10-1-1991

Nationalism, Modernization, and the Polylogue of Civilizations

Vytautus Kavolis
Dickinson College

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol25/iss25/7

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Comparative Civilizations Review by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen amatangelo@byu.edu.
The resurgence of nationalism in Eastern Europe, in both humane and violent forms, invites a reconsideration of the theoretical perspectives in which it is most frequently viewed. Not only its vitality, but also its variety of forms need to be accounted for.

Social scientists have tended to explain nationalism either as a product of industrialization exacerbated by uneven economic development, or as a response to external domination and division of lands claimed as sacredly one’s own, or as a deflection from class struggle, or as an atavistic throwback. In most of these explanations, nationalism is considered as in principle both temporary and abnormal.

It is evident that nationalism must also be viewed in relation to the accelerated modernization of culture and intensifying intercivilizational encounters, and interpreted as a perennial, not necessarily unhealthy feature of these processes.¹

The Inevitable Diversity of Modernizing Culture

“Modernizing” trends are as ancient as civilization itself. They can certainly be traced from the Axial Age of Karl Jaspers.² European cultural modernization may be said to have started in the twelfth century (Abelard). It came in several waves with distinguishable programs and in several ideological and national variants.

Taken as a whole, cultural modernization begs to be understood as a process that occurs on several levels and is capable of moving in opposite directions at different times or even simultaneously. First there are the modernizing thrusts toward individualism (recognition of the substantive claims of separate individualities), historicity (the conception of everything meaningful
as created by human beings over time), impersonally systematized and functioning rationality, universalism (application of the same normative and legal standards to all human beings), and humanization (evaluation of rules by whether they benefit or harm human beings).

These thrusts produce a collection of thinking and acting practices so differentiated, abstract, and seemingly artificial that, at the “archaic” level of any tradition undergoing modernization, local, unified hierarchies of values repeatedly reconstitute themselves. It is at this level that archaic nationalism, with its reliance on *ex toto* reasoning and heavy ritualization, arises. It is quite different from modernizing nationalism, of which the American case, with its *ex parte* logic and light ritualization, is a prototype.

What constitutes itself as archaic designs within modernizing cultures promises the restoration of some sense of undivided unity that is perceived to have been disrupted by modernization. While this process draws upon existing “survivals” for some or a great many of its raw materials, the restorationist energy derives from the dynamics generated by cultural modernization. The merely decorative uses of “folk culture” lack this energy.

In addition to its presumed antecedent, modernity also constructs its inverse (or rather an assortment of inverses). What is affirmed in the modernizing process is rejected in antimodernist reactions. But what is antimodernist has absorbed the impact of modernization and carries it within its own attitudes even while presenting itself as its opposite. The antimodernist phenomenon is not an “organic” wholeness. It rather manifests itself as one or another kind of repudiation (or “deconstruction”) of the several modernistic thrusts—traces of which it continues to carry within itself as its negative identity, its polemical context.

Insofar as the antimodern is the inversion of the modernistic, it remains within the same “system” as the modernizing. But in seeking to destroy the modernizing “system” the antimodernist subverts the legitimacy of hierarchy and duality, which are generally employed by the “system”-oriented modernizers as well as by many archaic reconstructionists, especially those who draw upon a background of monotheistic religion. (Western archaic reconstructionists who are inspired by traditional Asian religions or by a quest for a mythical women’s culture may consciously reject
dualistic and hierarchic models. These frequently creep in nevertheless into what they construct.)

There is also a structurally problematic but ever-reviving egalitarian, democratic-culture, “life-world”-oriented stream of cultural modernization. It tends to flow over into antimodernism, but ought to be distinguishable from the latter by the continued affirmation of rationality, historicism, individuality, humanism, and universalism—“the unfinished project of the Enlightenment” (model: Habermas) at its most mystical, that is without hierarchy or duality in it. The disconnectedness from everything archaic is most complete here.

The antimodernist seeks either an inversion of the symbolic structure of modernity or its annihilation. In the former case, a search for archaically firm points of reference, which modernism tends to eliminate, may result. In the latter case, as a result of the repudiation of both archaic and modernizing principles of order as well as of the directional orientations (“metanarratives”) of modernism, there arises a strong inclination toward cognitive incoherence. This is in sharp contrast to various versions of the modernizing culture which may conflict with each other and refuse to be ontologically or metaphysically grounded but which are generally, in each case, ideologically only too coherent.

It seems analytically efficient in sociological usage to reserve the concept of the /ws^modern to either (a) perceptions of unmotivated side-by-side presences of elements of modernizing projects and antimodernist reactions to them (the aggregative or assemblage phase of postmodernity), or (b) efforts to establish connections between them (the configurational or bridge-building phase of postmodernity, these phases being possible steps of its cultural maturation). In each case, diversity, flow, multi-perspectivalness, and a fragmentary multiculturalism are features of the postmodern.5

We argue that cultural modernization is a process occurring necessarily, though not always simultaneously, on three levels: the modernizing-antimodernist split at the center of the process; archaic restorationist programs in its depths (where the “inner demons” not only of Europe are most likely to be generated);6 postmodern reconfigurations of differentiated entities in the outer space of its most experimental enterprises.

Essential to this conception are the different modes by which
elements on each “level” of the process are integrated—to use a traditional term—into systems or networks of mutually comprehensible meanings. On the archaic level, the mode of integration is that of a particularistic hierarchy of values. The principle of symbolic hierarchy is retained in most versions of the modernizing project, but to be valid any modern hierarchy—as well as any modern equality—must make claims to universality. (The universalizing thrust, originating in the monotheistic religions, accounts for much of the “totalitarian temptation” in modern culture—but also for any prescriptive theory of modernization or of “universal civilization”).

Antimodernist reactions generally do not take cultural integration as a serious issue (or they treat it as an incomprehensible mystery). Antimodernism is strongly motivated by a reaction against established hegemonies which both archaic and modernist cultures may be employed to legitimate, whether under the aegis of a god or of nature, reason, or history.

But the result of suspicion of everything that may allow hegemonic control is that antimodernism comes to rely on the aesthetic imagination nearly alone and becomes a form of literature or theatre but not also, in sufficient measure, a crucible of practical responsibilities. It thus forfeits the capacity, which any viable culture most possess, of gathering and protecting.

This capacity is at least latent—though also fragile—in what is here conceived of as postmodern culture. This type of culture does not rely on hierarchic designs into which both archaic and modernizing cultures slip easily, though sometimes unintentionally. Postmodern culture can best be described as a collection of a large, potentially unlimited number of modes of discourse in which one mode is not in principle subject to the control of any other. It attains its own version of cultural integration through unexpected resonances among modes of discourse that have been separated by the modernizing project into differentiated realms of aesthetics, morality, and politics, or into religious and secular modes of thought, or into oppositions between “tradition” and “modernity,” the “global” and the “local.”

Its postmodern culture, the differentiation of spheres of life and of culture accomplished by modernity is not only taken for granted but affirmed as a liberating advance. But while modernizing culture stops here (and ends up in the closed circle of
infinite fragmentation), postmodern culture, as here conceived, opens itself up to the possible congenialities, or resonances, or even partial conjunctions among that which modernity has put asunder.

If archaic restorationism remains a cultural and does not become a political program, the main risk is that it will retard the development of those who identify with it (unless they find a futuristic language for talking about the archaic or, vice versa, by coming "closer to the archaic sources of the national language," manage "to say things which had not been said before"). The modernizing thrust possesses tremendous destructive but also self-correcting capacities. Antimodernist reactions contribute a great deal of vitality to present-day expressive culture, but also feed antinomian tendencies in contemporary life, to which a "normative reaction to normlessness" is a frequent response.

The greatest dangers in cultural modernization arise from a politicized conflation of the modernistic with the archaic—when a culture aspiring to modernism organizes itself in an archaic manner, as until recently in the Soviet Union, or when archaic culture adapts modernistic technical means to its purposes, as in Nazi Germany. When religious fundamentalism, especially of the monotheistic type, merges with a political purpose, it tends to follow the latter course.

**Globality as the Polylogue of Civilizations**

We now shift to another analytical model—that of globalization theory, which proclaims that the world is becoming "a single," though not a unified, "place." It is approaching a condition in which ontological understandings entertained in its various parts (though not necessarily of all of its parts at all times) impinge upon the making of decisions in any part.

But most of us take part in the world only through our image of our own civilization. Whatever might be said about the emergence of a network of practical interdependences conceivable as the "central civilization," particular civilizations still provide taken-for-granted symbolic frames in contemporary relations of Islam and the West, or East or South Asia and the West, or Islam and South Asia (and within the West, the four "subcivilizations" of Latin and North America and Western and Eastern
Europe insist on their distinctiveness, with Western Europe functioning as the base of extensions to the other three). The surviving civilizations possess a vital comprehensiveness of symbolic organization that imparts a large-scale and deeply grounded, though frequently latent, self-confidence of which those who subsist outside of the “world-historically significant” sociocultural formations are deprived.

To be sure, contemporary civilizations are (as perhaps the ancient Near Eastern civilizations were between 1,700 and 500 B.C.) in the process of self-reconstruction as a result of modernization and inter-civilizational encounters. The maintenance of their own identities has become problematic. This has the consequence that boundaries are blurred, contents interpenetrate, even central meanings become subject to contestations both within and outside of particular civilizational-traditions-in-transformation, alien genres suggest themselves for uncovering native experiences. Bicivilizational, multiethnic identities or identity disfractions arise, either functioning imaginatively as workshops in critical translation or dissolving into the waste products of “cosmopolitan” consumerism. While this is consciously grasped by a relatively small (though larger than during the preceding millennium or so) proportion of humanity and proves to be a weak force when it comes to matters as weighty and binding upon large populations as national interest, religion, or economic survival, it is the major worldwide spontaneous thrust of formation of cultural perceptions, against which other forces can act only defensively. In the remainder of this essay, we focus on the majority of humanity, who continue in various degrees of commitment and sophistication to conceive of themselves in relation to, or in the implicit terms of, particular civilizational traditions, as even the most “global-humans” do some of the time.

In the course of globalization, immemorial but limited inter-civilizational encounters are transformed into a continuous, all-affecting polylogue of civilizations. On the surface level, inter-civilizational encounters take the form of borrowing. Due to various kinds of developmental unevenness, differential power, traditional prestige, and waves of fashion, borrowing is frequently, even commonly asymmetrical. But even while borrowing takes place on the surface level, mutual criticism (the most primitive form of which is mutual misinterpretation) occurs on a deeper
level—and this can be symmetrical even when uneven development and power differentials are present.

What is meant by mutual criticism is not ritualistic harping on the other's defects but the coming to grips with another's distinctiveness by engaging one's own distinctiveness with it, a process which at its deepest approximates Emerson's conception of friendship as a relationship of "beautiful enemies." Understanding the other's individuality is of course impossible. But one can aim at formulating mutually intelligible terms for discussing each other's imponderables, and even cross-cultural misunderstandings can be fruitful: by misreading the text in a particular way one gives warning of one's own true measure.

Within the globalizing frame of consciousness, mutual criticism acquires a two-way communicative structure. On the one hand, everyone is sooner or later constrained to seek justification of one's own behavior in a "universally understandable" idiom—that is, its explanation either in the manner of a globally accepted mode of discourse, such as the rhetorics of culture, nationalism, democracy, or human rights; or by some demonstration of the empirical consequences of accepting one or another set of premises. On the other hand, one is constantly engaged in judging the "universal understandings"—that is, the globally accepted modes of discourse and the assumptions of "empiricism"—by one's own (though not necessarily "traditional") values and in the light of one's own historical and current experience.  

The need to justify one's own nation, religion, or movement not only in one's own language but also in a "universally understandable" idiom arises from the increased political and moral relevance of the world system of communications ranging from science to literature to journalism—anything beyond the purely instrumental exchanges of messages in multinational economic and political relations. The judging of what functions, at any given time, as "universal understandings" by one's own standards and experiences becomes a necessary response, by members of any self-respecting collectivity, to the impact upon them of "international" or "world" systems of communication. But unless efforts to recover "local," "subjugated" or "marginalized" knowledge—or to practice communally rooted criticism a la Michael Walzer— are at some point oriented to seeking justification in a
universally understandable idiom, they stand in danger of self-indulgence or provincialism.

"The universally understandable" is to some extent the immediately human that transcends all cultural differences (but cannot be relied upon if not symbolically confirmed). The cultural meanings, ideological formulations, standards of judgment that are "universally understood" all come from the culture of modernity (which is not identical with "Western culture") and consist of those of its elements which, over time, best endure the reality tests of the polylogue of civilizations and cultures, acquiring spontaneous world-wide appeal—from technological advancement to notions of human rights. This revisable selection of meanings constitutes the idiom in which each particular culture is increasingly constrained, but to varying extents, in proportion to its involvement with the "world system," to justify itself. The universal is viewed no longer as a substantive set of meanings but as the ability to communicate, in a mutually understandable manner, across all cultural lines, translating what an outsider would regard as "illusions" into "hypotheses."

While all cultures, under conditions of globalization, may challenge the "universal understandings" by their own values and experiences, only civilizations possess sufficiently differentiated intellectual frameworks to sustain or develop a mutual critique as entities equally capable of addressing the broadest conceivable range of problems. This is what gives a special significance to the polylogue of civilizations, as distinguished from "intercultural relations" for which the possession of a comprehensive competence is not required. There is an asymmetry between the political and cultural modes of participation in the "world system": a nation-state is sufficient in the first case, civilizations serving as matrices within which less comprehensive entities assert themselves remain the main players in the global culture. Superpowers are expendable, civilizations are not.

By incorporating the habit of critical responsiveness to universal discourses, a repertoire of translations, into at least their activities that have been affected by modern education and extensive travel abroad, the mode of operation of contemporary civilizations changes irretrievably, even when many of their structures appear to remain "traditional" to themselves. This in some ways
complicates or even confuses their operational procedures by introducing a dual inner-outer system of reference, a bifocal vision (not the same as Arnold Toynbee’s “schism in the soul”). But the dual reference may also provide an otherwise unobtainable source of pressure for updating aspects of civilizational traditions which the universal-particular kind of reality testing reveals to be “outdated without redeeming merit.” The present period has, in the world-wide communications network, more effective means, with self-correcting, “democratic” and “balancing” procedures built into it, for seeking the latter outcome than have earlier times of “civilizational crisis.”

The polylogue of civilizations and cultures can occur wherever minds open up beyond the taken-for-granted systems of categories and balancing styles of one civilization. This could be the universal purpose of post-high school humanistic education. Its primary social supports will be the universities, world media, international scholarly associations, and culture-critical movements—to the extent that they are all set up in such a way as not to consist of “official representatives” of collectivities or ideological bodies; and, on the other hand, are not committed to some blandly programmatic “citizenship of the world” (the incomplete humanity of which becomes evident when it comes to raising one’s children).16

The universal justification—particular judgment dialectic allows civilizations, nations within them, and multinational religions and ideological movements to retain nonprovincial cultural vitality (and a sense of realism) even when inundated by borrowings from elsewhere, whether of “high” or of “mass” culture. It is thus a precondition for the maintenance of civilizational identities in today’s world. And a contemporary definition of “being civilized.”

The globalizing process poses problems for postmodern culture which the latter in its perpetually unfinished, exploratory condition, may lack firmness of shape and balanced self-confidence to be able to resolve. Unless the postmodern is rooted in something other than itself, it falls short in stabilizing capacity, reliable moral commitments, even practical judgment.

But other forms of modernizing culture are no better in providing guidance in coming to grips with globalization. Antimodernist culture, in dissolving reliable structures of meaning into
"simulacra," cannot sustain anything. Modernistic culture becomes formal, hegemonistic, over-explicit, mind-bogglingly cumbersome. Even the practical gifts it distributes to grateful recipients turn out to be means for subduing, absorbing, or exhausting the vitality of the identities of others. And archaic restorationism is always provincial, with unbridgeable gaps between groups: tears only for the fallen on one's own side, perpetual chewing of one's own totemic beast in the cultural journals.

For these reasons, I hypothesize that viable responses to the challenges of globalization can be produced only by culturally stratified entities—that is, by nations, churches or civilizational movements which incorporate into their symbolic designs the modernistic-antimodernist split, archaic restorationist programs, and postmodern resonances—and are not so uncomfortable about the differences of content and accent among them as to become either rigidly polarized or frenetically stagnated.

Neither science nor a generalized "religion of humanity" can become a viable response to globalization, if only because neither is capable of generating a genuine archaic element in which particular communities are grounded. Stratified modernizing cultural systems—not only religion but also nationalism—are better qualified to respond to globalization.

Toward a Postmodern Nationalism?

Grounded in the principle that all collective individualities of the same type are morally entitled to equality of treatment, nationalism is a product of modern Western civilization, compelled to assert itself by the requirement of the international system that only entities possessing their own state organizations will be fully recognized as significant political and therefore also cultural presences in the world.

Civilizational configuration and international system account for the general "modernity" of nationalism (and for its Western-derived elements everywhere), but they do not explain either the strong presence of "nonmodern" features in most versions of nationalism, or its variability along the humane-virulent axis, or its shorter-term resurgences and submergences, perhaps best conceived as activations and deactivations, in particular regions.
The theory of stratified cultural modernization is intended to account for the first of these problems. The second is best approached through a comparative culture history focusing on the social uses of traditional and emergent symbolic designs (in which globalization becomes an increasingly central issue), and the third by drawing upon structural and functional explanatory logics as they are currently employed in empirical social research.

A nation is a community of participation and of historical experience; imagined by its members as either a representation in action of a "natural" language (as tends to be the case in Europe and the eastern Mediterranean) or as the creation of a series of collective decisions to establish a joint form of existence (Switzerland and the U.S.); and in fact held together both by a shared, distinctive set of cultural premises and an evolving political purpose respected by most of its members.

Nationalism is a conception of the cultural identity of a nation which becomes a mobilizing political program even when the nation is (as to some extent it always is) in the process of being invented. National identity is what, unless it is either culturally put into question or politically endangered, does not need to be explicitly declared about one's sense of being more at home in one this-worldly community of participation and historical experience than in any other.

The close alignment of culture with politics is perhaps the most general source of the dangers which nationalism has presented not only to the world, but to the members of the nations it sought to represent, to revive, or to "build." This alignment gives to nationalism a deeper, quasi-religious kind of power, an ability to overwhelm, which "normal" political forces generally lack. It leads to the exploitation of culture by politics.

Democracy in particular benefits from loosening the connections between culture and politics, so that important symbolic quests cannot be monopolized by particular political forces. Nationalism, national identity operates optimally in a democratic setting when its distinguishing marks are distributed over a range of political organizations and over a series of cultural programs, the two distributions far from coinciding with each other, and not divided rigorously along the lines of "majority" and "minority" groups. In what follows we will be mainly concerned with na-
nationalisms as conceptions of collective identity—in their cultural rather than political aspect.

In its cultural form, nationalism is similar to other civilization-shaping movements of the last two centuries—from romanticism to feminism—in that it relates to all levels of modernization of culture. In nineteenth-century Germany and Eastern Europe and present-day Near East, nationalism tends toward the archaic. American nationalism and, to a lesser extent, mainstream French nationalism since the Revolution have been modernizing. The crucial issue in distinguishing modernizing from archaic nationalism is whether one derives society from individuals having “human rights” or perceives individuals as embodiments of the “collective soul” of the nation.

Nationalism pretends at an archaic form when the nation to which it is oriented still needs to be constructed from tribal entities, as currently in sub-Saharan Africa, where what in Europe would be “archaic” may appear as an advance from the “primordial.” In India, a more complex “archaic-modernizing” nation-building has not reconciled its conflicting civic, nationalistic, and religious aspects. In the Soviet Union a program, modernistic in its rhetoric but archaic in its logic, to force “Soviet patriotism” on a largely unwilling multinational population has failed. But what is reasserting itself as a result of the “collapse of Communism,” even in Russia, is not necessarily nationalism ca. 1917. In Central Europe, Hungarian nationalism has probably changed most since 1939, toward the modernistic model, Yugoslav nationalisms have changed least. Eastern and central Europe is currently a laboratory of the diverse trajectories of the “modernization of nationalisms.”

Some less stable twentieth-century forms of nationalism, of the “blood and fire” variety (and Fascism), contain strong components of antimodernism. It seems possible to identify a postmodern nationalism in some intellectual leaders of the current upheaval in Central and Eastern Europe (Václav Havel). Anticipations of it could be found as early as in Mazzini, whose cast of mind may in fact be closer to that of today’s Central European nationalists than Havel’s.

Antimodernist nationalisms manifest themselves as ecstatic movements sweeping away both the restraints traditional in ac-
tual societies (which would be taken seriously in archaic nationalism) and the differentiating, universal categories of modernism. Postmodern nationalism conceives society as a non-exclusive, open-frontiers, polyphonic, "multicultural" cooperation integrated by a shared sense of adequacy, an *Angemessenheit*. The latter may yet come to serve as the "spirit" of the coming European supernationalism (from which at least some Central and Eastern European nations would prefer not to be excluded). It seems less likely than other forms of nationalism to lend itself to "mobilizing" uses.

What distinguishes most clearly among the four types of nationalism is the notion of the human quality most to be promoted by nationalizing political and cultural activities including education. In archaic nationalism, this is the *collective dignity* derived from acting in accordance with group tradition and guaranteed by the group to all of its members in proportion to their conformity to its values. A collective conception of dignity is indeed to be imposed on group members whether or not, as individuals, they want to be directed by it. (This is the sense of dignity granted to women in "orthodox" versions of various religious traditions.) In modernizing nationalism, the key notion is equality of *individual rights* protected by the laws of the nation and enforceable even against the current consensus prevailing in it, the nation viewed as the creation of the laws—and increasingly of the international understandings—it respects. Antimodernistic nationalism centers its attention on the *quest for purity*, an enthusiasm experienced in intensified fusion with others presumed to be like oneself, without being guided by an established framework of group customs or universal laws. (This characteristic imparts to antimodernistic nationalism more of a quality of "religious" fervor than other kinds of nationalism tend to possess.) Postmodern nationalism would allow for and recognize the human quality of *openness* and the cultural characteristic of translucence,\(^{28}\)—a Milosz-like commitment to one's own nation permeated with a responsiveness to others, a sense of multiple, communicating identities. (Antimodernist and postmodern activities and human beings have tended so far to be less stable than the archaic and the modernizing, with tendencies to "regress" toward the archaic or to "seek institutional stability" in the modernizing, as the rhetoric of contemporary sociology might put it.)
In order not to rely on a single dimension in distinguishing types of nationalism, we furthermore anticipate that they will be marked by different styles of social action framed by different conceptions of time. Archaic nationalism generally presumes a heritage (or restorability) of reliable habits, simultaneously practical and symbolic, in all areas of life. They are seen as operating in "sacred," ritualistically confirmed (or restorable) time. Modernizing nationalism tends to favor reasoned pragmatics—behavior controlled by reflection on principles to be accepted and calculations of practical consequences. Such practices presuppose an “empty, homogeneous” time always available (in the modern West, but not quite as much in eastern Europe) to be filled up and given content only by them. Antimodernistic nationalism engineers spectacular stagings—an expressivism oriented to attaining concentrated political effect. Such actions require an “explosive,” discontinuous conception of a self-creating and self-destroying time, reemerging from the graves of some Germanic or Scandinavian mythology. Postmodern nationalism or national identity reveals itself through spontaneous resonances across permeable boundaries. Time tends to become fragmented into a multiplicity of potentially but uncertainly interacting “slices.” These distinctions are intended to pertain to types of nationalism as well as to other civilizational movements since the French revolution. The purpose of having two sets of criteria is to get greater clarity on what is meant by locating particular nationalistic or other phenomena in relation to cultural modernization.

The four basic types of nationalism and their various mixes are specific foci of crystallization, popular transmission and testing of cultural modernization and can be expected, in its course, to recur. But an analysis of the more fully developed phenomena of nationalism—those which endure in contemporary nations—is likely to reveal the presence somewhere in their configurations of elements located on all levels of cultural modernization, and appealing to different groups in varying intensities. Only this kind of nationalism, in any case, is likely to measure up to the demands by which cultures are now being judged.

Nations are not the only foci of crystallization of such cultural processes. But nationalism (in this respect comparable to the “traditional” religions) refers more than the other civilizational movements of modernity to a community that is grounded in
everyday practices, and is “complete” in including, at least potentially, the widest range of individuals regularly active in it. For these reasons, nationalism has proved to possess a reality rootedness and resiliency superior to that of other civilizational movements of modernity and is likely to persist or keep reviving for a long time to come.

How much weight the various possible components of nationalism will acquire in a particular case presumably depends on the raw materials of religious and political tradition which a nation can draw upon in modernizing its cultures, on the current interplay of influential groups in a society, and on its international setting. The most important issue in contemporary studies of nationalism is whether conditions can be identified which promote either a virulent or a humane (that is, neither repressive nor violent) kind of nationalism.

Comparative economic failure, perceived externally generated cultural inundations, a widespread sense of anomie, and large influxes of immigrants differing in language, religion, or physical characteristics appear to be among the conditions that reduce the likelihood of nationalism taking a humane aspect. All of these conditions are likely to become more prevalent during globalization and may set off militant reactions to the polylogue of civilizations. In addition, fusion of nationalism with religion and unsettled territorial claims, particularly those concerned with archaic (and therefore uncompromisable) sacred spaces and centers, promote virulent nationalism.

The symbolic design of nationalism may be as important as external social conditions. While there are “traditional” cultures of moderation into which some nationalist movements may be absorbed, I would expect that in today’s world humane nationalism will depend on a strong presence in its symbolic designs of both modernizing and postmodern culture, and on the participation of its bearers in the polylogue of civilizations, —in the creation of universally understandable idioms, and simultaneously in the judgment of universal understandings by their own values and their own experiences.

This is a position which nationalist intellectuals can take without compromising either their intellect or their identity and without becoming flabby or naive. It is likely that, responding to the
inevitable challenges of globalization, a significant fraction of them will continue to take such positions.

Dickinson College

NOTES


3. Undivided unities properly belong to primordial cultural designs. The archaic can be defined by efforts at unification of what has already been divided, whether by “evolutionary” differentiation, breakdown, or migration. Such unifications can have either a forward-looking, contra-anomic, or a backward-looking, antimodernistic, imaginary restorationist thrust. Or even be both at the same time for different people.


6. The “inner demons” of a civilization which emerge in its archaizing restorationist programs are elaborations, in a contemporary idiom, of persistent (or recollected) ancient symbolic designs already present in its make-up. Norman Cohn, Europe’s Inner Demons: An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt (New York: Basic Books, 1975), and Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World-Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion (New York: Harper and Row, 1967). But, as Kampuchea has demonstrated, the inner demons can also be acquired in peripheral modernizing societies by borrowing from the “more advanced.”


“global scene” is best conceived as a series of flows and locations in which they intersect, see Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Culture Economy,” Public Culture, 2 (Spring, 1990), pp. 1-24.


14. Depending on the genre, historical context, and personal disposition, the polylogue of civilizations can take the widest diversity of forms—at present from the precision of Louis Dumont to the ambiguities of Salman Rushdie. The contemporary polylogue differs from age-old syncretistic efforts by (a) more explicit attention in judging ideas to their practical consequences, (b) a post-totalitarian refusal of the temptation of “universal syntheses.”

15. Michael Walzer, The Company of Critics: Social Criticism and Political Commitment in the Twentieth Century (New York: Basic Books, 1988). Cf. Walzer’s community-attached critic with the committed stranger of Agehananda Bharati: “I believe that cultural criticism is the only contribution we can make to cultures not originally our own, or not our own by choice… The method tends to avoid the disastrous distinction between ‘outsiders’ and ‘insiders,’ for the fact that one contributes to a culture makes one an ‘insider,’ and if cultural criticism is successful then the critic becomes an ‘insider’ by virtue of the value of his criticism; or to be more exact, the distinction between ‘outsider’ and ‘insider’ becomes irrelevant.” The Ochre Robe: An Attempt at Autobiography (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1970), pp. 275-6.

16. Anne Roiphe evokes a mother’s anxieties about her cosmopolitan children: “… will they join other tribes or will they be so universal, such citizens of the world, that they will be bland, ineffectual, gracious but ridiculous, like the meetings of the United Nations? In their universalism will the furnishings of their souls look like Olympic stadiums?” Generation Without Memory: A Jewish Journey in Christian America (New York: Linden Press, 1981), p. 214.

17. Jean Baudrillard, Simulations (New York: Semiotext[e], 1983).


19. Thus in the current East European context the development of a moderate-democratic culture would probably be helped along if the liberals did not let the extreme right to monopolize the symbolism of "national rebirth" and "collective roots" and the religious parties that of "repentance" and "moral standards."


21. See Louis Dumont, Essays on Individualism: Modern Ideology in Anthropological Perspective (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 113-148, on differences between French and German nationalism. Dumont contends that in French thought since the mid-eighteenth century the person embodies the dominant modern principle of individuality and therefore is the controlling criterion for comprehending the nation, whereas in German thought nations represent (collective) individualities and persons are parts of the totalities which their nations constitute for them. This has to be qualified by the support for Fascism in interwar France, which was stronger by first-rank intellectuals than anywhere in Europe (Zeev Sternhell, Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986]), and by the shift toward a "constitutional patriotism" in Germany after World War II. Jürgen Habermas, "Yet Again: German Identity—a Unified Nation of Angry DM-Burghers?", New German Critique, 52 (Winter, 1991), pp. 84-101. Habermas considers "linguistic community, culture, or history" as "prepolitical imponderables" and argues that a "post-traditional" national identity "exists only in the method of the public, discursive battle around the interpretation of a constitutional patriotism made concrete under particular historical circumstances" (p. 98). This is a distinction between archaic and modernizing nationalism conceived in exclusively political terms—and therefore found to be surprised by the reemergences of cultural nationalism which it lacks the conceptual equipment to comprehend.

22. Human or individual rights are rarely given an important place in African studies of nation-building. More characteristic are beliefs in "collective autonomy and collective distinctiveness without subscribing to the primacy of the individual in the liberal sense." Ali A. Mazrui, Cultural Engineering and Nation-Building in East Africa (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1972), p. 117.


far stronger than the comparable sense in post-Nazi Germany and more explicitly associated with nationalism, which can more plausibly be perceived as opposed to totalitarian dictatorship in the Soviet Union at present than it was in post-Nazi Germany.

25. Emilio Gentile, “Fascism as Political Religion,” Journal of Contemporary History, 25 (May-June, 1990), pp. 229-551. In distinguishing between nationalism and fascism, it is helpful to recall Anthony Smith: “The vital fact is that [European] nationalism has largely accepted the European heritage and attempted to build upon it, whereas fascism involved a wholesale and deliberate rejection of it.” Nationalism in the Twentieth Century, op. cit., p. 84. This may be valid, with qualifications, elsewhere as well. Saddam Hussein is not an Arab nationalist.

26. Havel’s postmodernism is clearest in his plays. His political-philosophical essays and speeches contain strong archaizing longings. The human rights theme, expressed more in action than in philosophy, is modernist. This confluence allows him to be described as a culturally balanced modernizer (an equivalent of David Riesman’s autonomous man)—and, to the extent this is related to his struggle on behalf of Czechoslovaks against imposed Soviet “cosmopolitanism,” as nationalist. The latter, in Havel’s case, can only mean humanist in a national idiom. For more one-sided interpretations, see Aviezer Tucker, “Vaclav Havel’s Heideggerianism,” Telos, No. 85 (Fall, 1990), pp. 63-78; Caroline Bayard, “The Intellectual in the Post Modern Age: East/West Contrasts,” Philosophy Today, 34 (Winter, 1990), pp. 291-302.


29. The general theories of nationalism, such as Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), or E. J. Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), fail to take into account the importance of national cultures in producing different kinds, or symbolic designs, of nationalism. This has the unjustifiable practical consequence that all nationalisms are treated alike—usually, by most social scientists, either with some hostility or with anticipations of their demise.

30. But the influx of Turkish workers in Germany since the 1960’s did not produce as much of a virulently nationalistic reaction as the immigration of the Algerians, at the same time, in France. It may be that while immigration can activate prejudices, it is not in itself a crucial factor in generating politically relevant nationalistic aggressiveness.

31. As Lebanon has indicated, a climate of mutual tolerance supported only by a tradition of accepting that each isolated group is entitled to its own values (and all of its members obligated to adhere to them)—rather than by the liberal consensus that each individual, freely interacting with
all others, can choose by his or her own lights—is under modern conditions fragile. There is some danger of this in some contemporary versions of “multicultural education.”

32. Archaic nationalism can be both virulent and humane (Solzhenitsyn). So can modernistic nationalism. It is difficult to imagine humane antimodernist or virulent postmodern nationalism.

33. National identities in the globalizing stage of history need to be open to and critical of not only their own but also all other civilizations. Who can still bear to live with a standard-issue parochial nationalism?