*Nations and Nationalism* **10** (1/2), 2004, 49–62. © *ASEN 2004*

# Place, kinship and the case for non-ethnic nations

THOMAS HYLLAND ERIKSEN

*Department of Social Anthropology, University of Oslo, Norway*

ABSTRACT. One of A. D. Smith's most controversial contributions to the theory of nationalism is his view of the role of the *ethnie* in the historical emergence of nationhood. He sees the *ethnie*, its shared memories, myths and territorial belonging as important conditions for stable national identities based on deep emotional commitments, thereby arguing against radical modernist and constructivist views of nationhood. While Smith's view has much to recommend it, this paper argues for a wider, more metaphorical conceptualisation of his central terms, using examples to support the view that both kinship (ethnicity) and place (territory) – basic elements in political identity everywhere – may be construed on the basis of diverse materials. However, and here Smith's interventions have been extremely valuable, the resulting collective identity must be based on some notion of kinship and place in order to be a national identity proper.

For many years and through an impressive number of books and journal articles, A. D. Smith has defended his view of the *ethnie* or ethnic community as the sociocultural and historical basis of modern nationalism (Smith 1986, 1991, 1995, 1998). As the readers of this journal are aware, his view is influential but far from uncontroversial. Already Hans Kohn (1955) distinguished between an 'Eastern', ethnocultural and a 'Western', civic form of nationalism, assuming that only the former was based on ethnic identity. Later studies of French and German nationalism (notably Brubaker 1992) have contrasted the consequences of *ius soli* and *ius sanguinis*, indicating roughly that Frenchness can be acquired, whereas descent determines whether or not one is to be considered a German. While Smith's theoretical opponent Ernest Gellner (1983, 1997) agrees with the view that ethnic groups formed the basis of nations – somewhat surprisingly, given his gargantuan emphasis on their constructed nature – the equally influential Benedict Anderson (1983) does not posit such a connection. Several of his main examples, such as Indonesia and the Philippines, were not based on a pre-existing *ethnie*. Current views of possible nations which are immediately relevant to the question of its relationship to ethnicity, include Habermas' notion of *Verfassungspatriotismus* – constitutional patriotism – and Kymlicka's (1995) concept of multicultural citizenship.

The perspective that will be developed here consists in an attempt to overcome the divide between constructivism and primordialism. Just as it can

be said that in political philosophy, the liberals have the best arguments while the communitarians have the best social theory, I shall argue that primordialists (or 'perennialists') are right in claiming that community and shared memories are crucial for the formation of national sentiment, while the constructivist emphasis on creativity in conjuring nations into existence is pertinent inasmuch as sentiments of national solidarity can be grown from diverse seedlings, perhaps even sometimes from hybrid germs.

## The issue

When A. D. Smith began his research on nationalism, the important academic subculture favouring Marxism and class consciousness seemed to be its most potent alternative; in the early twenty-first century, the challenge comes from a much more general tendency in social theory to emphasise change and movement, the relativity of boundaries, the multiplicity of identities and internal diversity, sacrificing cohesion, stability, homogeneity and structure as key concepts. It is as if the main research tool in much contemporary research on identification consists in a bifocal magnifying glass precluding generalisations and overviews, and favouring minutely detailed accounts of variations and nuances. This has certainly been a dominant tendency in social anthropology, while general social theorists have for years singled out globalisation and differentiation as current academic heartlands. Yet Smith's position on nationalism remains largely unchanged although he has qualified his view on the *ethnie*-nation relation somewhat since *The Ethnic Origin of Nations*; for example, in his recent work he makes it quite clear that he does not question the strength of and 'overarching' American nationalism (Smith 1995: 45), and he accepts that the distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism can be a useful one (e.g. Smith 1998: 212). His theory has nonetheless resisted the temptations from postmodern and postcolonial theories of identification, European integrationism and theories of globalisation and deterritorialisation. Sometimes cast as a primordialist, Smith has always argued that there is continuity between modern nations and a pre-modern past, and that successful national identities presuppose an *ethnie* at their core, that is a historically shaped collective identity incorporating myths of shared origins and cultural sharing. He strongly rejects predictions about the imminent transcendence of nationhood, whether they are based on materialist reasoning (a view represented by Eric Hobsbawm) or on logical arguments about the impossibility of national cohesion in a world which is increasingly recognised as being infinitely diverse (as witnessed in Homi Bhabha's work, see Smith 1998).

Smith's position is not only admirable for its resilience; it is also underpinned by his voluminous and rich writings on nationalism, where he, in addition to presenting empirical cases and developing theory, explicitly discusses alternative accounts of nationalism. His erudition and lucidity make it consistently rewarding to engage with his theorising about nationalism.

Clearly, Smith is correct in assuming that national sentiment and solidarity cannot be created *ex nihilo*. As Anderson (1991/1983) pointed out, national identity has more in common with phenomena such as kinship and religion than with secular political ideologies. The question is whether the emotional glue that binds nations together has to be ethnic in character, or whether there are alternative roads to national sentiment. I thus leave questions pertaining to the future of national identity aside, and will also refrain from a discussion of equally important questions concerning multiple identities, transnationalism and ambiguities in national identification, concentrating instead narrowly on the notion of the *ethnie* and its possible emotional and functional equivalents.

## What is the *ethnie*?

In his *Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Smith (1986: 22 – 30, see also Smith 1989) usefully presents an overview of six constituent elements or 'dimensions' of the *ethnie* as he sees it.

1 A collective name. Smith is right in emphasising the importance of ethnonyms for group identity; but of course, many named groups in the past have not qualified as ethnic ones–in many African societies documented in anthropological studies, people identified themselves largely through clan membership–and many African ethnonyms were superimposed colonial categories, lumping linguistically and culturally related groups together, which were later reified and internalised by the people in question (see e.g. Fardon 1987). In the present world, too, there are naturally many named groups which are not ethnic ones. 'Muslims' is one. 'Bavarians' is another. 'Social anthropologists', I suppose, is a third, although it very rarely (all too rarely?) functions as a corporate entity.
2 A common myth of descent. This is obviously an important criterion of ethnic identity. Smith elaborates the point by saying that there 'are myths of spatial and temporal origins, of migration, of ancestry and filiation, of the golden age, of decline and exile and rebirth'. As Leach (1954) famously showed in his study of Kachin–Shan politics, and many have followed his lead, these myths tend to be ambiguous in that different groups can be constituted in different ways depending on the interpretation of the myth. Since Smith mentions India, it is worthwhile to mention that the recent Hindu nationalist interpretation of the *Ramayana* as an epic focusing on the struggle between good and evil (viz. Hindus and Muslims) is deeply contested among Hindus and other Indians (see e.g. van der Veer 1994).
3 A shared history. Unlike many other authors (e.g. Tonkin et al. 1989), Smith distinguishes between myths and 'shared memories'. He seems to argue that the latter refer to real events, unlike the former; but myths are often believed in, and history–folk or academic–always contains important elements of narrative creativity. As he points out, histories can be divisive just like myths, and it is difficult to see any fundamental difference.

4 A distinctive shared culture. This is a problematic notion. Indeed, as Smith's own examples show, it is a purely empirical question what is considered and accepted as 'shared culture' in the context of group identity. It can be language, it can be religion, or a particular historical experience (such as racism or migration) which is externalised as the cultural emblem of a group, or it could be a unique combination of cultural elements as witnessed in Bangladesh, where the vast majority of inhabitants are unique in that they are Bengali speakers (like Bengali Hindus) *and* Muslims (like Indian Muslims).
5 An association with a specific territory. This is obviously relevant for the kind of group identity in question, but territorial claims are problematic to deal with in practice owing to migration, mixing and competing claims to the same territory.
6 A sense of solidarity. This is clearly the most important criterion of ethnic identity. Seeing oneself as culturally distinctive, collectively and individually, from other groups, and acting accordingly, is crucial for ethnic identification to endure.

Smith's delineation of the *ethnie*, which he assumes to lie at the foundation of nations, is rather more substantial than common anthropological definitions of ethnicity, which tend to emphasise formal elements, notably the relationship with outsiders, as key factors creating both group boundedness and an awareness of cultural difference (Barth 1969; Eriksen 2002[1993]). Contrasting *vis-à-vis* others is seen, in this intellectual tradition, as the constitutive element of ethnicity. Smith's emphasis on the substantial elements of sharing and internal solidarity represents an important corrective to those who are tempted, following simplistic interpretations of Anderson and Hobsbawm, to see ethnic groups and nations as 'imaginary' (the term 'imagined' is often taken to mean 'imaginary') and traditions as purely 'invented'.[1] The requirement of cultural sharing also not uncontroversially emphasised by Smith, also makes perfect sense. In the pre-modern empires, the imperial state demanded little and gave little in return from its subjects (see Grillo 1998). Cultural pluralism could flourish. The nation-state requires a much greater degree of homogeneity, and its citizens (who are, at least in theory, no longer subjects) demand equality, recognising that a certain degree of cultural similarity, such as command of a shared national language, is necessary for equality to be possible.

## Does it have to be an ethnie?

A collective name; a myth of origin; other shared myths/histories; cultural sharing; association with a territory; subjective sense of solidarity: These are Smith's defining criteria of the *ethnie*. He later elaborates ways in which *ethnies* can be turned into nations in the modern world; this will not occupy us here, as I shall, as announced, investigate whether or not other kinds of group can be functional equivalents of ethnic ones in producing national identity. Again, it

must be stressed that I am not concerned with the future of the nation-state, its moral legitimacy in the modern world and its alternatives (see Eriksen 1997 for a discussion), but with the question concerning possible foundations for national sentiment and identification.

For the sake of clarity, I shall deal with each of Smith's criteria separately.

First, a collective name or ethnonym. As mentioned above, there are many non-ethnic collective labels which evoke strong sentiments among their members. The question is whether they can serve as the basis for nationhood. The term 'American' seems to be one such, 'Muslim' another in the context of Pakistan, since the main (only?) reason that Pakistanis are not Indians is that they are Muslims. The term 'Pakistan' is itself a modern construction, and it is doubtful if Pakistanis had felt a strong national loyalty without the enmity and competition towards India. In other words, many options will do here.

Second, a myth of origin. In European countries, myths of origin tend to be ethnic, but not invariably so. The French myth of Clovis I, the first Christian king of the Franks, is a spiritual myth more than a genealogical one. Appropriately, it was a French intellectual, Ernest Renan (1982 [1882]), who said that the inhabitants of a nation need shared memories, but they also need to have forgotten the same things. In the same, justly celebrated essay, Renan also pointed out that 'racial considerations have…been for nothing in the constitution of modern nations', adding – much to the exasperation of racial purists – that France, Germany, Italy and Britain were all 'undecipherable medleys' of peoples.

In general, ethnic groups have myths of descent, even if they are often ambiguous and contested. Do nations need myths of descent or of origins? I have earlier argued that nations may thrive on myths of the future (Eriksen 1993), but they also need a shared past. However, this past can be near as well as distant. In Mauritius, a plausible myth of origin is the story of the ethnic riots in the late 1960s, 'the riots to end all riots;[2]in South Africa, the long struggle against racial segregation and apartheid has proven to be a powerful myth of origin for important segments of the otherwise ethnically diverse population. There is no logical reason why the *mythomoteur* often referred to by Smith that is the constitutive myth of the ethnic polity, should necessarily create an *ethnic* group rather than another kind of corporate entity. Again, the postcolonial nations probably give the best examples of alternative, non-biological myths of origin as opposed to biological myths of descent. Another example would be the Muslims of Mauritius (Eriksen 1998). Although they are of North Indian descent, and share their migration history with Mauritian Hindus, the Pan-Arabism of the 1970s led the majority of Mauritian Muslims to redefine their origins in religious terms. In the 1983 Census, most of them claimed that their 'ancestral language' was not Urdu or Bhojpuri, but Arabic. Confronting a Muslim informant with this 'obvious falsehood', I was given the answer that 'we admit that we came from India in a physical sense, but spiritually, our ancestral language is Arabic, and to a Muslim, the spirit is more

important than the flesh'. Who is prepared to argue with that? The style of reasoning is reminiscent of General de Gaulle's famous dictum that 'France is not a race, but an idea'.[3]

Third, there is the question of shared memories. Shared collective experiences, codified through narratives which are accessible to the members of the group, are clearly immensely important in the shaping of group identities (and again I agree with Smith at the general level). The refashioning of nations following the upsurge of minority movements, new waves of migration, feminism and postcolonial critiques indicates that the form of content such memories should take is contested, and that they can be re-shaped to fit present concerns (see Hutchinson 1994 for examples). That the memory of certain iconic events in the past need to be shared by the members of a nation is probably true, but they need not belong to a distant past. In Norway, the memory of German occupation during the Second World War did much to consolidate the sense of national identity, and since it is the only remotely tragic narrative in Norwegian history since the fourteenth century, it plays a significant part in contemporary Norwegian identity.

Then there is the difficult question of shared culture. A degree of sharing is obviously necessary, not least in polyethnic societies, in order to avoid segregation along ethnic lines, which is always a recipe for competition, mutual suspicion and conflict. The question is, how much is enough? How much do the citizens of a given state have to have in common, culturally speaking, in order to form a nation? One thing is for certain, namely that cultural commonalities are not sufficient. The recent histories of culturally rather homogeneous countries like Rwanda, Yugoslavia and Somalia[4] bear witness to this. Moreover, cultural commonalities can be achieved, and are achieved – through education, shared mass media and everyday interaction – by people with discrete origins. National sentiment is rather widespread and strong in a country such as Argentina (Archetti 1999), where it is based on shared migration history, but also on cultural expressions such as the tango, polo and football, as well as cultural practices such as the *asado* (large-scale barbecue). Again, as Calhoun points out in a discussion of the Eritrean – Ethiopian war, it was 'not the antiquity of Eritrean nationalism that mattered in mobilising people against Ethiopian rule,... but the felt reality of Eritreanness' (Calhoun 1997: 35). Eritrean identity is neither historically ancient nor ethno-religious, and during the war, members of the same clan fought on different sides. The importance of trivial everyday experiences – currency, TV news, flags in the street, tipping conventions, conversational styles etc. – has rarely been investigated systematically in studies of nationalism (but see Billig 1995), but contribute substantially to the development of that 'felt reality'. Everyday trivia often goes without saying because it comes without saying, and shared implicit conventions and notions, or taken-for-granteds, create a sense of community which is linked with space rather than time; sharing the same space rather than entertaining notions of shared origins. The moment the children of immigrants begin to speak the vernacular language without a foreign accent, it

becomes increasingly difficult for populist politicians to brand them as 'culturally alien'.

Territoral belonging, or at least some association with a territory, is the fifth criterion. With very few exceptions, all the cultural groups known to anthropology have some attachment to a territory or landscape. This is as true of nomads as of farmers, industrial workers and computer programmers. The *form* of belonging naturally varies, and the fixed polity marked by clear, digital, pencil-thin boundaries – citizens inside, foreigners outside – is a modern invention; but place has played a part throughout human cultural history. Mass migration has more often than not been born out of necessity not choice. In the contemporary world, many nonetheless belong not in one place but either in a metaphoric place but in two or more places. Transnational migrants exemplify the latter; Western 'experts' and businessmen the former. Enclaves of Western modernity scattered around the world, incorporating satellite TV, American and French schools, Internet access and cheap air tickets, imply that 'the West' (or even 'the USA') has been deterritorialised to some extent. The main current problem in US foreign policy is that inasmuch as the present regime wishes to pursue the traditional policy of isolationism, defence of American interests and indeed the USA as such seems to imply the necessity of global control, since the USA is everywhere by virtue of its overseas business communities and global economic interests.

More generally, territoriality is seen in many studies of nationalism as a complementary or opposing force to kinship or ethnic identity. Since, according to nationalist ideals, cultural and territorial boundaries ought to coincide, and since they hardly ever do in practice, questions of national identity often concern their mutual relationship: Is one a member of a nation by virtue of a shared ethnic identity/origin, or by virtue of living in the same place (that is, in this context, the same state)? To ethnic nationalists in, say, Norway who argue that immigrants are 'matter out of place' and ought to be sent back, it may be responded that according to their view of nationhood, four and a half million Norwegian live in Norway proper, but some eight to ten million Norwegians – the descendants of emigrants – live abroad, largely in North America. Such a *reductio ad absurdum* of ethnic nationalist claims shows, at the very least, that several forces are at play in shaping national identification, imputed biological origins being only one. This being as it may, territorial identification is definitely an important aspect of national identity; but it can be acquired through migration and settlement, as is evident in the New World, but also among immigrant communities in Europe who claim belonging to particular urban areas. Moreover, territoriality is metaphorical since the nation is an abstract place. In some migrant communities, attachment to the place of origin remains strong even among persons of the second or third generation, who have never been there (see Olwig 1997 for migrants from Nevis). Moreover, the studies presented in a recent book on movement and mixing (Rapport and Dawson 1998a) all in various ways confirm that if movement is endemic to the human condition, so is placeboundness. In the

explicitly polemical introductory chapter, the editors first conclude that 'human beings conceive of their lives as moving-in-between', before ending the sentence with the words 'a dialectic between movement and fixity' (Rapport and Dawson 1998b: 33). In the possibly most extreme case study presented in the book, Amit-Talai (1998) describes uprooted expatriates working in the Cayman Islands, unable or unwilling to return home and yet unable to settle in the archipelago permanently, for professional and political reasons. She depicts Cayman society as a transit place, more like an airport than like a town, where expatriates are weakly integrated in the local social systems and voice concerns over their lack of spatial belonging, contrasting their expat lives with 'reality'. If movement is endemic to humanity (and I think it is), then so is spatial identity: It can be dual, metaphorical, big (the USA) or small (a particular neighbourhood in north London), but there is little evidence to suggest that collective and societal identities can thrive without a spatial referent.

The final criterion is the subjective sense of identity. This is presumed to be the outcome of the other factors, and whether or not it exists is an empirical question, but it certainly helps if the five other requirements are satisfied in one way or another. So far, the discussion has indicated that Smith's list of factors defining the *ethnie* is accurate, but also that these elements need not produce *ethnies* but can also produce other kinds of collectivities based on ascription. The concept of the *ethnie* seems too rigid, and too bound up with *la longue durée* and native ideas of bloodlines, to accommodate the entire range of functioning imagined communities. In the words of Brubaker (1998: 301), 'counter-state definitions of the nation may be based on territory, on historical provincial privileges, on distinct political histories prior to incorporation into a larger state and so on'. A certain conceptual flexibility is therefore needed, but it is necessary to resist the temptation to conclude that anything goes. As Smith usefully reminds us there are clear constraints, and to his list of six (or possibly five, if we combine myth and memories) I shall add another two.

## Two further dimensions of national identity

One factor which is crucial in shaping community sentiment, rarely considered by sociologists and political scientists writing about ethnicity and nationalism, is that of *interpersonal networks*. The raw material upon which every abstract ideology has to build is everyday experience. The family, the environment of socialisation and the bonds of mutual commitment and trust developed through endless encounters and acts of reciprocity create that sense of 'cultural intimacy' (Herzfeld 1997) which includes insiders at the expense of excluding the outsiders from any group, whether this takes place consciously or unwittingly. The sense of kinship felt by well integrated members of any nation grows out of shared experiences (the cultural commonalities discussed above), but trust is developed through enduring interaction. The extent to which social

interaction networks cut across ethnic boundaries determines to no small extent the degree of shared national sentiment in polyethnic societies.

In an evaluation of the 'primordial sentiments' militating against the new postcolonial states, Geertz once wrote: 'One is bound to one's kinsman, one's neighbor, one's fellow believer, *ipso facto*; as the result not merely of personal affection, practical necessity, common interest, or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by virtue of some *unaccountable absolute import* attributed to the very tie itself' (Geertz 1963: 108, my italics). Verging on mysticism, this statement amounts to an intellectual abdication. But clearly, the 'absolute' dimension of the tie referred to by Geertz is nothing but that sense of being in the same boat and living in the same world, with a shared destiny, which results from regular interaction, small exchanges and mutual courtesies, webs of kinship and neighbourly relations. In a word, strong interpersonal ties are far from unaccountable, but derive from the nature of social interaction and local organisation.[5]

The other factor is *contrasting*, which frequently takes the form of negative stereotyping or enemy images of other nations, but which is also omnipresent in everyday arenas such as international sport. Having something in common doubtless helps, but there is also nothing like a common enemy. In the days after 11 September 2001, there were newspaper reports of African-American youths helping old Jewish ladies across the street. Colonial India, to pick another example almost at random, achieved a shared, if precarious (and ultimately doomed) collective identity across a space of huge cultural differences largely because of the shared opposition to the British. Partition, which came on the eve of independence and dampened enthusiasm on every side of the new borders, was not predicated on the Pakistanis having a shared ethnic identity – the Punjabi and the Bengali ethnic groups were actually both divided by partition – but on religion.

National discourses depend crucially on contrasting, which is more widespread than commonly assumed. Take the language of tourism: tourism boards worldwide offer carefully edited, standardised images of the country in question, singling out a few salient elements – Constable country and Buckingham Palace; Grand Canyon and Disneyworld; the *bistro* and the Eiffel Tower; the Kruger Park and Table Mountain – which are intended to 'sell' the country in question, but which also have an important internal function in giving a sense of *relational uniqueness* to the country's own citizens. My village informants in Mauritius would probably not have thought about showing me the coloured earths of Chamarel had they not known that this strange freak of nature was an acknowledged tourist attraction.

Contrasting is also politically important in more immediate ways. Polyethnic and class-divided Britain thus achieved a rare level of national cohesion during the Falklands/Malvinas war in 1982, just as the standardised rituals of international sport regularly enhance national solidarity, however fleetingly. We are not only because we have something in common, but perhaps chiefly because we are not them. Afrikaner group identity in South Africa

would obviously have been much weaker if it had not been developed through a hierarchical contrast in relation to other Africans; innumerable other examples could have been invoked to illustrate the same point. Contrasting is not, moreover, merely a political instrument intended to create loyalty and internal homogeneity; it is equally important as a means to achieve recognition in Taylor's (1992, 1998) sense.

## Place, kinship and nationhood

Smith's emphasis on shared narratives and territorial belonging as prerequisites for national solidarity is obviously pertinent. Supplemented with an understanding of social networks, trust and reciprocity, it is sufficient as a analytical framework for explaining why communities (which are all in a sense imagined) appear, endure and eventually are transformed or vanish. The question remains whether these communities need to have an ethnic foundation in order to function as nations. To my mind, this would entail stretching the concept of ethnic identity too far. I have therefore argued that there are several ways in which the requirements of nationhood can be met, and that shared ethnic identity is only one, even if it has historically been the most important one.

It is often said that the nation is based on the dual, European heritage of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. The nation can also be said to be connected to more universal dimensions of human existence. Virtually all political identities known to political anthropology are based, in different ways and to varying degrees of course, on place and kinship. The two principles often compete and create divided loyalties (see Gluckman, 1982[1956], for a famous presentation of this view), and there are good reasons to assume that patrilineal corporate groups, which fuse political loyalty, inheritance rules and patterns of settlement into one principle, tend to be politically stronger than – all other things being equal – matrilineal or cognatic descent groups, where the principles of place and kinship do not concur. The nation, too, is based on the dual principles of place and kinship, and just as in the traditional African society, they are rarely if ever completely congruent, they compete and lead to divided loyalties.

This much said, it is crucial to keep in mind that both place and kinship are, certainly in the case of huge entities such as nations (with the possible exceptions of countries on the scale of Nauru and Nevis), metaphorical. The sociobiologist Pierre Van Den Berghe, who sees ethnic solidarity as an expression of kin selection,[6] thus nearly gets it right (Van Den Berghe 1981). Kinship and territoriality are very powerful forces indeed in shaping human group identification. What is missing in the sociobiological account is an appreciation of the metaphorical nature of human communities.

The force of nationhood depends on the national ideology's ability to transfer the sentiments and commitments of citizens from their personal experiences to that abstract and imagined community called the nation. When national leaders use kinship terminology ('brothers and sisters', 'fatherland',

'homeland', 'mother tongue' and so on) to designate features of the abstract community which is the nation, they are busy carrying out this work. It could thus be said that the nation expropriates the personal sentiments and experiences of its citizens, transferring them to the much larger and loftier stage of the nation. It is in this sense that a Serb could refer, in the heady 1990s, to the 1389 battle of Kosovo in the first person: 'We [the kin group] lost the battle to the infidels, and we are not going to lose Kosovo again.' It is in the same sense that a crime committed against a member of one's nation is perceived as a crime against one's family members. The rape of a Croatian girl at the hands of Serbian soldiers somewhere in Croatia could justify 'revenge' carried out by any Croat against any Serb, as in a clan feud writ large. However, the metaphoric kin group of 'Americans' is not based on a folk sociobiological model of origins, yet it can be equally strong. Nations need not have 'navels' (Gellner 1997) even if it helps, and if they do not, they can sometimes create appropriate 'navels' retrospectively.

The nation is, thus, not a kin group but a metaphoric kin group. Similarly, the nation is not a place, but a metaphoric place. As wryly pointed out by Miller and Slater (2000), Trinidad does not stop at the coastline of insular Trinidad, but stretches into England, Canada and the USA, which are the countries with the largest Trinidadian immigrant populations. If anything, Trinidadian migrants feel *more* Trini than the ones who stay put. The everyday abstract image of the nation, taught to children through school atlases and to millions of adults through daily weather forecasts, is another example. Nations (again with a couple of exceptions) as physical entities cannot be observed directly; the citizens have to infer their existence from abstractions such as maps.

None of the above is intended to mean that nations are not real, only that their reality hinges on the efficacy of social constructions relating citizens to one another through fictive kinship, and creating a fatherland through geographical abstractions. In this dual way, the nation can be imagined as a metaphorical kin group residing in a metaphorical place.

The crucial question remains to be answered unequivocally: Under which circumstances do metaphoric kinship and metaphoric place of the national kinds function? This is, I hope to have shown, an entirely empirical question. Kinship, as generations of anthropologists have shown us (beginning, for all practical purposes, with Lévi-Strauss 1949), is not merely about descent and blood lines; it is also about alliances and affinality. In-laws are kin. Women from outside marry into kin groups. Just as it is theoretically possible for anybody to become a 'naturalised' American or Frenchman, rules of exogamy ensure that outsiders are allowed permanent entry into the villages of traditional kin groups. This is not to say that they are entirely open, of course – African peoples have their marriage rules just as Western countries have limits to immigration – but that a shared ethnic identity is not a necessary condition for nationhood.

Exactly who is reckoned as a member of the metaphoric kin group depends on its rules of inclusion and its founding myth. New World societies tend to

have founding myths of immigration (as in the case of Argentina), of mixing or *mestizaje* (as in the case of Mexico) or of anti-colonial struggles (as in the case of Jamaica). Old world societies, especially in Europe, tend to have founding myths of shared origins. However, neither the majority of Muslim states nor, of course, African states fit easily into this model. Malays are taught allegiance to their ethnic group *and* to the universal brotherhood of Islam. The polyethnic Malaysian state is thus relegated to an uncomfortably marginal intermediate position. Osama bin Laden's anti-American campaign, moreover, is not a struggle for national liberation (notwithstanding his contempt for the rulers of Saudi Arabia), but a religious struggle. In Africa, there is no doubt that ethnic diversity has emerged as a major source of conflict. However, the bloodiest conflict on the continent in the last couple of decades pitted two groups against each other who were culturally as similar as Croats and Serbs, or for that matter, Eastern Norwegians and Western Norwegians. The Hutus and Tutsis speak the same language and adhere to the same religion. Most Tutsis are sedentary like the Hutus, although their ancestors were pastoralists. Shared culture did not help. Just as in the case of ex-Yugoslavia, culturally similar groups fought bitterly against each other. For a third African example, contemporary South African national identity is deeply based on the struggle against apartheid. In spite of its incomplete integration of all ethnic groups in the country (many problems of identity and loyalty remain to be handled), it cannot be said to be ethnic in any conventional sense of the word. However, it is based on the shared memory of a series of transforming experiences, which thus serve to unite people who are otherwise quite different. The force of a founding myth makes itself felt very strongly indeed.

Place and kinship are nevertheless the prime movers in human collective identification. Living in the same place (physically or metaphorically) entails the acquisition of a wide range of shared skills and notions. During a debate about Norwegian nationhood, I once proposed, as a possible definition, that a Norwegian was someone who lived in Norway and had heard about Henrik Wergeland (a mid-nineteenth century poet known to all Norwegian schoolchildren but to no foreigners). The importance of such shared frames of reference is the reason why no clear-cut distinction between ethnocultural and civic nationalism holds water, as correctly pointed out by Smith (1995: 99). No functioning civic nationalism can be entirely divorced from cultural sharing, but as I have shown, this sharing does not necessarily need to refer to ethnic identity. Regarding kinship, I have emphasised its variable nature and its metaphoric functioning in nationhood, but it is difficult to find an enduring corporate group which does not draw on a notion of relatedness, whether biological or not, in its collective imagery and ideology. The other features listed by Smith – myth, memories, commonalities, subjective feeling of we-hood – follow from place and kinship. Whether or not the resulting collectivities are eventually turned into nations is, of course, another question.

The above argument suggests that the analytical perspective developed by Smith in his writings about nationalism is valid at an abstract level, but that his

linking of the traditional *ethnie* and the modern nation is unnecessarily substantial and rules out functional equivalents of *ethnies*. Is this merely a question of terminology? I should think not. It is only when we see that there are empirically functioning alternatives to the ethnic nation that it becomes possible to imagine existing nations as alternative kinds of imagined communities, based not on fictional bloodlines and shared history but on shared futures and multiple pasts; but by the same token, it is only when we heed Smith's words of caution that we understand that the range of options is limited by human experience and, indeed, by human nature.

## Notes

Thanks to Aleksandar Boskovic for comments on an earlier version.

1 Surprisingly many of those who have commented on *Imagined Communities* (Anderson 1983) and *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) have failed to see that Anderson emphasises, on one of the very first pages of the book, that not only nations, but *most communities* are imagined and abstract (which is not to say that they are imaginary), and that Hobsbawm and (especially) Ranger describe invented traditions as a particular subset of traditions, typically created by colonial powers to subjugate and dupe subject populations, incidentally rarely successful in achieving this.

2 As it happened, riots broke out again briefly in 1999.

3 De Gaulle's motivation for saying this, in the mid-1950s, was clearly to tell Algerians that they had no business demanding independence, since they were *de facto* French.

4 Yugoslavia and Rwanda were culturally relatively homogeneous, but they were of course not ethnically homogeneous.

5 An important anthropological account of the relationship between social networks, symbols and community is Cohen's (1985) *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, which concentrates on local and regional, rather than ethnic and national, forms of community.

6 Kin selection is the process, predicted in Hamilton's Rule (Hamilton 1964), whereby close genetic kin support each other because they share most of their genes. If I am infertile, I should thus help to ensure that my siblings and cousins have fertile offspring. The problem with this kind of model, if taken in a literal sense, is that human kinship practices are highly variable and selective.

## References

Amit-Talai, Vered. 1998. 'Risky hiatuses and the limits of social imagination: expatriacy in the Cayman Islands' in Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson (eds), *Migrants of Identity: Perceptions of Home in a World of Movement*. Oxford: Berg, pp. 39–60.

Archetti, Eduardo. 1999. *Masculinities: Football, Polo and the Tango in Argentina*. Oxford: Berg.

Anderson, Benedict. 1991 [1983]. *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. 2nd edition. London: Verso.

Barth, Fredrik. 1969. 'Introduction' in Fredrik Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, pp. 9–38.

Billig, Michael. 1995. *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage.

Brubaker, Rogers. 1992. *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Brubaker, Rogers. 1998. 'Myths and misconceptions in the study of nationalism' in John A. Hall (ed.), *The State of the Nation. Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 272–306.

Calhoun, Craig. 1997. *Nationalism*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
Cohen, A. P. 1985. *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. London: Fontana.
Eriksen, Thomas Hylland. 1993. 'A non-ethnic, future-oriented nationalism? Mauritius as an exemplary case', *Ethnos* 58(3–4): 197–221.
Eriksen, Thomas Hylland. 1997. 'The nation as a human being: a metaphor in a mid-life crisis?' in Kirsten Hastrup and Karen Fog Olwig (eds), *Siting Culture*. London: Routledge.
Eriksen, Thomas Hylland. 1998. *Common Denominators: Politics, Ideology and Compromise in Mauritius*. Oxford: Berg.
Eriksen, Thomas Hylland. 2002 [1993]. *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*, 2nd edition. London: Pluto.
Fardon, Richard. 1987. ' "African ethnogenesis": limits to the comparability of ethnic phenomena' in Ladislav Holy (ed.), *Comparative Anthropology*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 168–88.
Geertz, Clifford. 1963. 'The integrative revolution: Primordial sentiments and civil politics in the new states' in Clifford Geertz (ed.), *Old Societies and New States: the Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa*. New York: Free, pp. 105–119.
Gellner, Ernest. 1983. *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Gellner, Ernest. 1997. *Nationalism*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
Gluckman, Max. 1982 [1956]. *Conflict and Custom in Africa*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Grillo, Ralph. 1998. *Pluralism and the Politics of Difference: State, Culture, and Ethnicity in Comparative Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Hamilton, William. 1964. 'The genetical evolution of social behaviour', *Journal of Theoretical Biology*, 7: 1–52.
Herzfeld, Michael. 1997. *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State*. New York: Routledge.
Hobsbawm, Eric and Terence Ranger (eds). 1983. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Hutchinson, John. 1994. *Modern Nationalism*. London: Fontana.
Kohn, Hans. 1955. *Nationalism: Its Meaning and History*. New York: Van Nostrand.
Kymlicka, Will. 1995. *Multicultural Citizenship*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Leach, Edmund R. 1954. *Political Systems of Highland Burma*. London: Athlone.
Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1949. *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté*. Paris: Plon.
Miller, Daniel and Don Slater. 2000. *The Internet: an Ethnographic Approach*. Oxford: Berg.
Olwig, Karen Fog. 1997. 'Cultural sites: sustaining a home in a deterritorialized world' in Kirsten Hastrup and Karen Fog Olwig (eds.), *Siting Culture*. London: Routledge, pp. 17–38.
Rapport, Nigel and Andrew Dawson (eds.). 1998a. *Migrants of Identity: Perceptions of Home in a World of Movement*. Oxford: Berg.
Rapport, Nigel and Andrew Dawson (eds.). 1998b. 'Home and movement: a polemic' in Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson (eds.), *Migrants of Identity: Perceptions of Home in a World of Movement*, pp. 19–38. Oxford: Berg.
Renan, Ernest. 1982 [1882]. *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* Paris: Pocket.
Smith, A. D. 1986. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Smith, A. D. 1989. 'The origins of nations', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 12(3): 341–67.
Smith, A. D. 1991. *National Identity*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
Smith, A. D. 1995. *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era*. Cambridge: Polity.
Smith, A. D. 1998. *Nationalism and Modernism*. London: Routledge.
Taylor, Charles. 1992. *Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition'*, with comments, Amy Gutmann (ed.), Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
Taylor, Charles. 1998. 'Nationalism and modernity' in John A. Hall (ed.), *The State of the Nation. Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 191–218.
Tonkin, Elizabeth Maryon McDonald and Malcolm Chapman (eds.). 1989. *History and Ethnicity*. London: Routledge.
Van Den Berghe, Pierre. 1981. *The Ethnic Phenomenon*. New York: Elsevier.
Veer, Peter van der. 1994. *Religious Nationalism*. Berkeley CA: University of California Press.