhile. Quite the contrary. For example, I have found the particular analyses of writers such as Breuille (*Nationalism*), Nairn, Snyder, and others to be greatly illuminating. To continue with the analogy, it is crucial to know the different meanings of vocabulary items. The point is simply that one does not have a very good linguistic theory—or even a very good comprehension of the broader semantic structure of a particular language—if one does not also understand the universal principles of speech production and comprehension, including the universal principles of semantics.

10. I have discussed some aspects of nationalism during the Yüan dynasty in “Narrative Universals, National Sacrifice.” The topic is no less intellectually important than current U.S. nationalism. But it is less politically consequential at the moment.

11. Led by policy makers who have been characterized as “radical nationalists” (see Chomsky *Hegemony* 37 and citations).

of the United States. Rather, my primary interest is in the common principles, the structures, processes, and shared contents that make nationalism possible in the first place. Indeed, even in the case of differences, my main concern is with what principles govern these differences, what larger patterns are instantiated in the variations. For example, I consider why Germany and India developed sacrificial versions of nationalism so extensively. I pay some attention to why these versions were different from one another. However, I am concerned, first of all, with what conditions were shared by these societies. My contention is that a focus on common principles provides us not only with a deeper understanding of nationalism at the micro-level—one that goes to the cognitive substrate of the politics—but a more adequate understanding at every level. In other words, it helps us to explain a range of macro-level, thus apparently noncognitive, phenomena. These range from the instability of nationalism (in the face of subnationalisms) to the general failure of movements for international solidarity. Indeed, here as elsewhere, I believe that attention to shared patterns is the only means by which we can come to understand historical particularity and cultural difference. Historical particularity and cultural difference are not matters of absolute alienness and singularity. They are distinct specifications of common principles. Without those common principles, we could make no sense of any historically and culturally different society. Such a society would be simply opaque to us.

The first chapter, then, presents a general account of identity formation. It begins by drawing a fundamental distinction between categorial and practical identity. Roughly, practical identity comprises what we do or can do. It is the total of our capacities, propensities, interests, routines—most important, those that bear on our interactions with others. Categorial identity is our inclusion of ourselves in particular sets of people, our location of ourselves in terms of in-group/out-group divisions.¹² The chapter goes on to explore the nature of categorial identity, its motivational force, and its relation to practical identity.¹³ It considers the ways in which categorial

12. The general distinction between practical and categorial identity is both obvious (at least once stated) and highly consequential. Nonetheless, it seems to have been almost entirely ignored by writers on identity. For an overview of theories of identity, which tend to combine these in unclear and shifting ways, see Monroe, Hankin, and Van Vechten.

13. One reader of my manuscript asked about the relation of categorial and practical identity to individual identity. We use *individual identity* in two senses. One refers to one's activities and capacities. This is the same as practical identity—though, in discussing practical identity, I stress the interpersonal integration of people's activities and capacities rather than their private idiosyncrasies (which may be emphasized in treatments of individual identity). The more common use of individual identity refers to one's self-conscious sense of being the same individual—thus one's sense of continuity in memories, feelings, interests, and so forth.

identification is bound up with the articulation of group norms, the formation of out-group prototypes, and the development of in-group hierarchies. It then sets out to define nationalism as a particular form of categorial identification. The chapter concludes by broaching the question of how we hierarchize different categorial identifications in cases of conflict. Suppose Smith's religious identity conflicts with his or her national identity. How does it happen that Smith fights on the side of his or her nation against his or her coreligionists (or vice versa)? I argue that the hierarchization of identity categories (i.e., their ordering in terms of motivational force) is governed by specifiable parameters. I isolate five that are particularly important: salience, functionality (with respect to the distribution of goods, services, and opportunities in society), opposability (i.e., the degree to which an in-group category is contrasted with one or more out-group categories), durability, and affectivity (or emotional force).¹⁴

The second chapter goes through these parameters in sequence, considering how ordinary routines of daily life as well as unusual events serve to enhance the salience, functionality, opposability, durability, and affectivity of one or another identity category. Specifically, the chapter examines what I call "techniques of nationalization," which is to say, the means of hierarchizing identity categories in such a way as to make the national category preeminent. In connection with this, it considers social phenomena ranging from flag ceremonies to national legal systems. The argument of the chapter is that societies such as the United States are pervaded by practices that enhance the motivational force of national identifications. In keeping with this, the chapter focuses particularly on the motivationally crucial parameter of affectivity.

This is related to categorial identity in referring to one's ideas about oneself. However, it is different also, for the ideas, in this case, concern one's distinctiveness, not what one has in common with others. One's sense of individual identity is an important topic (and one closely related to narrative, cognition, and emotion). But it is also the topic for a different book.

14. Relatively little work has been done on emotion and categorial identity, especially from a cognitive perspective. Consider, for example, the collection on *Identity and Emotion*, edited by Bosma and Kunnen. Most of the chapters take up identity in a very different sense. They bear first of all on an emergent, experiential, and active sense of self, which is related to practical identity. They do not focus on the idea of oneself as defined by a particular group category. Indeed, even treatments of emotions in politics have tended to focus on a small number of particular issues (for an overview, see G. E. Marcus; for a range of specific topics see Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta, *Passionate Politics*). François, Siegrist, and Vogel have put together a fascinating volume, *Nation und Emotion*. The essays have a great deal to say about some ways of fostering nationalism (e.g., particular national festivals) in their specific historical contexts. However, despite the title, there is little systematic treatment of particular emotions and their precise function in nationalist politics. (They also presuppose the "social, cultural and historical character of emotions" [François, Siegrist, and Vogel, "Die Nation" 20; my translation], which is, I believe, incompatible with the neurocognitive evidence.)

The second chapter leaves out two crucial factors in the way we think about and respond to nations. First, nations are obviously vast and multifarious entities, far too large for us to encounter directly. As Benedict Anderson famously put it, the nation is an “imagined community,” not an experiential one. Our inability to know the nation in a personal way inhibits our thought about nationalist undertakings or possibilities and, even more important, our emotional relation to the nation. In general, when faced with an abstract entity that no one can experience, we turn to models. We compare what is vast and amorphous to something that is more concrete and familiar. In short, we use metaphor. Chapter 3 considers the nationalist operation of “conceptual metaphor,” metaphor that organizes our thought and, in some cases, orients our feeling as well.

More exactly, in this chapter, I argue that there are a few standard metaphors for nationhood or for a citizen’s relation to the nation. Such metaphors may derive from the distinguishing characteristics of nationalism as opposed to other types of identity category. Perhaps the most prominent of these distinguishing characteristics is the connection of nationalism to the land. Religion or class is not bound up with a specific territory in the way that nationhood is. In keeping with this, one of the most common types of nationalist metaphor parallels the citizen’s relation to the national territory with a plant’s relation to the earth—for example, through the image of roots. Metaphors of this sort cultivate a sense of belonging to the nation and its culture, as well as the national territory itself. A second prominent source for metaphors of national identity is the converse of this—distinguishing characteristics of competing identity categories. The purpose of these metaphors is, presumably, to preempt the force of those competing categories. Thus, one common metaphor for the nation is the family. This works to take over some of the intellectual and emotive power of ethnic categorization, which is distinguished from class, religion, or even nation by the putatively common ancestry of members of the ethnic group. Prominent cases of this in nationalism include the metaphor of the founding fathers. The third domain from which we commonly draw nationalist metaphors is the paradigm of human unity—the individual. This serves in an obvious way to occlude divisions within the nation and to foster a feeling of oneness. It gives rise to such common metaphors as “the voice of the people” and “the will of the nation.” The chapter includes examples from a range of sources, including Abraham Lincoln’s “Address at the Dedication of the Gettysburg National Cemetery.” It ends with an analysis of metaphor in one of the most prominent national songs in the United States, “My Country ‘tis of Thee.”

Metaphor is crucial, both conceptually and emotionally. However, it is, so to speak, temporally localized. It gives us a way of thinking about and responding to an object or situation. But nationalism involves extensively elaborated sequences of events and actions undertaken in the pursuit of goals. This leads us to the second crucial factor left out from chapter 2—narrative.¹⁵ When we think about national goals and actions in pursuit of those goals, we think in terms of stories.¹⁶ Like metaphor, narrative

15. Some readers of this manuscript have been concerned that I have opposed metaphors and narratives too sharply. Of course, metaphors are not entirely separate from narratives. Indeed, the two are often integrated. This occurs most obviously in allegory. But it is common elsewhere as well. My point here is simply that examining metaphors as such does not tell us much about the narrative structures through which complex causal sequences are organized in nationalist thought and action. For example, *THE NATION IS A MOTHER* may be taken up in an Irish nationalist story where, say, the hero's mother is kidnapped by British soldiers and the hero must rescue her. In this case, the history of British colonialism in Ireland is simultaneously metaphorized and emplotted. The basic narrative structure includes a set of characters—a protagonist, a family of the protagonist, and an antagonist. More important, it includes a series of events or conditions—normalcy, followed by kidnapping, followed by anxiety and suffering, followed by rescue (and perhaps punishment of the antagonist), followed by normalcy. That basic narrative structure may be combined with the metaphor in that the metaphor may be used as one means of specifying and developing the narrative structure. Thus, it may lead to an author making the mother the one who is kidnapped; it may lead to the specification of the captors as British, and so on. Alternatively, one might say that the narrative structure allows one to expand the metaphor to a series of historical events. It allows us to think of colonial conquest as kidnapping the mother; it facilitates our imagination of achieving independence in terms of freeing the mother. However, either way, the metaphor itself does not produce this sequence of events. The point is clear when we simply recognize that the kidnapping narrative structure may be used literally or may be metaphorized in countless other ways (e.g., a wartime draft may be allegorized as kidnapping; a successful deceptive electoral campaign may be allegorized as kidnapping, and so on). Conversely, the metaphorical structure *THE NATION IS A MOTHER* may be narrativized in various ways (e.g., she may be brutalized by a landlord who takes all her money so that she can barely feed her children; she may be a promiscuous woman who sleeps with a wealthy man for her own benefit while ignoring her hungry children, and so on—note also that *THE NATION IS A MOTHER* may be specified to mean that the land, the citizens, or the government is a mother). In short, I am not claiming that metaphors and narratives are antithetical. They are simply different and thus need to be discussed separately. A similar point could be made about almost any mental contents or processes. For example, remembering the past and imagining the future are not wholly unrelated activities. Indeed, they are closely interrelated. But we would not, for that reason, want to act as if they were the same.

16. Over the past decade or so, researchers have devoted increasing attention to the relation between narrative and nationalism. However, this attention has for the most part focused on isolating nationalist concerns in specific narratives (e.g., particular novels). This is certainly valuable, but it does not really tell us much at a theoretical level. Sometimes researchers have asserted more general connections between narrative and nationalism. However, in these cases, the use of the term *narrative* often seems overly broad. For example, the “narratives” discussed by some writers seem to be largely a matter of causal inference. As a result, the narrative nature of nationalism seems to entail the somewhat banal observation that nationalism involves causal inference. There are certainly valuable treatments of narrative and

too guides the way we understand and respond to the nation. Moreover, as with metaphor, there are patterns to our use of narrative structures. In the fourth chapter, I consider first of all the implications of general narrative organization. For example, stories have beginnings and endings. The point may seem banal; however, it has consequences for the way we think about causality. Consider the most intense and destructive form of national conflict, war. We explain a war by telling the story of the war. The story has a particular starting point. In real life, wars are the result of multiple, temporally staggered precedents that are themselves the result of multiple, temporally staggered precedents, and so on *ad infinitum*. The bombing of the World Trade Center was a heinous crime. But it was not an absolute beginning. It was preceded by U.S. actions, and actions by other nations and by other subnational and transnational groups. Similarly, there are no real endings. Causes produce effects that are themselves causes of further effects. Consequences multiply endlessly. Thus, the conflict in Afghanistan continues, despite its supposed conclusion. It does not, and indeed cannot, have a storybook ending. Nonetheless, we tend to think about wars as if they have such endings. This bounding of wars within story structure has concrete effects, not only on people's understanding of historical events, but on their actions of supporting and pursuing war as well. In short, even at this general level, the emplotment of nationalism is highly consequential.

Of course, the effects of narrative structure do not stop with these very general or "schematic" features, properties that are common to stories simply in that they are stories. Narratives fall into more particular categories or genres as well. I conclude chapter 4 by outlining the three most common narrative prototypes worldwide.¹⁷ These are heroic, sacrificial, and romantic tragicomedy. The heroic structure involves a sequence of events bearing on the usurpation of in-group authority and a sequence of events concerning threats posed by an out-group. The sacrificial structure concerns some sin by the in-group, the resulting devastation of the in-group society, and the necessity of a sacrifice to end that devastation. Finally, the romantic

nationalism (see, for example, Khalidi, Reichmann, and Mary Green). Moreover, there are illuminating explorations of narrative and other aspects of politics. For example, the essays in Dennis Mumby's collection, *Narrative and Social Control*, help to explain such topics as the operation of conformity in the workplace and the social communication of racist belief. But this research does not appear to have significant theoretical consequences for the relation between narrative (its distinguishing forms, structural principles, etc.) and nationalism. There are only very rare exceptions, such as Kevin Foster's treatment of romantic quest structures in the Malvinas/Falkland Islands War.

17. On the universality of these prototypes, see my *The Mind and Its Stories*.

structure is a fairly ordinary love story in which society (often in the form of oppressive parents) prevents two lovers from uniting. I argue that these universal structures are the most common structures by which nationalism is emplotted. I should emphasize here that they are not the only structures by which nationalism may be emplotted. Our narrative capacities are not determined by these three prototypes. However, these structures are the ones that recur across cultures and across historical periods. They appear to guide the majority of canonical literary narratives worldwide.

The reason for the predominance of these prototypes is simple. We may tell stories about anything—and, indeed, we do. I come home from the grocery store and tell my wife how the price of feta cheese has gone up and how this led me to wonder whether or not I would buy it. The story is interesting enough to my wife (or at least she feels compelled to pretend that it is interesting enough). However, it is probably not interesting enough for, say, most readers of this book. Individually, among intimates, many narrative topics and developments will engage us, perhaps even motivate us to action. However, as one moves out from one's circle of family and friends, the list of engaging and motivating topics and developments will diminish. More precisely, narratives are formed around happiness goals. For example, heroic tragicomedy draws on the happiness goal of social prestige and power (for the in-group over out-groups and for an individual within an in-group). My story about the grocery store draws on the happiness goal of getting cheese that I like. There are two crucial variables here: (1) the extent to which the goal is shared by different people and (2) the importance of the goal for individuals who share it. The goal of acquiring social prestige and power is widely shared and it is important for most people. The goal of getting feta cheese is not widely shared and it is not all that weighty even for those who have it. Stories are likely to have greater emotional force and motivational impact for larger groups of people for longer periods of time if they concern goals that are important and widely shared. For this reason (and due to the nature of our emotion systems), a limited number of narrative prototypes are likely to have disproportionate force across cultures and across time periods. Drawing on narrative and psychological research, I have argued that there are three such prototypes. Since these are the prototypes that have the broadest and most enduring force in general, they should also be the prototypes that have the broadest and most enduring force in the emplotment of nationalism in particular.

Of course, a number of writers have referred to a narrower set of narratives that appear to be consequential for social ideas and practices. In some cases, they refer to particular stories. Particular stories that have

social impact need not conform to one of the prototypes. In this way, a particular book may come to have great social influence outside the narrative structures I am considering. On the other hand, more often than not, such paradigmatic works do conform to standard narrative structures. For example, the (obviously pervasive) Christian story of the fall and redemption of humanity is a highly prototypical sacrificial narrative; the Hindu epic *Rāmāyaṇa*—a socially and politically crucial text in India—combines highly prototypical heroic and romantic narratives.

Indeed, the point holds even for narratives that appear very narrowly bound to cultural and historical particulars. For example, James Phelan refers to “cultural narratives,” such as the Barbie doll being a dangerous role model for young girls (9). What could be more nonuniversal than a narrative structure centering on a particular toy manufactured at a particular time and place? But, on reflection, we may decide that it is not so simply culturally bound. (Phelan is not claiming that it is simply culturally bound. However, I think most readers would be likely to take this as a good instance of a nonuniversal narrative.) First of all, the structure may be more aptly referred to as a narrative of female emaciation, for which the Barbie doll serves simply as one prominent instance. Needless to say, this narrative, too, is not universal. But it is more clearly related to an ethical element of the sacrificial prototype, an element according to which the ethics of self-sacrifice are bound up with self-denial of food (see my *The Mind* 200 for discussion). In conjunction with this universal prototype, a social ideology that assigns women a role of greater self-sacrifice may contribute to the development of cultural narratives bearing on female emaciation. In this way, even such apparently particularistic structures as the Barbie narrative may be seen as deriving at least part of their social force from their relation to universal prototypes.

Of course, one might wonder if “Dangerous Role Model Barbie” is aptly considered a narrative at all. Barbie comes to serve as a paradigm or ideal of female beauty. That ideal presumably has consequences for one’s behavior (as ideals do generally). Does the sequence of establishing and pursuing an ideal truly constitute a narrative? I agree with Phelan that it does. Put very crudely, the “Dangerous Role Model Barbie” narrative runs something like this. Young women form an ideal of female beauty by exposure to Barbie dolls, emaciated fashion models, and so on. They compare their own bodies to this ideal. Finding themselves too thick—even when they are at a healthy weight—they begin to diet. In some cases, this dieting becomes obsessive, even to the point where some young women risk (or succumb to) starvation.

To understand why this constitutes a narrative, we need to define “story.” Like other words of ordinary language, “story” may be defined at different levels of specificity. The most basic levels give bare minimal conditions for being a story. But we do not consider all stories to be equally good instances of “storyness,” even if they satisfy the minimal conditions. In other words, not all stories are equally prototypical. One fairly basic level of story definition would be as follows. A story is a sequence of non-normal, causally related events and actions that emerge from normalcy and return to normalcy. In other words, we have certain expectations about the way the world will ordinarily operate. We have a possible story whenever things do not happen the way they are supposed to. Driving to work, I expect to encounter some red and some green lights. If I encounter all green or all red lights, that is abnormal and I have the seed of a story. I begin with the normal world when I am at home. I return to the normal sequence of things when I arrive at work. However, in the interim, I experience a series of events that are non-normal. A slightly more prototypical level would delimit stories in the following way. We have a story when an agent desires the achievement of some goal and passes through a series of nonordinary events and actions before achieving that goal or establishing that the goal is not achievable. (Either achieving the goal or finding it to be unachievable should have the function of returning the agent’s situation to normalcy.) Note that the goal is presumably something that will contribute to the protagonist’s happiness. In consequence, the middle of the story—in which the protagonist lacks that goal—should be emotionally aversive for the protagonist. This is the level at which “Dangerous Role Model Barbie” is a narrative. It involves a goal of achieving a certain physical ideal, an aversive emotional condition (disgust with one’s appearance), and pursuit of the goal (through dieting). A peculiar thing about this narrative is that it rarely has a comic conclusion, a conclusion in which the young woman achieves the goal and lives happily ever after. Rather, dieting itself becomes “normal,” if more tragic consequences do not follow.

Beyond the types of story considered thus far, we have a still more prototypical story when the goal, the events, and the actions are emotionally engaging, not only for the protagonist, but for readers or listeners as well. We therefore have the most highly prototypical stories when the goals are standard happiness prototypes. This begins to account for the existence of the three cross-cultural narrative prototypes, for these are linked with happiness prototypes—enduring romantic union for the romantic prototype; individual and in-group power and esteem for the heroic prototype; plenty of life’s necessities in the sacrificial prototype.

Of the three cross-cultural prototypes, it should come as no surprise that heroic tragicomedy is the default form for nationalism. In other words, our tendency is first of all to imagine our nation—its organization, its relation to enemies, its past, its future—through a heroic structure. In particular conditions, people shift to a sacrificial or romantic mode. Specifically, when the society has been devastated and there is no longer any hope of social domination over out-groups, nationalists may take up the sacrificial structure. When the nation is divided by subnational oppositions, then the romantic mode may become important, as writers envision the union of the subnational groups through stories of romantic love.¹⁸ On the other hand, the romantic plot is strongly individualistic and antihierarchical. Thus, it often works against nationalism, opposing identity divisions between in- and out-groups and opposing in-group hierarchies. As a result, the romantic structure may operate, not only as a narrative of national reconciliation, but as a narrative of internationalism. Put differently, it may serve as a means of opposing national divisions just as it may serve as a means of opposing subnational divisions. Indeed, the logic of the romantic plot seems to push inevitably toward undermining categorial identifications of any sort, including national identifications (and toward challenging group hierarchies of any sort).

In referring to subnational reconciliation, I mentioned “stories of romantic love.” One very common way of opposing subnational divisions is through the literary representation of romantic love that crosses such subnational boundaries (e.g., love uniting a Hindu and a Muslim in India or an African American and a European American in the United States). The nationalist use of literature is not confined to romantic plotment. Heroic and sacrificial forms of nationalism are also frequently expressed in such explicit, fictional stories—narrative poems, plays, movies, and so forth. It may be less obvious that narrative structures of all three sorts serve to emplot histories as well,¹⁹ guiding our selection of historical details, orienting our causal inferences, and so forth. Perhaps most important, these structures even provide implicit organizing principles for nationalist policies and practices. This is particularly striking because, unlike fictions or histories, policies and practices do not have an obvious, overt narrative

18. As far as I am aware, this is the only one of the three patterns that has been discussed by other writers. Specifically, Doris Sommer has treated this topic in relation to Latin American literature.

19. The emplotment of history was explored by Hayden White in his path-breaking *Metahistory*. I am deeply indebted to White’s work, though my own understanding of the key narrative structures, and the way they operate in nationalist thought and feeling, is obviously different from White’s.

organization. Put differently, when we look at a policy statement, we do not commonly see a plot (at least not in the narratological sense). In the final chapters, I consider the three narrative prototypes in turn, examining cases of both explicit narratives (in stories and/or histories) and implicit narratives (in policy statements and related works).

Chapter 5 takes up heroic emplotment. It begins with some general points about the nationalist operation of narrative genres. Specifically, all three genres operate at two levels. We might refer to these as the “prototypical” and “exemplary” levels. The prototypes just outlined provide general, cross-culturally constant structures for imagining the nation. More exactly, the heroic prototype provides a general structure for imagining the internal social hierarchy of the nation and the relation of the nation to its external enemies. The sacrificial prototype provides the broad principles for imagining social devastation and regeneration. The romantic prototype provides guidelines for imagining national division and reconciliation. But emplotments do not proceed solely from prototypes. They draw on particular, exemplary narratives as well. These exemplars, which differ from nation to nation, are especially important in the case of heroic emplotment. Specifically, nations often adopt one or two ancient heroic plots as paradigms for nationalist thought and action.

After briefly treating these general issues, chapter 5 turns to a paradigm of this sort, the story of King David. This story illustrates the heroic structure and its nationalist use remarkably well. It has obvious importance for contemporary Israeli nationalism, including the Israeli relation to Palestine and the Palestinian people. But it is also consequential for a range of European and American nationalisms, including that of the United States. In the case of the United States, it seems clear that biblical stories have had greater national importance than any subsequent epic or related narratives. (For example, no work of American literature—heroic or otherwise—has had anything like the influence of the Bible on American political life.) Moreover, the importance of biblical stories has only increased in recent years. Indeed, they are central to the increasingly influential Christian nationalist movements. As Goldberg points out, “Veterans of the Christian nationalist movement occupy positions throughout the federal bureaucracy, making crucial decisions about our national life” (16). Regarding Israel itself, Moyers notes that millions of conservative Christian Americans actively support Israel because of their deep belief in biblical narratives. More generally, today the nationalisms of the United States and Israel are intertwined, particularly in foreign policy. One could even argue that there is no single issue of greater importance for American, or global, peace than the resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

In the second part of the chapter, I turn to a recent American film, *Independence Day*. This is, of course, an explicit, fictional narrative, and a highly popular one—indeed, it is one of the twenty top grossing films of all time in the United States.²⁰ I have chosen this film for two main reasons. First, it is different from the biblical story of David in obvious ways. It is modern, popular, and enacted rather than ancient, high canonical, and written. But it shows us the same prototypical structure operating toward nationalist ends. On the other hand, while the prototypical structure is shared, there are clear differences in the details of the story. Some of these are incidental. (Stories have to have some differences.) But some are not incidental. Some are systematic and politically consequential. This leads to my second reason for choosing this film. It allows us to explore the particularity of U.S. nationalism. While nationalism follows common principles everywhere, those principles are always particularized in distinct ways. Thus, the nationalism of the United States is not identical with that of Israel or any other country. It has a different historical development, and a different cultural and political context. *Independence Day* presents the heroic plot in a highly prototypical form—hence its similarity to the story of David. But it also specifies that form in a way that reveals distinctive aspects of U.S. nationalism. (A third, less important reason for choosing the film is that it draws on—or at least alludes to—the story of David. Though the connections are very limited, they do suggest the paradigmatic status of the David story in American nationalism.)

The treatment of *Independence Day*, with its specifically American nationalism, prepares us for the third section of the chapter, which examines the tacit heroic emplotment of the nation in George W. Bush's national speech three days after the September 11 bombings.

Before continuing on to the sacrificial plot, I briefly treat the “epilogue of suffering.” A surprising part of explicit heroic stories (discussed at length in chapter 4 of my *The Mind*) is the addition of an epilogue that questions the heroic actions and values of the rest of the work. This epilogue typically presents the hero as suffering from remorse for the innocents killed during the heroic conflict. It is clear that such epilogues occur outside explicit stories as well (e.g., in nationalist policies). To illustrate the point, I consider an historically consequential, public instance of this epilogue. The Winter Soldier Investigation took place in January and February of 1971. It convened over one hundred witnesses to war crimes in Vietnam. The witnesses were primarily soldiers who had often taken part

20. See <http://www.the-movie-times.com> (accessed June 2, 2006).

in these crimes, under orders from superior officers. In 1972, a selection of these testimonies was edited by the Vietnam Veterans Against the War and published by Beacon Press. Of course, this book does not form a single, coherent narrative. However, when one is aware of the structure of the epilogue of suffering, it is easy to recognize that the work does indeed manifest an opposition not only to the Vietnam War, but to its heroic emplotment. Moreover, it manifests traces of its own narrative organization as well—and these traces follow the structure of the epilogue.

Chapter 6 considers sacrificial narratives. The military preeminence of the United States has meant that the United States has never been in a position where sacrificial emplotment became nationally significant. I have therefore taken up two diametrically opposed and historically consequential cases from other parts of the world—one from Germany, and one from India.

Some versions of sacrificial nationalism involve the deaths of both out-group and in-group members. However, many versions of sacrificial nationalism focus on one or the other. In some cases, sacrificial nationalism isolates an “internal enemy” that is taken to be the cause of national devastation. That internal enemy must, then, be purged. In other cases, sacrificial nationalism sees the in-group itself as collectively responsible for the devastation. That in-group must, then, sacrifice from itself. In the first section of this chapter, I consider the former, “purgative” sacrificial nationalism. Specifically, I take up what is probably the most extended and horrifying example of such emplotment in the history of the world—Hitler’s Germany. To discuss this case, I work through the first book of *Mein Kampf*, examining the implicit sacrificial emplotment that rationalizes the authoritarianism and genocide that marked Nazi policy.

In the second section of the chapter, I turn to Gandhi, one of the most widely revered political figures ever, a nationalist politician whose ideas and practices have had significant impact around the world—including the United States, by way of such activists as Martin Luther King. Gandhi may seem to have nothing at all in common with Hitler. However, the two share a fundamentally sacrificial approach to nationalism. The crucial difference is that Gandhi’s nationalism is a nationalism of penitential *self*-sacrifice. It is not a nationalism of purging an internal enemy. In order to explore Gandhi’s sacrificial emplotment of nationalism, I consider a series of lectures he delivered on the *Bhagavad Gītā*, a Hindu religious text that was of central importance in the development of Indian nationalism.

In the cases of both Hitler and Gandhi, a recognition of sacrificial emplotment allows us to see patterns in and implications of their principles

and policies that we would otherwise have missed. It also suggests some reasons for their great popular appeal. As David Brown pointed out, it is important to explain “not only why state elites articulated” a particular “ideology of nationalism, but also why these invented nationalist ideologies resonated in the imaginings of civil society” (34). In this case, both explanations are bound up with the conditions in which sacrificial emplotments tend to arise and take hold. In addition, as I have already noted, the default mode of nationalist narrative is heroic. The heroic plot remains important even in sacrificial nationalism. Indeed, it effectively underlies sacrificial narratives. Put differently, nationalism is never purely sacrificial. It is sacrificial only insofar as an heroic emplotment appears impossible. Various aspects of both Hitler’s and Gandhi’s thought (e.g., Gandhi’s sometimes equivocal statements about violence or weapons)—and some aspects of their followers’ commitments and actions—become much more comprehensible when we recognize this.

The final chapter considers the romantic plot. As Doris Sommer has suggested, one of the most common uses of the romantic plot is to oppose subnational division—racial, religious, regional, and so forth. Again, just as conditions of national devastation tend to trigger a sacrificial emplotment, conditions of national division tend to trigger a romantic emplotment. In connection with this, I consider the work that is perhaps the closest thing Americans have to a national epic—Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, specifically the key poem, “Song of Myself.” Whitman is widely viewed as the “poet of America” (see Miller 5) and “Song of Myself” is “the most acclaimed and influential poem written by an American,” as Greenspan has remarked (1). Whitman was keenly aware of the growing estrangement of different segments of the American population, specifically those who opposed slavery (concentrated in the North) and those who supported it (concentrated in the South). Even more important, he was deeply disturbed by the racial divisions in the nation. Many cases of literary works involve an explicit romantic emplotment of nationalism, some discussed by Sommer. “Song of Myself” involves a much more subdued version of the narrative structure, a tacit emplotment that is visible only at certain points in the poem. But this is precisely why it is valuable to examine that emplotment. It helps us to discern and understand aspects of the poem and the poem’s nationalism that would otherwise go unnoticed or that we would sense only vaguely and inarticulately. It also helps us to recognize and more fully understand the inexplicit operation of such emplotment.

As I have already indicated, a distinctive feature of the romantic plot is that it has an antidivisive or incorporative tendency that tends to repeat

itself with increasingly large groups all the way up to humanity as a whole. Simply put, if romantic emplotment offers us an argument against regional subnationalism, then it must equally offer us an argument against nationalism. If it works against the oppositions among different racial groups in the United States, then it must work against the oppositions among different national groups globally. For this reason, the tacit romantic emplotment of politics tends, not toward nationalism, but toward internationalism. In fact, we see this tendency in Whitman. At certain points, “Song of Myself” is a song of America. But it repeatedly expands beyond America to the world. Some authors have followed through on the implications of this extension, self-consciously advocating a vigorous internationalism and elaborating on the antihierarchical elements of romantic emplotment as well. I conclude with a case of this sort—Emma Goldman, a Russian immigrant to the United States and a widely influential activist. Her important essays on Anarchism reveal a consistent romantic emplotment of social ideas and practices. This emplotment not only helps to explain various aspects of Goldman’s own thought and action. It also suggests alternatives to the destructive nationalisms of the heroic and sacrificial modes, nationalisms that have caused such terrible, human suffering across the ages, and particularly in the past century.²¹

21. Earlier, I responded briefly to the idea that globalization has spelled the end of nationalism. The brevity of this response was troubling to some, who felt a deeper engagement with the most prominent theorists of this orientation—particularly Hardt and Negri—is important to establish the continuing political relevance of nationalism. I initially added a lengthy discussion of work by Hardt and Negri, with whom I have many political agreements and share a sense of political solidarity, despite our sometimes significant intellectual divergences. Hardt and Negri, however, are treating a different topic and are therefore largely irrelevant to this book. Specifically, they are discussing governmental autonomy, not the motivational force of categorial identification, which is the topic of the present work. Moreover, as I have already noted, governmental autonomy is not straightforwardly correlated with group solidarity or emotional engagement. Again, the motivational force of national identification may actually be enhanced by a decline in national autonomy, a point well illustrated by the growth of nationalist feeling under colonial domination. For this reason, a lengthy discussion of Hardt and Negri, or any other theorist arguing that the authority of national governments has declined, is simply beside the point. Treating Hardt and Negri at length would take us on a detour from the main argument and add extra pages to an already bulky manuscript.

I have therefore removed this discussion here, and transformed it into a separate article. The key points of that article are as follows. (1) Hardt and Negri are discussing *nationalism* in the somewhat peculiar sense of the autonomy of one national government relative to other national governments—“the sovereignty of the nation-state,” as they put it (*Multitude* xii). This is surely an important topic, but it should not be confused with *nationalism* in the sense of a motivating force. (2) Hardt and Negri view the decline in national sovereignty as related to the development of a “new form” (xii) of world structure, the network. I agree that there is a network aspect to intergovernmental relations. But I disagree with Hardt and Negri in two respects. First, I believe that this has always been the case. Second, their use of network

theory is somewhat loose and metaphorical, leading them to conclusions about a decline in national autonomy that simply do not follow. (3) Their conclusions about the novelty of the multitude as a network also rely on the loose and metaphorical use of network theory and their conclusion that states must become networks to fight networks appears simply to be a non sequitur. (4) Their treatment of recent coalition-building efforts by the United States understates the development of coalitions in the past and overstates the need of the United States for coalition partners. It also understates the coercive force of such coalition-building in a “unipolar” world (a point that could be treated productively through a more technical use of network theory). (5) Part of the reason for coalition-building, in the view of Hardt and Negri, is the need for justification and the primacy of humanitarian concerns (see 26, 60). The facts surrounding “humanitarian interventions” seem to speak against the seriousness of the humanitarian concerns (see Chomsky, *New*; and Herman and Peterson on the paradigmatic case of Yugoslavia). (6) When Hardt and Negri turn from governments to the multitude, their analysis seems to rely on inadequate causal analyses. For example, their key explanatory category of “immaterial labor” includes scientific research, psychotherapy, and serving fast food. This does not seem to be a causally coherent category—nor does it seem to be particularly immaterial (thus profoundly different from what went before). (7) The conclusions they draw from their notion of immaterial labor—for example, that the “construction of social relationships” by “the poor” becomes “directly productive” (131)—seem to be non sequiturs. This is important because these conclusions make social transformation (e.g., the development of “economic self-management”; 336) appear much easier than it is. (8) Hardt and Negri present an inspiring vision of antiauthoritarian, mass movements for social, economic, and political transformation. This vision is itself derived from various popular movements that have arisen in recent years. Unfortunately, it is not clear that their optimism is justified. (9) Finally, I ask—if a number of Hardt and Negri’s conclusions do not follow from their premises, what do they follow from? I believe their conclusions follow most directly from their preferred form of tacit emplotment, in much the way predicted by the analyses set out in the following pages. Specifically, like Whitman and Goldman, Hardt and Negri’s understanding of and response to nationalism are oriented and organized by a tacit romantic narrative. Indeed, this is one reason why their work also holds out an, in many ways, inspiring vision for a more humane future.