Part One
The Modernist Paradigm Contested
1  Premodern Nations, National Identities, National Sentiments and National Solidarity

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While the subject of this volume, like the conference from which it emanates, is early modern nationalism in Europe, the task set to me by the editor is to broaden the frame and discuss premodern nationalism not merely over centuries but over millennia, and not only in Europe but throughout the world. Indeed, my book (with Alexander Yakobson), Nations: The Long History and Deep Roots of Political Ethnicity and Nationalism (Cambridge UP, 2013), challenges the modernist portrayal of nationalism as recent and superficial. The book argues that, reflecting the post-1945 climate of ideas and normative atmosphere, modernists have lost sight of the ethno-national phenomenon’s deep roots, and have declared the nation and nationalism to be a pure socio-historical construct or artificially contrived. As a result, they misinterpret the ethno-national phenomenon’s historical trajectory and either remain confounded by or turn a blind eye to its highly explosive potency, so evidently one of the strongest forces in human history.

Nations and nationalism are not primordial. Nonetheless, they are rooted in primordial human sentiments of kin-culture affinity, solidarity and mutual cooperation, evolutionarily engraved in human nature. These attachments, permeating social life and extending beyond family to tribe and ethnos, became integral to politics when states emerged millennia ago. Ethnicity has always been political and politicised, ever since the beginning of politics, because people have always been heavily biased towards those they view as their kin-culture community. Needless to say, no ethnic identity or people comes neatly packaged with an unchanging essence. Ethnogenesis, processes of ethnic and national fission and fusion, changes of identity and cultural transformation, take place all the time. And still, while always in flux, ethnic and national identities are among the most durable, and most potent, of cultural forms.
Political Ethnicity and Premodern Imagined Communities

I have introduced the concept of political ethnicity to describe this reality whose historical salience cannot be exaggerated despite the fact that it has been largely downplayed in the literature on the national phenomenon. Similarly, I do not use the terms primordial and perennial to describe the counter-modernist position, as both of them sound metaphysical and unreal, and, indeed, have been invoked as a caricature by modernists. Instead, I employ the term ‘traditionalist position’, with the double connotation it carries: as having been the traditional view before the rise of modernist theorising; and as the view that nations and nationalism have a long and genuine pedigree, rather than being a wholly fabricated modern myth. I am glad to see that this term is already becoming accepted.

Semantic, factual and normative elements are variably combined in modernist theorising. Semantics is the least problematic. Most modernists insist that equal citizenship and popular sovereignty are inseparable from the concept of the nation. Yet precisely because all these features have been closely intertwined during the modern era, they are easily confounded. I submit that in ordinary usage nationhood means common identification and solidarity with one’s people and state, and the political expression of these sentiments, irrespective of whether citizenship is equally enjoyed or popular sovereignty prevails. The real question, then, is whether or not the national phenomenon existed in this sense before modern times. And this leads us to a problem more significant than the semantic: the interpretation of history. I embrace Ernest Gellner’s definition of the nation as a rough congruence between culture or ethnicity and state. Yet he and other modernists have erred in claiming that such congruence was confined to modern times.¹

Modernists deny that the population of premodern states – oppressed peasants scattered in their village communities – had any consciousness of being part of a larger people. Indeed, scarcely noted, what they in fact reject is the existence of premodern peoples. This view of premodern society is a caricature of historical realities. Projected by theorists, it is challenged by the great majority of the historians of particular societies. Medieval historian Susan Reynolds is the only one who directly went into the fray in defence of European medieval national states;² but many historians express similar views less overtly. Side by side with other pristine forms of statehood, such as city-states and empires, in all of which ethnicity was highly political, there also existed so-called territorial states or dynastic kingdoms. These, however, were most often national monarchies, wherein the boundaries of ethnos or people and state largely overlapped.
Of course, the state, in turn, greatly reinforced the ethnic unity of its realm. Ethnicity made the state and the state made ethnicity, in a reciprocal and dialectical process. Indeed, both these threads of causation reveal how highly political ethnicity has always been. Why would the state strive to homogenise its realm where possible, were it not for the fact that a sense of common identity immeasurably fostered the people's loyalty legitimised political rule and helped to sustain the state's integrity and independence? Contrary to a widespread view, state-building in a pre-existing ethnic space has been exceedingly easier than ethno-building. What Anthony Smith has claimed for modern nations was also true for premodern national states.

Although the illiterate masses in premodern societies are mute in the written records, one can look at what they did in lieu of what they did not write, surely a clear indication of where they stood. Throughout history peoples habitually rose in arms in desperate struggles to defend or regain their freedom – often by risking their lives, property and much else that was dear. Since, according to the modernist cliché, they only substituted foreign for domestic masters and would in any case have remained oppressed, the only plausible conclusion is that they deeply cared about and fought for their people's collective freedom. Clearly the people preferred their own, often hated, masters to 'bloody foreigners'. Nor do we have here merely peasants' response to the disruption of invasion. Popular uprising in pursuit of liberty from foreign rule often occurred after a country had long been conquered by an alien power, and sometimes after it was pacified to a degree greater than it had been before the foreign conquest. Reality speaks volumes even though the illiterate masses rarely found somebody to record them.

After shared language, the main bonding elements of premodern peoples and a major instrument of state- and nation-building were the premodern mass cultural forms of epos, ritual and religion. These were widely disseminated by the dense clerical and cultic network spread throughout the countryside and reaching into every town and village. The holiness, righteousness and special mission of one's state and people resonated in every parish. The peasant girl Joan of Arc, who absorbed and expressed this powerful message in her native Lorraine village, was unique only in her remarkable ascent. Herein was the primary and most powerful medium of the premodern national 'imagined community' which Benedict Anderson has so sorely missed. The nation was widely imagined – and as holy and God's chosen one.

Anderson's mistake is twofold. First, the view that universal religious identity preceded national identity ignores the national religions of most peoples before the rise of universal religions, as well as the strongly national
character and bias of the local churches of universal faiths, including Christianity, both Western and Eastern. Overwhelmingly, national churches tended to champion the patriotic cause in case of a threat or conflict. Indeed, they often kept the national spirit alive even when the state itself was destroyed and the country was occupied by a foreign invader. The lower clergy in particular, closer to the people in their way of life and sentiments, often assuming leadership positions at the local level, and free from considerations of high politics, tended to be staunchly patriotic. Rather than conflicting with the national idea, religion was one of its strongest pillars.

Anderson’s emphasis on literacy and print technology has been much exaggerated, because illiterate societies had their own potent means of wide-scale cultural transmission. Oral epics recited by wandering bards and celebrating gods, kings, heroes and the people – always ours – served as a major vehicle of cultural dissemination. It is all too often forgotten that although the masses in historical state societies could not read, they were commonly read to – and preached to – in the vernacular by the literati in ceremonies and public gatherings. The effect of all these factors on the consolidation of large-scale ‘imagined communities’ cannot be overstated.

Nations in Eurasia from the Earliest Times

Contrary to the European bias of the literature on the national phenomenon – already challenged by other leading critics of modernism such as Anthony Smith, Steven Grosby and Aviel Roshwald – Asia, where states evolved the earliest, is also where some of the most ancient national states can be found. From around 3000 BC, unified Egypt emerged as the world’s first large, territorial national state, congruent with a distinct people of shared ethnicity and culture. This, indeed, was the secret of its remarkable endurance for nearly three millennia. Further east, the small national states of Israel, Amon, Moab and Edom, together with other incipient national states and city-states in the Ancient Near East, were destroyed by Assyria, the region’s first territorial empire. Indeed, Assyria became the first in a series of empires that henceforth would constitute the standard in Southwest Asia, replacing one another down to the twentieth century. Thus, the pristine emergence of national states in that part of the world was interrupted by the rise and triumph of imperial juggernauts. Hence Elie Kedourie’s sweeping and misleading assertion that nationalism and the national state were alien to Asia.⁴
This claim was even less valid in East Asia. China is the world's oldest and largest civilisation and state, comprising roughly a fifth of humanity, then as now. And yet it has been given only minimal attention on the very margins of a Europe-centric debate. Premodern China maintained an extensive, country-wide system of Confucian schools as well as universal military conscription – institutions of the kind hailed as the workshops of modern nationalism. All the same, it has scarcely been asked whether the close connection between state and culture in China – alias nationhood – had anything to do with the country’s unique, continuous cultural and political existence over millennia.

Modernist historian and theorist Eric Hobsbawm has noted that China, Korea and Japan are ‘among the extremely rare examples of historic states composed of a population that is ethnically almost or entirely homogeneous’. Indeed, in all these countries – despite periods of anarchy or foreign rule – culture, a people and state have overlapped for millennia. Again, why should this remarkable congruence have endured so long and so persistently if collective identity did not matter politically in premodern state societies ostensibly defined by elite rule and class divisions? This is a mystery that modernist theorists do not seem to recognise.

Here lies the answer to the question raised by Benedict Anderson: why French Indochina disintegrated into separate national states upon decolonisation, rather than becoming a single realm as did Dutch Indonesia. This outcome ensued because each of Indochina's modern states had a long history and an ethnic core or Staatsvolk identified with it, which constituted at least 85 percent of its population. These included: a Viet state since the tenth century; Cambodian-Khmer state since the sixth century; a Siamese-Thai state since the fourteenth century; and a Mayanmar-Burman state since the tenth century (the last one being the exception with only 68 percent of the population Bamar). Evidently, Hobsbawm was far too modest in singling out China, Korea and Japan for their close connection between people and state.

Much the same applied to Europe. Peninsular and mountainous Mediterranean Europe in antiquity was dominated by the city-state and later by the Roman Empire. But in the open lands north of the Alpine mountain range, early national states emerged everywhere as the chief module of state formation. Indeed, the earliest European national state that emerged north of the Mediterranean was no other than ancient Macedonia, which Philip II and Alexander would turn into the cornerstone of vast imperial expansion. As a historian of Macedon’s emergence writes cautiously but revealingly:
I once wondered whether Macedon was Europe’s earliest national state... the Macedonians were an ethnic group derived from their predecessors, the Makedones, and defined in historical times by their service to their king... In this sense they were a people, or *ethos*, with a common set of loyalties and a shared historical experience.\textsuperscript{7}

After the fall of Rome, and as the former Germanic and Slav lands were drawn into the fold of civilisation, national states mushroomed everywhere north of the old Roman frontier. But before turning to this development, allow me a few words about the Age of Migration. There has been a radical trend, influenced by fashionable anthropological theories and suggesting that the various Germanic conglomerations had no substantial ethnic identity or ethnic core.\textsuperscript{8} Certainly, people in and around that core often had various forms of dual or multiple identity, were variably bi- or multi-lingual, or switched between identities. Such behaviour is in the very nature of ethnic identity, and all the more so in such fluid historical circumstances as those that prevailed during the barbarian invasions. But to claim that this was tantamount to an *absence* of ethnic identity among Goths, Franks, Vandals or Huns is simply ridiculous. Indeed some early proponents of this view, such as historian of the Goths Peter Heather, have since backed away from its more extreme expressions.\textsuperscript{9}

Soon after the Age of Migration, states – many of them national states – began to emerge throughout Europe. Medieval England saw the formation of a national state, where people and state overlapped, both before and after the Norman Conquest, first in the tenth-eleventh centuries and again in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries. A Scottish nation, popularly defended against English occupation, was in existence by 1300. In the Declaration of Arbroath (1320), the right of the ‘*Scottorum nacio*’ to independence was proclaimed in the name of the entire community, comprising the signatory lords ‘and the other barons, and freeholders and the whole community of the realm of Scotland’.\textsuperscript{10} There had been a Danish national state by the tenth century, a Norwegian one by the eleventh century, and a Swedish one shortly after. The medieval Holy Roman Empire until about 1500 was – despite imperial ambitions – a quintessentially German state, as were, by no accident, practically all its emperors and electoral princes except for the king of Bohemia (himself a German after 1310). There was a Czech national state from the late ninth century, and a popular mobilisation under the Hussites in the fifteenth century that stressed the uniqueness of the Czech land, language and people. Gellner went badly astray in portraying premodern Bohemia and Moravia as non-national. The truth of the matter
was that the Czech lands had been thoroughly national before losing their national independence and much of their national identity following their disastrous defeat at the Battle of the White Mountain (1620).

There was a Polish state from the tenth century, in alliance with Lithuania from the fourteenth century and distinct from the Ukraine, as Bohdan Khmelnytsky’s revolt in the Ukraine demonstrates. Although the Polish state was famously dominated by the aristocracy that harshly oppressed the Polish peasantry, the latter did not join the Ukrainian revolt and, on the contrary, rose in arms against the Swedish occupiers during the Deluge. Similarly, there was a unified Russian state from the tenth century, and again from around 1500. And although the Russian people lacked any rights, they revolted en masse against Polish rule in the early seventeenth century; were called upon by Peter the Great to save the holy Russian motherland from the Swedes before Poltava in the early eighteenth century; and everywhere joined in the destruction of Napoleon’s invading army in the early nineteenth century. The most backward, and supposedly pre-nationalist, power in Europe faced the national forces raised by revolutionary France with no less national fervour. In southeast Europe there was a Bulgarian state from around 800, while Serb and Hungarian states existed by the tenth century – until all of them fell before the Ottomans.

Thus, empires – in this case, the Russian, Ottoman and Habsburg – were the powerful engines which through superior force destroyed national states that had been budding everywhere from early on in the process of state formation. Rather than being the nineteenth-century nationalist fabrications that modernists claim them to be, medieval European nations turn out to be most authentic and more relevant to the subject of nationalism than the early modern period in east-central Europe, postulated as the standard by modernists. Ironically, it is modernists who reveal here the unhistorical anachronism with which they charge their antagonists. After all the necessary debunking of nationalist myths, it is still the case that the great majority of the European peoples and nations have exhibited remarkable resilience, going back to an incipient medieval consolidation of state societies on the basis of yet earlier ethnic formations.

**Surprise – The Meaning of Natio Is Nation**

In my book I cite the many uses of the concept of nation in the premodern sources, both in the Latin forms *gens* and *natio/nacio* and in their vernacular derivatives. These references include, for example: Bede’s *gens anglorum* in
the seventh century; the Serb natio of The Royal Frankish Annals for the year 822; priest Helmold’s twelfth-century chronicles and account of the ‘many naciones’ around the Baltic, ‘the Danes and the Swedes’ to the north and ‘the Slavic naciones’ to the south; Saxo Grammaticus’s thirteenth-century Danes, who like all ‘nationes’ are in the habit of vaunting the fame of their achievements, and joy in recollecting their ancestors; the Scottish official plea to the Pope in the Declaration of Arbroath (1320) on behalf of the ‘Scotorum nacio; the German Nation in the official title of the Reich and in Luther’s address in the early sixteenth century; the prominence of the Czech gens in a pronoucedly ethno-national sense in the fifteenth-century Hussite written records; the Polish fifteenth- and sixteenth-centuries definition of the nation in cultural and linguistic terms; and the fervent rhetoric of a Hungarian ethnic natio in the seventeenth century.

The context, meaning and significance of the concept of nation in all these cases are abundantly clear. It should be sufficient to discard the strange quirk in the literature on the national phenomenon: the notion that the word nation itself is a new one and that its earlier Latin-medieval forms actually meant something different. 11 As Susan Reynolds has written in refutation of this mistake:

There is no foundation at all for the belief, common among students of modern nationalism, that the world natio was seldom used in the Middle Ages except to describe the nationes into which university students were divided ... the groups which medieval writers called gentes, nationes, or populi were actually thought of as units of common biological descent ... as well as of common culture. 12

Medievalist Julia Smith and early modern historian of Poland David Althoen write in the same spirit. 13 Indeed, Johan Huizinga (who better to cite in the Netherlands?) had made the same point as far back as 1940:

The word natio has always remained much more current than patria. Actually it had changed very little in connotation since classical times. Closely linked with natus and natura, it vaguely indicated a larger context than gens or populus, but without being any fixed distinction between the three terms. The Vulgate used gentes, populos, and nationes interchangeably for the nations of the Old Testament ... 14

Gradually ... Latin Christendom arranged itself in a number of kingdoms corresponding, though still very roughly, to national lines ... France,
England, and Scotland, the three Scandinavian kingdoms, Aragon, Castile, and Portugal, Sicily, Hungary, and Poland had all of them taken their places as units of Latin Christendom by around 1150.15

The most remarkable medieval document I have come across relating to the question of the nation – scarcely noted in the modern debate – deals with the deliberations on this question in the ecclesiastic Council of Constance (1416). The Catholic Church’s ecumenical councils supposedly embodied the indivisible unity of the Church. But in practice they introduced representation by nations and national bloc voting from the thirteenth century on. At the Council of Vienne (1311-12), there was a separate vote by the following ‘nations’: Italians, Spaniards, Germans, Danes, English, Scotch, Irish and French. At the Council of Pisa (1409), the larger states dominated, and representation clustered around the delegations from Italy, France, Germany and England (the Spaniards were absent). Hungarians, Czechs, Poles, Danes and Swedes were included in the German ‘nation’; the Mediterranean periphery (except Spain which joined later) in the Italian ‘nation’; the French periphery in the French ‘nation’; and the British Isles in the English ‘nation’. Soon, however, claims for separate representation for the smaller nations were made on the basis of language and sovereignty.

Unsurprisingly, the realities of power politics helped determine which claim was accorded recognition. We have no space to go over the fascinating details of these deliberations. However, here is how the English delegation defined the nation, stressing the concept’s both ethno-cultural and territorial aspects:

whether nation (natio) be understood as a people (gens) marked off from others by blood relationship and habit of unity or by peculiarities of language ... or whether nation (natio) be understood, as it should be, as a territory ...16

Furthermore, the English delegation put forward as a general truism a seemingly strikingly modern concept of nation as transcending the boundaries of dynastic rule:

Everyone knows that it matters not whether a nation obeys one prince only or several. Are there not many kingdoms in the Spanish nation that pay no tribute to the king of Castile, the chief ruler of Spain? But it does not follow that they are not parts of the Spanish nation.17
It is difficult to imagine more impressive evidence for the national question in medieval Europe.

The Pedigree of Dutch Nationhood

As the conference from which this volume emanates took place in the Netherlands and was prompted by the question of Dutch nationhood and nationalism in the early modern period – that is, before they were supposed to exist according to the modernist dogma – a few comments are called for concerning the Dutch case. As we have seen above, the Dutch are not at all unique in having formed a strong national identity soon after their independence and long before the French and Industrial revolutions. Dutch historians have clearly been confounded by the fact that what they well know to be a very genuine and deep historical reality is widely regarded as a heresy within the theory of nationalism dominated by the modernist school. In this respect, they are not different from their peers in Hungary, Poland, Serbia, Sweden or Scotland, to name but a few examples, who are told that the long premodern existence of their respective peoples and nations is a nineteenth-century myth that is strictly improper and naïve for scholars to hold. The position in which they are placed is absurd to the point of amusement. At the same time, the Dutch nation is different from the others mentioned in that it does not extend far back into the Middle Ages as do some of Europe’s ‘old nations’, to use Hugh Seton-Watson’s phrase. Dutch nationhood emerged only with the revolt, secession and independence, from the later part of the sixteenth century. Indeed, this timing explains the framing of this volume around early modern Europe from 1600 onward, which perfectly fits the special features of the Dutch case. Earlier, the people of the Low Countries belonged to an admittedly very heterogeneous Germanic linguistic space, and politically, too, they were part of the Holy Roman Empire, again, basically a German state.

A number of historical events and developments, some of them quite contingent, facilitated the formation of a distinct Dutch national identity. The detachment of the Low Countries from the Empire by Charles V for reasons of dynastic inheritance and their transfer to the Spanish realm were clearly of major significance in this process. The adoption of the vernacular, rather than High German, as the Dutch literary language signified another major break with the Germanic space. Note that the German-speaking Swiss, who also formed a splinter national entity from that space, took a different course and adopted High German rather than Schweizerdeutsch as
their literary language. This is probably the reason why their spoken dialect is commonly referred to as ‘German’, whereas Dutch is regarded as a separate language, even though their relation to the Germanic linguistic space is otherwise quite similar. The United Provinces’ spectacular commercial success at the very moment that the world was opened to European trade provided the rebelling Dutch with the means to defend themselves, while also increasing their incentive to do so. This commercial success in turn made possible exceedingly high urbanisation rates, unmatched anywhere else in early modern Europe. Urbanisation is another factor that is supposed to foster the formation of a common national identity, of course among a population that shares ethno-cultural characteristics. In this respect, the dominance of Holland and Amsterdam within the otherwise quite diverse United Provinces provided a core that facilitated national consolidation. Furthermore, the Low Countries’ ability to shelter behind water barriers ensured their survival, in the same way that the Swiss Confederation was shielded by its mountain fortress. As the Netherlands secured its independence, the usual processes of ‘nation-building’ could take their course during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The Modernist Allure – and Fallacy

The historical salience of premodern political ethnicity and nationhood does not imply that nationalism was either a given, an unchanging quantity, or otherwise immutable. Nor am I claiming that the people of premodern national states were as closely integrated and highly mobilised as the people of modern national states are. The sweeping process of economic and social modernisation made a difference, indeed, a huge difference. Modernists are generally correct about much of what they write with respect to modern developments. However, nations were far from being a creation of the modern era. The idea that the concept of nation was unknown, unimportant or devoid of political significance to the people of the premodern world is one of the greatest missteps taken by modern social theory.

The change from the premodern to the modern with respect to the role of nationhood can be described as follows: while premodern national identity was always highly potent politically, largely underpinning the frontiers of loyalty, and thus borders, among political communities, it was secondary to the dynastic principle and to the right of the conqueror in the legitimatio discourse; by contrast, it became the paramount formal, legal and ideological principle during modern times, as sovereignty became invested
in the people rather than in the ruler. Rather than inventing nationalism, modernity *released, transformed and enhanced* it. This was a truly massive change, yet less drastic than modernists construe it to be. They have been overly impressed by the truly revolutionary modern transformation, as well as by the ‘creative’ reworking of existing traditions, memories and myths by nationalists and state authorities, the so-called ‘invention of tradition’. Modernists have sweepingly assumed that the constant adaptation of materials that is intrinsic to the flow of tradition, including fabrication and manipulation, wholly invalidates the nationalist claim, whereas it often merely tints genuine realities. Indeed, while myths abound in the nationalistic discourse, modernist counter-myths have been almost as easily created. Imagined communities do not mean invented, nor does invented tradition imply wholesale fabrication. The fashionable shibboleths which have become dominant in the social sciences obscure the fact that social phenomena tend to be *both* deeply rooted and construed. There is nothing mutually exclusive here.

The modernist school has won hegemonic status in the study of nationalism for a number of interrelated reasons. First, there was an inevitable, necessary and justified reaction against the naïve and sometimes also consciously manipulative sweeping nationalistic narratives, nineteenth-century style, which questioned their authenticity and subjected them to a detailed historical scrutiny. However, it was all too easy to get carried away in this process and believe that *everything* was an invented myth, thereby throwing out the baby with the bathwater. The pendulum has swung too far, and it is only natural that it is beginning to swing in the other direction, in a dialectical process. A true equilibrium point and higher synthesis are needed, which will incorporate the long history and deep roots of political ethnicity and nationalism, *as well as* their far-reaching modern transformation. It should be recognised that the very genuine nature of the ethno-national phenomenon is also what makes it the object of mythmaking and manipulation. Only something that touches a very sensitive chord can be so powerfully manipulated.

Another major reason for the modernist hegemony is ideological rather than strictly scholarly, and is thus far more difficult to overcome. Liberalism, the hegemonic ideology in the West since 1945, views nationalism with understandable suspicion. Liberalism and nationalism were inseparable from each other during the nineteenth century, as the right of peoples to national self-determination was widely regarded as part of the liberal platform. This platform, reaffirmed by President Woodrow Wilson as the blueprint for a twentieth-century world order, has in fact become the norm.
in today’s world. Indeed, contrary to the rhetoric about a post-nationalistic age, the crucial development of our times has actually been the acceptance of national self-determination on the principle of the people’s choice throughout the developed world. At the same time, the horrendous manifestations of aggressive and chauvinistic nationalism, culminating in Nazism, have made liberals deeply ambivalent if not hostile towards the national idea. Furthermore, liberalism professes universalism, whereas nationalism, even in a liberal form, incorporates particularistic elements of group identity and solidarity. From the liberal misgivings with respect to nationalism it was only a short step to deny that ethnic and national affiliations were genuine and deep-rooted sentiments of great efficacy and dismiss them as no more than instrumental fabrications, the product of the specific conditions of a particular and transient era.

Ironically, in construing nationalism as a modern, nationalistic ideological fabrication, the modernists themselves have manifested an ideological false consciousness of the type they so vehemently criticise in others. Although detecting ideological biases has become the stock in trade of scholars in the humanities and social science, they themselves all too often fall victim to the strong human predilection to view the world through the prisms of their particular set of assumptions and values that are perceived as transparent and natural. Comprehensive outlooks rule. In our subject, this applies to modernists during the liberal era, as much as it did to nationalists during the heyday of nationalist ideologists. Within the framework of the dominant discourse any alternative perspective and inconvenient facts are dismissed as ridiculously misplaced, immaterial and illegitimate. It is impossible to explain the hype surrounding the modernist writings except in connection with the dominant ideology of our times. A massive, ideological herd phenomenon has been at work. As liberalism remains hegemonic – or at least, given the alternatives, one hopes that it does – the modernist discourse with respect to the national phenomenon is unlikely to go away.

Yet another related reason for the rise of modernism in the study of nationalism is the clean-slate view of human nature that went hand in hand with liberal ideology during the middle part of the twentieth century when the modernist theory was conceived. In this framework, scholars lacked the theoretical tools to comprehend the deep roots of the ethnic and national phenomenon in naturally evolved human propensities. This is strikingly revealed in Gellner’s unfortunate pronouncement that ‘nationalism does not have any very deep roots in the human psyche’ – after which he confessed to be deeply moved by his native Bohemian folk nationalism.
For much of the twentieth century the idea that human nature had anything to do with social realities was anathema to historians and social scientists. And that which we lack the means to comprehend we do not see even if it is staring us in the face: ethnic and national affinities have deep roots in the human psyche, and they have been among the most powerful forces in human history – in early modern Europe, and millennia earlier, throughout the world.

Notes

8. An extreme example is Florin Curta, *The Making of the Slavs: History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region c. 500-700* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), and idem, *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 500-1250* (Cambridge UP, 2006). Disregarding generations of linguistic and other research, Curta casually suggests that the Slavs did not immigrate to the Danube frontier from the north, but somehow emerged there in the middle of the first millennium. Why then their language should be so similar to that of other Slavs in northern and eastern Europe remains unclear.
11. The claim seems to have been introduced by Guido Zernatt, ‘Nation: The History of a Word’, *The Review of Politics*, 6 (1944), 351-66, and then copied from one study to another.


15. Ibid., 103-5.


17. Thrupp (ed.), *Change in Medieval Society*, 293.
