Secular Nationhood?
The Importance of Language in the Life of Nations

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He that's mounting up must on his neighbour mount,
And we and all the Muses are things of no account.
W.B. Yeats, "The Curse of Cromwell"[1]

This treasure is the reserve of poetry, the source of emotional renewal from which the centuries to come will draw. It cannot be transmitted without being *transformed* – otherwise, we have perversion.
Paul-Émile Borduas *et al*., "Refus Global"[2]

Introduction

Scholars of nationhood have neglected the artists. It is not that they have failed to recognize the sometimes essential role of national artists; rather, it is that they haven't given them their due *qua* artists, by which I mean as individuals who engage in a specifically creative process. I want to claim that among the prime sources of both the origins and persistence of nations and nationalism has been an aesthetically contingent one: if not for artists having been inspired to create nations there would be none, and if not for nations' continual receptivity to their artists' creations an important part of the *raison d'être* of the nation, at least in the eyes of nationalists, would be denied.

My argument for this, I admit, relies upon a somewhat idiosyncratic conception of creativity, one that few artists or nationalists could be said to uphold, at least explicitly. Even so, I believe that it supports an account of the role that artists have played, and continue to play, as regards national communities that serves as an important complement to those that have been developed so far. Another result of my approach, moreover, is that it leads us to question the standard conception of nations, and of the states that recognize them, as secular. This, in turn, suggests that we need to interpret the significance that language has for nationalists in a new way. After showing

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[1] In *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), p. 305.

[2] "Ce trésor est la réserve poétique, le renouvellement émotif où puiseront les siècles à venir. Il ne peut être transmis que TRANSFORMÉ, sans quoi c'est le gauchissement." In *Refus global et autres écrits*, eds. André-G. Bourassa and Gilles Lapointe (Montreal: Éditions TYPO, 1997), p. 77 (my translation).

how, I conclude with an argument about what this new interpretation should mean for language politics.

The Origins of Nations

In the past century, most approaches to the origins of nations have been "modernist," the claim being that there were no nations before modernity. We can distinguish between two groups here. One emphasizes the functional requirements of economic or political structures. Ernest Gellner, for example, focuses on the modern industrial economy's need for a people with a homogenous language and culture, while Benedict Anderson stresses how modern democratic states rely upon such peoples, nationalism here being seen as a way of encouraging their identification with the state.[3] The second group, while sensitive to such structural factors, nevertheless emphasizes agency instead. Thus do Isaiah Berlin and Charles Taylor, among others, invoke the "bent twig" phenomenon according to which elites, reacting to slights to their dignity, develop nationalisms that then come to galvanize large populations.[4] And Homi K. Bhabha and Anthony W. Marx, albeit in different ways, highlight the use of national symbols and discourses within political and cultural struggles, showing how given matrices of social power have led to the oppression of marginal groups.[5]

Why do I claim that the above accounts leave little room for the creative origins of nations? The answer should be obvious when it comes to the first group, since it portrays nations as but functions of economic or political ends. Yet even the more agent-centred approaches show nationhood to be nothing more than the product of certain contexts. The nation may be an original means of responding to those contexts, to be sure, but this is an originality that, I would say, is a

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[3] See Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983); and Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991, rev. ed.).

[4] See Berlin, "Nationalism: Past Neglect and Present Power," in *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (London: Hogarth Press, 1979); Berlin, "The Bent Twig: On the Rise of Nationalism," in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (London: John Murray, 1990); and Taylor, "Nationalism and Modernity," in Robert McKim and Jeff McMahan, eds., *The Morality of Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[5] See Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," in Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990); and Marx, *Faith in Nation: Exclusionary Origins of Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

product of "interpretation" rather than "creation." It arises, in other words, out of a thoroughly comprehensible reaction to a situation and to nothing more than that situation. As Berlin describes the bent twig phenomenon, for example, it is "a response to a patronizing or disparaging attitude towards the traditional values of a society, the result of wounded pride and a sense of humiliation in its most socially conscious members, which in due course produce anger and self-assertion."[6] Given the insecurities felt by certain elites in newly modern contexts, they are said to react in a way that, psychologically and sociologically speaking, meets the challenges posed. They have, one might say, found a means of "making sense" of their situation, and that is exactly what interpretations aim to do.

Creations, however, are different. It is often said that part of what artists respond to is an "inspiration," by which is meant something irrational, something that cannot be reduced to their psychology or the exigencies of their situation. Inspirations transcend context, making their coming (or not) a matter of aesthetic, as distinct from historical, contingency.[7] Creations, then, are "inspired interpretations," meaning that they are something other than strictly interpretive, hence not quite (practically) rational.

It should be evident that creation as so conceived is also not reducible to the artist's "will," something that would make it nothing more than a function of what Nietzsche called "life." Consider his Zarathustra's declaration: "It was creators who created peoples and hung a faith and a love over them: thus they served life."[8] To serve something as thoroughly mundane as life, however, is a form of interpretation – vitalistic interpretation, perhaps, but interpretation nevertheless. Nietzsche thus fails to distinguish between interpretation and creation, hence, ultimately, between fiction and non-fiction. I believe these to be crucial distinctions, however, and though I have obviously not done much to defend them here I think they can be shown to support some very interesting insights about nations and the nationalisms that uphold them.

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[6] Berlin, "Nationalism," p. 346.

[7] The "chance" of receiving an inspiration is thus unlike the notion defended by Reinhart Koselleck, for whom chance has a fully historical nature. See Koselleck, "Chance as Motivational Trace in Historical Writing," in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1979), p. 117. Otherwise put: the contingency of inspiration is not only incommensurable, it is non-interpretable.

[8] Nietzsche, "Of the New Idol," in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 75.

But before introducing these insights, I want to point out how adopting the interpretation–creation distinction reveals a double irony in Eyal Chowers' very interesting argument on behalf of the uniqueness of modern Jewish nationalism. Chowers begins by distinguishing between different kinds of wholly teleological notions of history: the linear, as with Kant or Marx, and the cyclical, as with Herder or Hegel. Both are said to posit fully integrated notions of profane, historical time, leaving no room for the aesthetically unanticipated, for the "creative dimension," as Chowers puts it, which requires what he calls an ontology of "sundered history."[9] The first irony arises from Chowers' claim that Zionism is distinct from Western European nationalisms in that its nation arose due to the radical discontinuity made possible by spaces or gaps in history, i.e., it was a product of creation. It seems to me, however, that *all* nations have come into being because of creation, or if not that most nationalists, even if only implicitly, believe this to be true of their own nations.

The second irony in Chowers' account arises from the fact that the early Zionist thinkers he cites ground creativity in the will, hence in what Chowers describes as "a semimessianism that depends on humans alone."[10] But this, again, leaves us with a process based upon Nietzsche's "life," one that may be said to produce fictions of a sort, although no more so than does, say, lying. For liars make up their tales in order to meet some entirely worldly end; their stories, in other words, are but a reflection of their judgement about how best to respond to the realities of a given situation. Falsehood is thus a product of interpretation rather than creation. The irony, then, is that to speak of genuine creation Chowers must be able to refer to inspirations that do not entirely depend on such mundane ends. By claiming that nations are at least partly the result of such inspirations, I am thus claiming that nations, unlike lies, are like works of art.

Should we, then, be turning away from the two groups of modernist accounts and looking to those that date the origins of nations from before modernity? For they tend to place a much greater emphasis on the role of artists. Yet they, too, are limited in important ways. Again we may distinguish between two groups. The first are the romantics, led by Herder, for whom nations claim histories that reach

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[9] Chowers, "Time in Zionism: The Life and Afterlife of a Temporal Revolution," *Political Theory* 26, no. 5 (Oct. 1998): 652–85, pp. 655, 654.

[10] Ibid., p. 657.

back to time immemorial.[11] To the romantic, artists are certainly fundamental to a nation's development: Chateaubriand and, following him, Victor Hugo went so far as to identify "mother geniuses" such as Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and Rabelais who give birth to and nourish all of the other great writers of their respective nations.[12] But even such greats are viewed as working within already established national contexts: the seed having already been planted, the artist is confined to the task of watering the flower – an activity that, as Herder emphasized, must also fully accommodate itself to the given nation's natural environment.[13] The romantic artist, then, *cultivates* the already present nation; without it, he or she would be nothing. Hence the romantic claim, one that goes back to Rousseau, that it is not so much the artist as the nation's "institutions" that give "form to the genius, the character, the tastes, and the customs of a people."[14]

The second group is relatively recent, it having arisen out of a felt need to provide a revisionist alternative to the modernist account. To scholars such as Adrian Hastings and Anthony D. Smith, we should be blurring the sharp pre-modern/modern divide that is assumed by the modernists. This they do by emphasizing the transformation of ethnicities into nations, the latter being distinguished by their self-identification with the biblical model of the elected or chosen people. Hastings, in particular, focuses on the fundamental role played by the translation, sometimes long before modernity, of the Christian Bible into various vernaculars, which he believes paved the way for other literary works that served as the basis of nationhood.[15] Smith, for his part, accepts the modernity of nations but nevertheless considers the power of the ancient election model key to the

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[11] See Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, trans. Frank E. Manuel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), bks. 7–8.

[12] See Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe: Tome 1*, ed. Jean-Claude Berchet (Paris: Bordas, 1989), bk. 12, ch. 1; and Hugo, *William Shakespeare* (Paris: Flammarion, 1973), bk. 2.

[13] See Herder, *Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, bk. 7, ch. 5. As Mikhail Bakhtin has described, the ideal of mother-geniuses "induced the romantic to seek the seed of the future in the past and to appreciate the past from the point of view of that future which it had fertilized and generated." Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 124.

[14] Rousseau, *The Government of Poland*, trans. Willmoore Kendall (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1972), p. 11.

[15] See Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), esp. pp. 3–4, 194–98.

persistence of national identities. And like Hastings he claims that myth-making has been crucial for both national formation and persistence.[16]

Now many translations of the Bible were indeed acts of creation and not merely interpretation (the many "errors" in the beautiful King James version, evident to any reader of Hebrew, ancient Greek, and English, is surely a case in point – Tyndale was a great artist). Neither Hastings nor Smith, however, distinguishes between their trail-blazing creators and those who receive their work, the non-fiction-producing interpreters. Both makers and receivers, that is, tend to be lumped together as "intellectuals," all of whom appear to have equally important roles in the nation's development.[17] One of the reasons for this, I suggest, is that Hastings and Smith restrict the national artist's project to the invention of myths about a given nation's ancient origins, myths that nevertheless conform to the pre-fabricated mold of the biblical election model. In so doing they unjustifiably limit the artist's originality, making his or her creativity comparable, say, to that of a chef baking a cake: one is certainly free to choose from among a variety of ingredients, but the overall product – if it is to be a cake – must meet certain fundamental specifications determined in advance. This, however, is craft (*technē*), not art.

Moreover, if Hastings or Smith were more sensitive to the form and content of what national artists have produced they might have recognized the presence of other types of community in the historical transitions they trace from *ethnie* to nation. In particular, they might have identified distinctly "religious" and "civic" communities. For example, as regards content, while Hastings is right to read Chaucer as articulating an English community that is no longer simply an *ethnie*, Hastings' labelling it a nation is premature. This is because it was a religious community instead, one fully embedded in the pre-modern hierarchical cosmos. In that world, society is connected to the transcendent through mediating institutions – above all, through the Church and the monarchy (with the latter, of course, *Dei Gratia Rex/Regina*). To Hastings, however, the portrait drawn in the famous Prologue to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is of a people only "*professedly* brought together by religion" since they are shown to be having fun, to enjoy risqué stories, and to be

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[16] See Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); and Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[17] See, for example, Hastings, *Construction of Nationhood*, pp. 22, 48–50, 69; and Smith, "History and National Destiny: Reponses and Clarifications," *Nations and Nationalism* 10, nos. 1/2 (2004): 195–209, pp. 197–98.

highly literate.[18] I fail to see why these things put their religiosity in question, however (unless one assumes an extremely dour conception of religion). Moreover, the Prologue's very opening lines, with their description of the return of spring in cosmically cyclical terms, establish a setting that is clearly in keeping with the pre-modern *ontic logos* cosmology. According to it, people must find their place in a pre-set hierarchy rather than, as in the modern nation, live their lives "horizontally." One also cannot fail to notice how Chaucer's characters represent a cross-section of English society, with its fixed division into three broad classes or estates: the military, the clergy, and the laity. This is not to ignore our interest in how those characters depart from type – the corrupt rebellious monk being probably the strongest case in point – yet this literary technique relies precisely on the types being there in the first place. Nor should we neglect the fact that, no matter how distinctly portrayed, none of the characters is given a proper name. Finally, the significance of religion is underscored in that all of them have been brought together because of it: they're on a pilgrimage, after all.[19]

The other community missed is the civic, political one. For what was Milton's *Paradise Lost* if not, among other things, an attempt to infuse the classical republican ideal into a post-monarchic Christian England, just as the fictionalized England of James Harrington's *Oceana* strove to do the same in a more pagan way?[20] Most famously, however, it was in the two revolutionary societies – the American and the French – that the ideal of a citizenry dedicated to self-rule became widespread, each later replacing it with one that affirmed their respective majority national communities instead.[21] Hastings, however, claims that a French nation existed before the Revolution, even though he admits, following Eugen Weber, that most of the country's citizens did not speak French and had little sense of national identification well into the nineteenth

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[18] Hastings, *Construction of Nationhood*, p. 47 (my emphasis).

[19] See Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1987, 3rd ed.), fragment 1, lines 1–858.

[20] See Armand Himy, "*Paradise Lost* as a Republican 'Tractatus Theologico-Politicus'," in David Armitage, Himy, and Quentin Skinner, eds., *Milton and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and J.G.A. Pockock, "Introduction" to Harrington, *The Political Works of James Harrington*, ed. Pockock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 15–99.

[21] See, for example, Hudson Meadwell, "Republics, Nations and Transitions to Modernity," *Nations and Nationalism* 5, no. 1 (1999): 19–51, pp. 22–26.

century.[22] Smith similarly refuses to accept a distinction between patriotism and nationalism,[23] one which recognizes that only the former puts the civic or political community at the centre of its concerns.[24]

Greater attention to the form of what artists have produced would also have served to highlight the differences between these various types of community. Consider Anderson's insight into the unique, nation-forming way that the 18th century novel managed to fuse the world inside the text – in which a solitary hero moves horizontally through a sociological landscape – with the world outside; or think of Ian Watt's account of how the novel's formal realism focused on particulars and individuals with proper names rather than on archetypes as well as spoke with the egalitarian voice of a rising middle class, thus contributing to the development of a secular, horizontal sense of time and the relations lived within it.[25] *Pace* Hastings and Smith, then, the rise of the novel points to the limited appeal of such archetypes as biblical election since they belong to the by then increasingly outdated hierarchical cosmology. So the novel, we may say, was one of the artistic forms that contributed to the transformation of religious into national communities.

Other, non-fictional modes did so as well: Anderson invokes the rise of the daily newspaper[26] and we might also reference works of literary and art criticism, among others. But these media are, again, products of interpretation rather than creation, and it is the created that usually lead the way. This suggests that nations are "imagined communities" not only because their communion, as Anderson asserts, exists in their members' minds though they haven't all met,[27] but also, and even

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[22] See Hastings, p. 26; and Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

[23] See Smith, "History and National Destiny," pp. 200–201.

[24] Different ways of defending the distinction can be found in Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country: An Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Jürgen Habermas, "Appendix II: Citizenship and National Identity," in *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996); and my *From Pluralist to Patriotic Politics: Putting Practice First* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[25] See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 25–33; Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), esp. pp. 9–61, 87–88; as well as Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 286–89.

[26] See Anderson, pp. 33–36.

[27] See ibid., p. 6.

more significantly, because the common good they share is something that has largely been created by artists.

Giving these artists their due suggests that we should establish a *via media* between the modernist and revisionist accounts. While the former may be said to exaggerate the discontinuities between the modern and pre-modern eras, the latter do the opposite. This is not to claim that creations can be wholly disengaged from the contexts in which they arise – the interpretation that is part of all creativity ensures that artistic creation is never *ex nihilo*. But nor should we limit creative acts to those contexts since that would lead us to miss the inspirations driving them. All purely social scientific explanations of the creation of things, including new literary forms as well as the communities sometimes fashioned by them, are thus going to be necessarily limited. For after all, what is the term "inspiration" – as well as "genius" or "accident" for that matter – if not a placeholder for the inexplicable?

Secularism?

One effect of my claim about the importance of creativity to nations is that, while supporting the distinction between religious and national communities, it also puts in question the secularity of the latter. If one accepts that inspiration has a transcendent source, then creation as I have been describing it may be said to have a sacred aspect. This is, of course, a highly controversial claim, and yet the argument that follows assumes only that it is something (often implicitly) assumed by nationalists. For example, I think it is behind the aura of "greatness" that they tend to believe is present around their most cherished artists.[28] Hence my objection to the radically secular conception of the public sphere described by Charles Taylor,[29] the public sphere being the domain wherein the nation for the most part resides. The problem with Taylor's account is that it leaves no room for the sense that the modern social world is, to a degree, sundered or "cracked." That notion, I believe, is what has led sociologists of religion such as Danièle Hervieu-Léger and Peter

[28] On "greatness" as so understood, see my "Good, Bad, Great, Evil" (ch. 12 of this volume).

[29] See Taylor, "Liberal Politics and the Public Sphere," in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 266–71; Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 64–67; and Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), ch. 13.

L. Berger to reinterpret classic conceptions of the sacred in ways incompatible with its monopolization by traditional religion. To Hervieu-Léger certain social occasions, such as some sporting events or rock concerts, are productive of meaning in a uniquely modern religious way.[30] This is also how she accounts for the disbelieving reactions to the death of the singer-songwriter Jim Morrison, who some took as the founder of a new religion (the more recent example of Elvis Presley is, of course, an even more remarkable case of this).[31] And Berger has added the suggestion that, for many people, even ordinary, everyday experiences can stand for "signals" of transcendence, albeit of a second-hand sort.[32] If he's right, then even what I have been identifying as interpretations of creations can be said to point towards something beyond.

Now although I ally myself with these claims, I do not wish to abandon the distinction between national and religious communities, nor that between strictly national communities and those which consist of an amalgam of the national and the religious, i.e., the communities defended by contemporary religious nationalists.[33] Consider the Jewish nation in Israel today. About half of its members are religious, in the sense that they identify with one of the institutionalized branches of the Jewish religion (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, etc.). The others should not be labelled secular, however, for as Zionists they identify with a community that, as I have been suggesting, sees itself as connected to the sacred through its artists. Indeed such Zionists can even be said to appeal, even if only implicitly, to the model of biblical election, although only if we understand it differently than Smith, in particular, has encouraged us to do. Smith is far too enamoured with Michael Walzer's reading of Exodus, which holds that while the Israelites were certainly chosen by God we should also emphasize their free will, their decision to consent to the Covenant.[34] This take awards them a political role, one that is dialogical and interpretive rather than creative. We could, however, see them as creators instead by appealing to a classic alternative conception of the

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[30] See Hervieu-Léger, *La Religion pour mémoire* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1993), pp. 148–55.

[31] See ibid., pp. 222–25; and Norman J. Girardot's review essay, "*Ecce* Elvis: 'Elvis Studies' as a Postmodernist Paradigm for the Academic Study of Religions," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 68, no. 3 (Sept. 2000): 603–14.

[32] See Berger, *A Far Glory: The Quest for Faith in an Age of Credulity* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), ch. 5.

[33] On the latter, see Mark Juergensmeyer, *Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994, 2nd ed).

[34] See Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, p. 61; and Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), ch. 3.

Covenant, one that Walzer seems to give little credit. It views the Covenant as the product of a much more violent process: just as artists receive, or have imposed upon them, inspirations, the Israelites were forced to accept God's Law, because if they didn't then He would have dropped the whole of Mount Sinai upon their heads. They did accept, of course, whereupon it could follow later that "Moses spake in the ears of all the congregation of Israel the words of this poem" (Deut. 31:30; my translation).[35]

In the light of this alternative reading, Smith's way of invoking the ongoing resonance of the election model as an account of the persistence of national identity appears too backward-looking. The point is no longer that nationalists comply with the model by asserting an interpreted analogy between their nation and the ancient Israelites; rather, it is that they see it as rabbinic Jews did, which is to say as calling upon the nation who would enter into a Covenant with God to create anew, again and again. To Smith, however, "the myth of election inspires . . . action consonant with the message or promise of the original event, as it is reinterpreted by successive generations."[36] While Smith does not distinguish between interpretation and creation, I think he can nevertheless be said to emphasize the former. We see this in his account of national identity as consisting "the maintenance and continual reinterpretation"[37] of the nation's culture, as well as in his claim that the transformation of *ethnies* into nations, while drawing upon the sacred sources of traditional religion, tends to take place as if these sources were models and ideals already fully present in history: "Modern nationalists often draw on reinterpreted and received (rather than 'original') beliefs, memories, and traditions."[38] Moreover, Smith also sees a nation's future adaptability as largely a question of the resources it can invoke from the past, there being no

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[35] For the threat of being crushed by the mountain, see the *Babylonian Talmud*: *Sefer Mo'ed: Tractate Shabbath*, 88a–b. For a recent commentary along these lines, see Emmanuel Levinas, "The Temptation of Temptation," in *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). And for more on this "revelatory creativity," of which the Covenant can be considered an example, see my "On the Minimal Global Ethic" (ch. 10 of this volume), § III.i.

[36] Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, p. 49.

[37] Ibid., pp. 24–25.

[38] Ibid., pp. 255, 256. On p. 258, Smith refers to "those who seek to create nations," but nowhere does he indicate that he means anything other than "reinterpretation" by this (he also often lumps interpretive and creative works together).

mention of the creative originality, as I would conceive of it, of its artists.[39] Hence his reference to the repetition of standard patterns in the construction of ethnohistorical myths, such as ideals of a golden age or the sacrifices by national heroes portrayed in late eighteenth century European painting.[40] The result is that nations appear to honour their most creative members not so much for their originality as for their ability to "embody" the people, a wholly secular entity that "constitute[s] the object of this new religion."[41] Smith evidently adheres to a highly Durkheimian approach, one which conceives of religion largely in terms of its functional ability to bind the members of a community together. But this does not leave much room for the sacred, as is clear from Smith's claim that nationalism and national identity are things "wholly in and of this world."[42]

What gets left out of this picture is a sense of how nationalists, by embracing their community's artists, engage in a form of worship, which is to say in a way of life that strives for the sacred rather than the mundane. As Berger has written of worship: "All true worship is a difficult attempt to reach out for transcendence. It is this reaching *out* that must be symbolized, by whatever resources a particular tradition has at hand. The chosen form will certainly have a communal aspect. But the community itself is not the object of the exercise; at best it is the subject."[43] Part of the pride nationalists feel about the especially creative members of their nation, I thus want to claim, is that they see the latter's greatness as attesting to their nation's having been chosen yet again – chosen, that is, to receive the gifts of inspiration. This suggests a new take on Ernest Renan's famous declaration: "To have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more – these are the essential conditions for being a people."[44]

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[39] See ibid., p. 260.

[40] See ibid., pp. 171–2, 223–35. "For all their differences in period costume and accessories, they expressed the same didactic ideal of heroic self-sacrifice, and were repeated and supplemented well into the nineteenth century." Ibid., p. 235.

[41] Ibid., pp. 41, 42. See also pp. 235–38.

[42] Ibid., p. 25.

[43] Berger, *A Far Glory*, p. 96.

[44] Renan, "What is a Nation?" in Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration*, p. 19.

The above leads me to assert that there is a need to reconceive the separation of church and state, or *laïcité*, as it applies to those states which, in one form or another, grant special recognition to the nations under their jurisdiction. France and Quebec are cases in point. The former's supposedly neutral Jacobin state has, in fact, for a very long time now, granted special recognition to the majority French nation (as distinct from, say, its Basque, Corsican, Catalan and Breton *micronations*).[45] The Quebec state, having adopted statutes such as the language law Bill 101 (1977), has also taken on special responsibilities towards the majority Québécois nation, a community that cannot be said to include all Quebecers, since that category includes the province's anglophone or allophone citizens (not that they haven't been welcome to join its majority nation).[46] These realities in themselves suggest that the states in question cannot be considered neutral; my hope is that an awareness of the sacred dimension of national communities will help dispel the neutralist myth by undermining claims of *laïcité* as well.

Recognizing this dimension can also assist us in accounting for the tendency of nationalists to affirm their ideology in an "anti-political" way, which is to say one that favours force over dialogue as a means of responding to conflict.[47] Violence is, after all, intrinsic to most connections with the sacred.[48] With many traditional religions, this violence has manifested itself as sacrifice or warfare to restore order, or it has been tied to notions of cosmic struggle which assume that the rules of ordinary morality no longer apply.[49] The creativity of the nation points to a different relation with violence, however, one that arises from the felt need to "tear" into the fabric of the profane so as

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[45] On France and its minority nations, see, for example, Graham Vaughan Rogers, "Cultural Pluralism under the One and Incorrigible French Republic: Diwan and the Breton Language," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 2, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 550–80; and some of the articles in the journal *Pouvoirs Locaux*, no. 63 (Dec. 2004), which is dedicated to the theme "Décentralisation: Les nouveaux espaces du Patrimoine."

[46] On the Québécois and the other nations in the province, see my *Shall We Dance? A Patriotic Politics for Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), pp. 67–80.

[47] Chowers, for one, admits as much as regards Zionism. See his "Time in Zionism," pp. 676–78. Zionism has evolved, however; today, it is a much more dialogical ideology, as the participation of Zionists in the negotiations of the Oslo peace process demonstrates. That said, it still has a way to go. See my "Going Rabin One Further" (ch. 6 of this volume).

[48] For one account of this, see Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), esp. pp. 23–24; for another, see René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

[49] See Juergensmeyer, *Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*, ch. 6.

to make cracks or openings to the sacred, i.e. invitations for inspiration.[50] Anti-politics is certainly a way of doing this, yet it is not the only one, which is why we may say that it is at least possible for nationalists to be true to their ideology while also being (pro-)political.

Not when that politics is restricted to a "pluralist" form, however, one which gives primacy to dialogue as negotiation.[51] For pluralists would have us go no further than engage in the struggles necessary for making accommodations, hence to place patches over any of the cracks or spaces underlying conflict. Pluralism, that is, aims for justice as compromise rather than as truth, and this is something that nationalists, given their deep concern for the "authenticity" of national life, can be expected to find offensive. In this regard, they may be said to share something with their more traditionally religious cousins. As Mark Juergensmeyer has reported of a Sri Lankan Buddhist monk:

> Interestingly, one of the concepts that disturbed the bhikkhu the most was an activity that most Westerners regards as a cardinal strength of the secular political system: the ability to respond impartially to the demands of a variety of groups. The political expediency of giving in to the demands of particular interests, such as those of the Tamils, was cited by the bhikkhu as evidence of the government's immorality. He felt that such politicians were incapable of standing up for truth in the face of competing, selfish interests, and their impartiality indicated that they ultimately cared only about themselves.[52]

The monk exaggerates, surely. Nevertheless, those who find it difficult to view their community as some narrowly-focused interest group will always resent the politics of pluralism.

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[50] This is related to the crises that Edward Shils, following Max Weber, has identified as a precondition for the eruption of charisma. See Shils, "Charisma," pp. 132–33, and "Charisma, Order, and Status," p. 263, both in *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).

[51] See, for example, Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969); Stuart Hampshire, *Justice Is Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Bernard Williams, *In the Beginning was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument*, ed. Geoffrey Hawthorn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[52] Juergensmeyer, p. 21.

Moreover, in covering over the spaces between conflicting goods, pluralists can be said to reduce opportunities for inspiration and hence creation. Consider my own country Canada where, until relatively recently, the dominance of pluralist approaches to politics has gone virtually unchallenged. The tendency of Canadians to accommodate their conflicts may explain why Northrop Frye once felt obliged to note that we had yet to produce a writer of classic proportions. For "'genius' is as much, and as essentially, a matter of social context as it is of individual character"; and "the Canadian genius for compromise is reflected in the existence of Canada itself."[53]

A "patriotic" politics, one which aims for the realization of the common good instead of just accommodation, is also, it must be said, not conducive to creativity. This is because it strives for the "integration" of goods through the reconciliation of conflict, something which would also close any spaces that might lie between them.[54] Yet at least patriotism *can* be said to favour truth over compromise, which is why nationalists – who are, after all, concerned with not only creativity but also the integrity of their national communities – might be able to be convinced to participate in such a politics.

Language Policy

One subject, in particular, about which this is may be true is that of language. To the nationalist, the vernacular is the chief repository of the nation's culture. Now particularly given the dominance of pluralist models of politics in practice, we can understand why nationalists have tended to approach issues of language in an anti-political way.[55] My claims about creativity, moreover, point to another reason for the intensity of nationalist attitudes. For a language can also be understood to constitute the "mitt" into which the nation's artists "catch" their inspirations, a receptor that is itself transformed by the nation's critics when they interpret the artworks produced. Hence signs

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[53] Frye, "Conclusion to a *Literary History of Canada*," in *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), pp. 215, 219. On Canada's attraction to the pluralist politics of negotiation, see my *Shall We Dance?*

[54] See my *From Pluralist to Patriotic Politics*.

[55] On the fierceness of nationalist attitudes towards language policy, see the opening of Joshua A. Fishman's *Language and Nationalism: Two Integrative Essays* (Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1972), ch. 2.

like that one waved in a Montreal protest rally in favour of the Quebec language law Bill 101 (1977): "Laissons vivre au langue de nos poêtes (let us live in the language of our poets)."[56] Or think of Gershom Scholem's denunciation of those of his fellow Zionists who he believed failed to recognize how "at times the holiness of our language leaps out and speaks to us."[57] All of this suggests that nationalists see language as more than just their culture's repository: it is also the bridge between their nation and the sacred.

These claims have implications for how we should be approaching questions of language policy, an occasional concern of governing institutions in the West at least since the time of the counter-Reformation Church. I would now like to suggest how we might criticize the two most popular approaches to language policy today.

The proponents of the first view it as neutralist. History has witnessed many cases of multilingual societies governed in a single or a few dominant languages – Latin amongst the Romans; Persian the Mughals; English, French and German in today's European Union – but only with the rise of neutralist political philosophy has there been an attempt to give this theoretical justification. To neutralists, a just society needs to be founded upon a systematically unified theory of justice. When not silent about language policy, such theories tend to affirm a single language, or limited set of languages, as official for the state. Former Canadian prime minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, for example, endorsed Canada's Official Languages Act (1985) as preferable to a *realpolitik* approach. The latter, he believed, would amount to granting English and French official status not because of any conception of justice but because the people who happen to speak them have managed – unlike the speakers of, say, Iroquois or Ukrainian – to obtain "the power to break the country." To Trudeau, affirming the official status of English and French does not imply endorsing the supposedly divisive "two-nations" conception of the country since his neutralist theory, enshrined since 1982 in the country's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, ensures the

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[56] From a photo in Paul Beaugrand-Champagne, ed., *Un siècle à Montréal* (Montreal: Éditions du Trécarré, 1999), p. 68.

[57] Scholem, "Thoughts About Our Language," in *On the Possibility of Jewish Mysticism in Our Time: And Other Essays*, ed. Avraham Sahpira, trans. Jonathan Chipman (Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1997), p. 28.

country's unity. As he sees it, Canada should be considered a single nation that happens to group together "two *linguistic* communities."[58]

Is this coherent? The question must be asked because whether the reference is to "nations" or "linguistic communities" the fact remains that the primary languages of some and not all citizens are being granted special status and this is something that requires justification. How to respond, for example, when it is asked why French and not one of the other minority languages spoken in the country should be favoured alongside English? Here is Trudeau's answer:

> Some criticize official bilingualism, arguing that it consists of privileging French Canadians. It may indeed be a privilege, but I believe that, from a historical point of view, the fact is that francophones have existed in significant number and have been established in this country for a very long time. Moreover, there has existed since the country's beginning a kind of entente to the effect that their rights have been recognized. And so, I say: "let's privilege the francophones!"[59]

The problem evident here is that the justifications Trudeau offers – population, length of tenure in the country, an entente – simply do not pass neutralist muster. For what are they if not, by neutralist standards, historical contingencies expressive of *realpolitik*? It seems, then, that an ostensibly neutral theory of justice – particularly one that, like Trudeau's, asserts an uncompromising respect for the individual[60] – cannot coherently favour one or more vernaculars over others. This is because it would inevitably be seen as aiming to promote some linguistic communities over others, namely, those whose languages are granted official status. In consequence, it seems to me that the Canadian

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[58] See Trudeau, "Quebec and the Constitutional Problem," in *Federalism and the French Canadians* (Toronto : Macmillan, 1968), p. 31.

[59] Pierre Trudeau, Max and Monique Nemni, "Entretien avec Pierre Elliot Trudeau," *Cité libre* 25, no. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1997): 9–17, p. 17 (my translation).

[60] See, for example, Trudeau, *The Essential Trudeau*, ed. Ron Graham (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1998). Will Kymlicka also defends a neutralist liberal theory of justice although, unlike Trudeau, he is open to explicitly recognizing national communities. Kymlicka is able to do so because he believes that such communities can, when implicated in questions of justice, be theoretically reconciled with the respect for the individual. But this leaves no room for the possibility that the needs of national communities and those of the individual can conflict and that, when they do, the latter should not always trump the former. See Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

neutralist who chooses not to be silent about language policy must endorse neither English nor French but a language to which the country's history has no special attachment: Esperanto, for example. But that, of course, is out of the question.

The second approach, which begins by recognizing precisely this, is pluralist. As Alan Patten writes: "Disengagement cannot be the best response of public institutions to linguistic pluralism because disengagement from language is impossible."[61] Instead of calling on us to apply some overarching systematic theory, then, Patten engages in the typically pluralist endeavour of separating out the various values at stake (pluralist political philosophers are almost always analytic political philosophers). He then groups these into independently distinct policy models and suggests that, when it comes to conflict, they must be balanced against each other. The relative weightings of each is to be determined by one's preferred ideology (liberalism in Patten's case) and the exigencies of the context. This, too, is standard pluralism since the pluralist, seeing in a genuine conflict of values only separate things that "pull in different directions," can call upon us to do no more than "try not to do excessive damage to any one of them" for "difficult choices need to be made."[62]

There is something unwarranted about this assumption, however. Genuine conflicts are not necessarily such zero-sum affairs, capable of being accommodated, perhaps, but never truly reconciled. For my patriotic claim is that reconciliation *is* sometimes possible, but only if those involved focus on how the features of their conflict are parts of a whole, one which may be capable of being transformed in a way that further integrates them rather than balancing them against each other. Given this more holistic conception, it becomes possible for moral and political conflict to admit of synergistic – and not only compromising – solutions. But not if we follow Patten in "chopping up" the historical tapestries from which the questions of language policy always arise. In so doing he only ensures an adversity that distorts what is really going on. Moreover, Patten's

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[61] Patten, "Political Theory and Language Policy," *Political Theory* 29, no. 5 (Oct. 2001): 691–715, p. 693.

[62] Ibid., p. 710. In a later paper on language policy, however, Patten takes a neutralist approach. Now the relevant values are to be balanced according to the priorities and conditions established by an abstract systematic theory. The implication is that the values have been commensurated and so that justice, though still a matter of balancing, somehow no longer requires compromise. Hence the absence of any talk about "difficult choices." See Patten, "What Kind of Bilingualism?" in Will Kymlicka and Patten, eds., *Language Rights and Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

approach is particularly inappropriate when it comes to language policy since, as we have seen, its favouring of compromise will only encourage the anti-political tendencies of nationalists.

As regards language policy, then, I do not think that we should be following either the neutralist or the pluralist. Recognizing that creativity is a significant source of nationhood means giving the sacred dimension of nationalism its due, and this should lead us to conceive of the importance that language has for nationalists in a new way. Language, to them, is simply not something that can be interlocked within some overarching systematic theory of justice, nor can it be subjected to compromise as easily as other, more secular, goods. In consequence, language policy should not be a matter of applying a theory, nor, if possible, of balancing demands against each other. Rather, all involved need to strive to be as sensitive as possible to the context and this means focusing on the whole by listening to and conversing with each other. What's needed are answers to questions such as: What kinds of communities are present? What languages do they speak? What, if anything, do they require from the state? And how, if at all, can these needs be reconciled with other ethical imperatives, such as those associated with the respect for the individual? Answers to these questions will be no more arbitrary than those we aim for to resolve the dilemmas we face in our personal lives, for just as we hope to be authentic to our historically evolving identities as individuals so too should the political community. And since success at this endeavour represents the truth of the matter, even those citizens who are also nationalists might be able to become enthusiastic about it. Even the nationalist, that is, can be a patriot.