

Origins of Ethnic Nationalism in Germany and Repercussions in India

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It is pertinent to study the origins of nationalism against the backdrop of the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. It is generally agreed that nationalism as an ideology emerged in the wake of the French Revolution. As one treks through the history of nationalism in Europe, the rise of ethnic nationalism and its origins in the thought of German Romanticism, the uncanny influence European nationalism had on the ideas of ethnic nationalists in colonial India can be visibly seen.

This year, Germans are celebrating the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. At the time, that event gave rise to great hopes of the world overcoming a major division and coming together on the basis of enlightenment principles of democracy and human rights. Unfortunately, subsequent developments have not quite fulfilled these expectations. In the decades after the fall of the “iron curtain”, so-called ethnic conflicts have claimed millions of civilian lives. Even in a more long-term perspective, many political scientists agree that the greatest threats to peace in the last two centuries have come from those regions in which partitions along ethnic lines have taken place (Czempel 2000; Gagnon 1994-95, 2006; Münkler 2002; Wieland 2006). Examples include Greece-Turkey (1922), Ireland (1921), India-Pakistan (1947), South African (1948), Palestine (1948) and Cyprus (1974). This paper searches for the roots of ethnic nationalism as a political ideology. It looks at its origins in the reactions of German intellectuals and political elites to the French Revolution and to the Napoleonic conquest of Europe. It establishes its model character for future ethnic-nationalist movements in Europe and Asia and it indicates its pathways to India through the intellectuals of communalist movements.

The work of sociologists like John W Meyer (2009) and Shmuel N Eisenstadt (2006) suggests that the global condition today is marked by the prevalence of a “global civilisation of modernity” (Eisenstadt 1998: 55). This “global cultural reference frame” (Dusche 2010: 52ff, 64, 80ff, 112, 120, 134) is constitutive for actors (individuals, organisations, states) as well as their actions. It provides the principal patterns governing processes of institution formation, including the formation of nation states and their organisational structures. All this takes place against the backdrop of historical trajectories that link each nation, east or west, to older dynastic, ethnic or proto-national solidarities.¹

The dialectical process of global cultural influence, on one hand, and local historical trajectory, on the other, leads to what Eisenstadt has called “multiple modernities” (Eisenstadt 2005). Alternatively, the anthropologist Peter van der Veer (1998) suggests to speak of “multiple histories” within a singular modernity. Whichever terminology one prefers, plural modernities or plural histories of modernity are not to be understood as processes of simple diffusion of ideas and practices from the west into the colonised world. Christopher Bayly (2006) and van der Veer (2001) have shown that key concepts and practices of European modernity are themselves often the result of an imperial encounter. Such key concepts include religion in the modern sense of the word, the religiously neutral state (secularism) as well as (religious) civil

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society and public sphere. The key notion, however, is that of the nation state itself. That is why van der Veer (1998: 289) suggests that there is, in fact, only one modernity which is the one embodied by the political idea of the nation state. It clashes with other historical forms and it is the clash and the violence of it which leads to plural histories within this modern encounter, outside Europe as well as in Europe itself, for we must not forget that in Europe the emergence of nationalism and modernity was not the result of an harmonious growth but of violent struggle against the forces of the old regime. In modernity thus perceived, the distinction between east and west becomes less marked than the stereotype “the west imposing its concepts on the east” would suggest.

It is through the work of historians like Christopher Bayly that we understand how the global condition of modernity has come about, what were its principal turning points and which were the results of the encounter between global patterns and local trajectories. According to Bayly (2006: 292), before the 19th century, the global cultural reference frame was still dominated by universalist ideologies rooted in the medieval notions of empire and faith. In the medieval scheme of things there could only be one legitimate empire and one legitimate faith. The reformation and the Peace of Westphalia had shattered this belief. Now there was a plurality of fully sovereign states and several religions laid claim to true faith. Enlightenment notions of religious tolerance lead to a further weakening of the universalist claims of these denominations. Now it became even conceivable that several religions could be “true”, each leading to “god” in their own ways. With the turn of the 18th century, European as well as colonial subjects began to claim individual rights such as freedom of conscience. Therein they used the language of citizenship and individual human rights, which they adopted from the revolutionary discourses that emerged between 1780 and 1820 in America and Europe.² On an international level, colonial subjects claimed rights for political autonomy for their colonial states based on the principles of republican self-governance. In the 1830s Ram Mohun Roy, for example, pleaded that the “rights” of the Mughal empire had been violated by the British East India Company (Bayly 2006:292). At this point, the Mughal empire ceased to be seen as an universal dynastic order but as an individual state among others with rights to self-governance.³

Nationalism as an Ideology

The two concepts, individual liberty and collective independence were merged in the ideology of nationalism. Most historians agree that the decades around 1800 mark a watershed in global history. Through the fact of the European colonial expansion an interconnected space was created for a revolution of the mind to take place that made it possible that the impact of the American and the French revolutions took a global dimension. Such paradigm shifts in the normative dimension of the cultural reference frame need to be understood from the perspective of cultural history and cultural change (Jelavich 2006: 232). One dominant feature of this revolution was the rise of nationalism to prime importance as an universal normative system.

As a working definition I take nationalism to signify an ideology in conjunction with a practice (a mobilisation, a movement or a

state-sponsored legal practice) for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population, which some if its members deem to constitute an actual or potential “nation” (Smith 2005: 9). From the perspective of nationalism all older universalisms become subjected to the idea that the world consists of a plurality of nations each legitimately claiming the first loyalty of their subjects, independently of religious affiliation. In that sense, nationalism displaces religion in its primary claim to loyalty. Similarly, nationalism displaces empire in its claim to loyalty. The emergence of the nation state gave rise to the idea that loyalty was due to the nation and that demands for loyalty were based on law and not on faith. In modern states, subjects (later citizens) could follow different religions or secular world views without immediately raising the question of political loyalty.

The consequences of this intellectual revolution are most marked in the domain of faith. Nationalism begins to replace religion as a framework for ultimate values. With the rise of nationalism a corresponding shift occurred in what religion means (van der Veer 2002: 178). Religion is transformed from a universal word view into a particular perspective legitimately demanding loyalty only from co-religionists. Even though religions like Catholicism or Islam retain their universal aspiration, they increasingly organised and expressed themselves in the newly universal framework of a world made up of nations. Thus they form national church organisations and national missionary associations. Some Muslims translate their claim to a liberated universal *ummah* into the liberation of individual Muslim nations. Some Hindus begin to identify their universal world view as one religion among others and as an identity marker of India as a nation (Dalmia 1995). For them, religion turns from the universal to the particular but to the particular in a collective sense. Religion here is not the individual belief of a person but the collective belief of a community. At the World Parliament of Religions (1893), for example, Vivekananda identified the claims of the Indian nation to self-rule with Hinduism as a religion (Bayly 2006: 297). Later on, ethnic nationalists drew on this identification of the community with the whole of the nation.

Regarding the displacement of religious universalism in its role to determine ultimate values, the Jewish-German sociologist Norbert Elias (1990) characterised nationalism as the most powerful value system since the 19th century. Similarly, historian Dieter Langewiesche (2000: 35) notes that since the age of revolutions, universalism of any kind is regularly instrumentalised by nationalism. Wherever national politics is being loaded with universal values, it ends up serving the perceived national interest of the state actor, whether openly or in disguise. This is as true of the French campaigns to export the universal principles of the revolution in the wars between the 1792 and 1815 as it is of today's export human rights and democracy into the Muslim world. Even communist internationalism was instrumentalised to serve Russia's interests first and foremost (ibid: 36).

The Challenge of Nationalism

The rise of nationalism to such pre-eminence in the global cultural reference frame is a challenge not only for other universalist systems of belief. It poses a challenge also to science. Whereas the

scholarly communities of the enlightenment era liked to think of themselves as a universal republic of letters, after the turn of the 18th century, scholars begin to identify their scholarly discipline with the nation. As the historian of science Dhruv Raina observed, scholars begin to think in terms of French, German or English physics, chemistry or mathematics and they begin to compete with one another on who discovered what first.⁴ The same applies to history as an academic discipline. Following a popular trend, some nationally-minded historians begin to write apologetic histories of their peoples, rooting them as deep in antiquity as possible. They write about the heroic deeds and tragic misfortunes of their nations like court historians of former times would have written about the achievements of the dynasties or ruling ethnicities they served. Even today historians compete over which nation was the first to discover human rights and democracy, modernity or the enlightenment, so as to raise the self-esteem of their national audiences. Given the constraints of the nationalist paradigm and its influence even on academic activities, the question thus arises as to whether globally-minded historians can escape the strictures of the nationalist mindframe. In other words, is global history possible or will it just be another particularistic historiography in the guise of universalism? (Davis 2006).

Van der Veer pointed out that it is a particular product of representations of modernity to split up social life in domains with clear boundaries, such as the economy, the state, and religion. This is enhanced by professional specialisation along the same lines. Thus for him the history of modernity is also and perhaps primarily the history of modern history writing (van der Veer 1998: 290). After all, it is not an accident that the emergence of history as an academic discipline coincides with the emergence of nationalism in the late 18th and 19th centuries.⁵

For many historians, nationalism is an ambivalent phenomenon. It carries a democratic, emancipatory promise but it invariably also has an aggressive side to it. They urge us to keep an eye on both sides of the phenomenon rather than eliminating one side by way of language policy (Langewiesche 2000). In India, for understandable reasons, nationalism tends to carry a rather positive connotation (Chatterjee 2006). One speaks of the “values of nationalism”.⁶ Nationalism is associated with the struggle for self-rule in India and with the ambitious project of liberalisation from home-grown injustices. Since nationalism is used as a positive qualifier rather than a technical term, social mobilisations around alternative conceptions of nationhood or regional autonomy are not labelled nationalist but communalist or separatist.⁷ To non-Indians, in return, the meaning of “communalism” (Mukherjee et al 2008: 12) is not self-evident. Their associations (community, communitarianism) would be rather positive ones. To deal with this, one needs to take both experiences into account – the positive experience of emancipation as well as the extremely negative experiences of war, expulsion and genocide.

International Institutions

After the second world war the aggressive side of nationalism had become so obvious to everyone that, for a short while, it was possible to erect an international institution like the

United Nations Organisation and to agree on a Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Even the European Union and its earlier larval stages were erected in the spirit of supra-national cooperation as a means to prevent armed conflict between the “nations” of Europe. But since the re-emergence of violent nationalism after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in Yugoslavia, in south Asia and other parts of the world and with the disregard for the international law regime (Rittberger 1995) displayed by successive US administrations, it is clear that supra-nationalism leads a precarious life. Nevertheless, historians should not fall into the trap of a teleological interpretation of nationalism as representing the end of all history. Although supra-national governance and a global rule of law seem very unlikely at present, for historians the predominance of nationalism should remain an historically contingent phenomenon. Just as there is a time before nationalism rose to predominance, there may also be a time when it, in turn, will be displaced by a new belief system, which may be universal in aspiration and global in impact.

For a long time, teleological readings of modernity have dominated the debates. Since the second world war, the standard narrative among well-meaning scholars went as follows: While nations may or may not have existed in pre-modern times, nationalism as an ideology certainly is a modern phenomenon, emerging for the first time in the wake of the revolutions of the late 18th century. Whether nationalism has or has not been a necessary corollary of processes of modern state formation, emerging capitalist economies, industrialising societies, etc, in any case it would be relegated to a past era as soon as global interconnectedness would reach a point where politics, economy and ecology could no longer be handled by individual states alone. In an age of post-nationalism and regional and global governance, nationalism as an ideology would lose its relevance and humanity could finally start thinking about how to overcome its many divisions, possibly giving rise to a cosmopolitan future and a global state of peace and justice (Benhabib 2006). The thesis of the demise of nationalism resembles the secularisation thesis and both share the same fate. Just as religion is back on the agenda, so is nationalism (Mann 2006). Since nationalism has acquired a quasi-religious status, it would be interesting to explore the connection between nationalism and religion.

In contrast to the reading of modernity as a process leading to the decline of nationalism, some historians have always maintained that nations are a recurring feature of human society (Smith 2005: 49). Recently it was put forward by Adrian Hastings, Anthony Smith and others who point to the role of the people of Israel as a model history of a chosen people (Hastings 1997). The memory of that people as conveyed by the Bible, which became increasingly available in vernacular languages in Europe in the time of humanism, enhanced the development of nationalism and finally lead to the canonisation of its principle – a state to each people – in the covenant of the League of Nations and in the peace settlement of Versailles. Modernists, by contrast, argue that not only nationalism but nations themselves are a phenomenon of the recent past (not earlier than 1780). Influential modernist accounts are those of Gellner, Hobsbawm’s and Anderson.⁸

The Emergence of Nationalism

Most modernists and perennialists,⁹ however, agree that nationalism as an ideology emerges only in the wake of the French Revolution. The earliest recorded use of the term nationalism goes back to Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) at the end of the 18th century (Herder 1784-91; Smith 2005: 5). The term apparently was rarely used in the first half of the 19th century. In the German case, the first recorded use of the term “*natio Germanica*” occurred at the Imperial Council in Regensburg in 1471. The council was charged with devising strategies to fight back the Ottomans. In this context the self-identification as “Holy Roman Empire of German Nation” occurred for the first time. It was popularised through imperial and papal propaganda but the German consciousness that spread among the educated classes certainly did not lead to claims of integration into a common polity or state.¹⁰

While there is hardly any disagreement about the time and the circumstances of the emergence of nationalism as an ideology, there is considerable disagreement concerning its status. While some maintain that nationalism is a necessary feature of modernising societies others would question just this. When Gellner speaks of the localised cultures of pre-industrial societies and nationalism as the principle of homogenising these so as to make a more uniform labour force available for the job market (Gellner 2006), others object that there may be ways to modernity without going through the stage of a fully industrialised society (Eisenstadt 2005, 2006). With regard to India this question is particularly pertinent. India retains a huge internal differentiation into various cultural subgroups. The number of its linguistic, religious, caste and tribal groups is legion. Nevertheless India experiences modernisation. Should we then say that India is less modern because it is more diverse or should we say that India’s modernity is just different?

Applying Gellner’s theory of nationalism to India would raise further and related questions. According to Gellner, the homogenisation of culture is an “inescapable imperative” for any industrialising and modernising country (Gellner 2006: 38). In this perspective, it would seem rather “natural” if India’s culture would centre around a modernised and homogenised conception of Hinduism in conjunction with a nationalist/communalist ideology (*Hindutva*). There are authors who perceive such a trend (Nanda 2009). India would not be the first country that started out as an inclusive project of political justice and ended in aggressive religio-national chauvinism. This prediction, however, may itself rest on a questionable modernist teleology, in which case India would prove Gellner wrong. Thus with regard to India we can raise interesting questions regarding the assessment of Indian nationalism from the perspective of universal theories of nationalism, and the reverse, the assessment of universal theories of nationalism in view of India as a case.

The wars, ethnic cleansings, genocides and the holocaust committed in the wake of nationalism have lead many scholars and thinkers to a rather negative assessment of nationalism. In its place they entertained dreams of an utopia of an undivided humanity living in peaceful harmony. This stream of thought equally has its roots in the European Enlightenment (Kant’s

Perpetual Peace) (Kant 1795). It later found expression in the writings of Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein, the latter of which called nationalism the “measles of mankind”.¹¹ In India it is Rabindranath Tagore, in particular, who had qualms about nationalism. Patriotism, he writes, cannot be our final spiritual shelter. “My refuge is humanity. I will not buy glass for the price of diamonds, and I will never allow patriotism to triumph over humanity as long as I live”.¹² In *Gitanjali* he dreams of a time “where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls” (Tagore 1913). Even for Gandhi there was a time after the time of nationalism: “One must go through nationalism to reach internationalism”, he wrote, “in the same way that one must go through war to reach peace”¹³ – a surprising thing to say, by the way, for an advocate of non-violence. Also Nehru, although viewing nationalism as a necessary stage in the development of India, acknowledged its limitations and aggressive potential and thought of ways of its overcoming. He thought, nationalism was inevitable in India. The abiding appeal of nationalism to the spirit of Indians had to be recognised and provided for, but its sway had to be limited to a narrower sphere. India for all her intense nationalistic fervour had to accept internationalism and the co-ordination, and even to some extent the subordination, of the independent nation state to a world organisation and an international law regime.¹⁴ Enlightenment cosmopolitanism, leftist internationalism or universal humanism for long have dreamt of a world coming together in spite of ethnic, religious and economic cleavages. This utopian dream received its latest boost after the collapse of the socialist block when the world seemed to become one. Globalisation seemed to lead to the demise of the nation state. But ever since, history did not seem be congruous with these expectations. Since the early 1990s there have been reassertions of nationalism from various quarters in the Caucasus, the Balkans, in Asia and Africa.

Nevertheless, from a global perspective, humanity faces the challenge to institute global governance in spite of an horrendous diversity of national cultural backgrounds. From this perspective, some nation-building processes look more promising than others. India, in particular, has a centuries old experience of living together and governing a vast spectrum of different cultural, religious, some would say proto-national formations. This experience draws from the times of the emperors Ashoka and Akbar but the credit for modern India goes to Gandhi and Nehru, who succeeded in establishing a democratic way of governance in spite of all this diversity. From the perspective of classical nationalism, India would have been impossible, for it lacks unity in language, religion, economic equity and regional identity. The fact that India is not only possible but very real, poses a challenge to classical theories of nationalism. From the perspective of these theories, a European political integration equally would seem rather unlikely. Where is the common identity, it is often asked, if the aim should be political union?

Thus in a comparative perspective, the question arises as to how the Indian and the European unification processes would have to be assessed in view of their prospective overcoming of the paradigm of nationalism. But this shall not be the concern of the present paper. A cosmopolitan revolution of the mind may

still be centuries away. Meanwhile we have to deal with the continuing influence of the ideology of nationalism in domestic and international affairs. This paper limits itself to the intellectual history of nationalism. Here I am drawing on the work of Hans Kohn (1891-1971), a philosopher and a historian who was born in Prague in 1891 into a German-speaking Jewish family. Faced with the apocalypse of the second world war and the attempted annihilation of his people, he published *The Idea of Nationalism* in 1944.¹⁵ Therein he introduces the basic distinction between civic nationalism and ethnic nationalism. Civic nationalism assumes the primacy of territory over people, thus the nation is formed by all the citizens living on an already established territory in an already established state. The model here is France.¹⁶ Ethnic nationalism, in contrast, assumes the primacy of the people over the territory. The model here is Germany.¹⁷ Because the region associated with the various German dialects consisted of some 300 principalities at the time of the Napoleonic conquest, many were very small and few would have been viable nation states. Thus German nationalism started by stipulating the unity of the German-speaking people to bring about the unity of the territory and the state.

Ethnic Nationalism

The ideology of ethnic nationalism was tried out for the first time in the attempt of the ruling elites of the two biggest German-speaking countries, Prussia and Austria, to oust the Napoleonic armies. In their struggle they employed the ideas of the German literary intelligentsia of the time, notably the ideas of the German Romantics who had been coping with the impact of the European Enlightenment, the French Revolution and revolutionary nationalism on an intellectual plane. These ideas and their historical impact is what I would like to explore. The ideology of ethnic nationalism first developed by the German Romantic movement was widely used as a model for nationalist movements in central and eastern Europe, in the domains of the Hapsburgs and of the Ottomans and even in India. This last connection in particular will lead us to the German roots, among others, of the Hindutva ideology.

Today ethnic nationalism is an important factor contributing to most of intra- and inter-state conflicts. In India its impact can be felt in the phenomenon of Muslim and Hindu identity politics, which lead to the partition of the subcontinent. It is still felt today in Muslim and Hindu communalism and it was and still is effective in many secessionist movements in the country – from Tamil Nadu and Punjab to Kashmir and some of the “Seven Sister States” in the north-east.

In analysing ethnic nationalism as a form of identity politics (Dusche 2010), I want to show that conflict is almost unavoidable if one takes this ideology seriously. I am arguing that the proneness to conflict is rooted in a number of misconceptions that first concern the way the polity is conceived and then carries over to the antagonistic way the polity begins to look at its neighbours.

- The first assumption of ethnic nationalism is that peoples or nations exist ontologically independently of any polity or state.
- Second these peoples or nations are attributed with a collective will to political autonomy or statehood.

- Third, such peoples or nations are attributed with the right to a territory on which to erect their state.

All of these assumptions are controversial from ethnographic, historical, and philosophical points of view. Ethnographers and some historians would concede that ethnic or national identities can exist independently of, or within, larger polities or states. Often, however, as already Max Weber noted, their identity is founded on the memory of a decayed political entity. In this perspective, ethnic identity becomes parasitic on political identity (Weber 1922).

But even if one grants that political identities of the past can be revived, this alone would not warrant that they should be revived. If, for whatever reason, one decides that they should, this gives rise to the question by whom and in whose name? Who claims to speak for this identity, who determines its scope, who is included, who excluded? Ethnic nationalism claims to be able to decide all these questions in the absence of any institutional mechanism to determine an electorate and to legitimise representatives through elections. This calls into question point number two: How can a collective will of a people or a nation be determined in the absence of representative institutions? This again raises the question as to how it can be assumed that peoples or nations prior to any territorial and political identity can have a collective will. This extends to the idea that such pre-political peoples or nations could be the bearers of collective rights, not to speak of the right to an independent state on a defined territory.

The claims of ethnic nationalists are thus anthropologically and historically doubtful and philosophically unfounded. Ontologically, the assumption of the independence or even primacy of the ethnic over the political identity cannot be demonstrated. In terms of moral theory either it seems problematic to speak of collective will or collective rights in the absence of any representative institutions.

In spite of all this, ethnic nationalism assumes that peoples or nations exist ontologically, that is, prior to any political entity or state, which could alone claim an act of collective choice or an original contract as its base. In the absence of representative institutions, aspiring ethno-nationalist elites therefore have to find an alternative form of representation. The alternative they chose is that of symbolic representation. The metaphor they often use is that of the organism. In an organism, in a way, each part represents the whole. Thus the fin of a fish can be seen as representing the whole fish just as the foot of the Buddha can be used to represent the Buddha as a whole.

The metaphor of the organism, however, has one major disadvantage. It fails to represent a fundamental aspect of collective human life, that is, the existence and legitimacy of conflicting interests. Even within a family, the smallest unit of collective human life, everyone does not have the same interests. Different interests need legitimate space to be articulated and mediated in such a manner that they do not give rise to oppression or violence. The same applies to a people or a nation.

Organisms know of no inner conflict. If its organs begin to conflict, if the immune system, for example, begins attacking parts of the organism to which it belongs, the organism is sick. Thus if we use the organism as a metaphor for society, we are led to

believe that conflict within society amounts to illness or disease and needs to be eliminated or suppressed. When a nation's unity is seen as natural and organic, internal conflict comes to be seen as a challenge to its ontological status, its very being. Internal conflict thereby becomes a matter of loyalty instead of being the subject to political mediation. Since politically-rational and morally viable ways of conflict mediation are not provided for, ethnic nationalism has a tendency to violently suppress internal conflict through the oppression or elimination of the weaker party in the conflict.

The fact, in turn, that social unity is based on the denial of difference leads ethnic nationalists to resort to a well known technique to bring about this unity in spite of existing differences. The trick is to evoke an emergency situation, an imminent danger from within or from without, that induces everyone to huddle together and forget their differences for a while. To achieve such a party-truce effect, ethnic nationalists evoke the danger emanating from the "other", which can be another nation or a minority within the nation. Just as they aim to unify and homogenise their own people, they tend to evoke homogenising images of the "other". In the German case, this "other" has been the stereotypical Turk in the 15th and 16th centuries, the stereotypical Frenchman in the 18th and 19th centuries and the stereotypical Jew in the 19th and 20th centuries. In the Indian case it can alternatively be the Muslim or the Hindu, depending on one's communal perspective. Since internal unity is more easily wrought by appeals to party truce, the projection of an internal or external enemy conveniently serves the purpose of stabilising the polity.

The reference to such enemy projections, in turn, risks becoming a self-fulfilling prophesy. Thereby ethnic nationalism becomes a prime source of intra- as well as inter-state conflict. This is aggravated by the fact that the boundaries of ethnic communities are never clear. People of different ethnicities normally live together in mixed settlement areas. There is hardly any people or nation occupying only one area with no members of other peoples or nations settling in the same area. Thus Germans, Hungarians and Gypsies settled in today's Romania and in the Balkans while Romanians, Germans, Serbs, Croats, Gypsies, etc, settle in today's Hungary. There are no ethnically pure territories anywhere in the world. Even Japan, which is often referred to as the only ethnically homogeneous country in the world, has ethnic minorities (Ainu, Ryukyuan, Barakumin). Therefore toying with ethnic nationalism is playing with the fire of forced assimilation, ethnic cleansing, genocide, partition and war. Nations defined on the basis of ethnicity and not territory are therefore almost bound to conflict over territory and people.

Origins of Ethnic Nationalism

Where did the idea of ethnic nationalism come from? Where was it first conceived and where was it first put into practice? Most historians agree that ethnic nationalism arose as a reaction to the Napoleonic occupation of much of Europe. In Spain, Italy, Russia, Austria, Prussia and in other German-speaking lands, resistance was mobilised to expel the occupying Napoleonic armies. The small and ultimately unsuccessful liberal nationalist factions in Spain, Italy and Russia followed more or less the Enlightenment

model of nationalism based on territory and anti-feudalism. They were outnumbered by the uneducated rural masses who, if anything, wanted to restore the old feudal order together with their kings and bishops. In Germany, however, revolutionary-nationalist and feudal-conservative ideas were amalgamated in a peculiar way to create ethnic nationalism. Materially this had its reasons in the political fragmentation of German-speaking lands. Intellectually, it had its roots in the political thought of German Romanticism which, in turn, drew on Johann Gottfried Herder and his Enlightenment ontology of peoples. It was first put into practice in the mobilisation of the "national storm" (*landsturm*) against the French in Prussia and Austria.

In the following I shall revisit the intellectual history of German political romanticism and its historical circumstances to rediscover the trajectories of ethnic nationalism in Prussia and the Hapsburg Empire and to trace it to ethno-national conflicts in other parts of the world, particularly India. The German Romantic movement could draw on an older sentiment among the German-speaking people that they belonged to a common nation, but the sense of belonging to a common nation did not as yet lead to nationalism as an ideology. The idea of nationalism (as an ideology) is a product of the Enlightenment period. In Germany, nationalism became virulent for the first time with the old feudal elites (Prussian and Austrian) facing the mobilising force of French revolutionary nationalism. The defeat of the anti-French coalition at Jena and Auerstedt had served to demonstrate the superiority of mass mobilisation for modern warfare. To match this new thrust the Prussian and Austrian elites had to come up with a similar force to match this French "nation-in-arms". They decided to mobilise their peoples on the basis of German national sentiment. By that time they could already count on the attractiveness of the idea of the sovereignty of the people, which was popularised during the French Revolution. In the eyes of many Germans, this was linked to the project of liberation of the German lands from foreign rule. Its ideologues powerfully utilised the emancipatory flavour of nationalism without however committing themselves to the emancipatory implications that this would engender for the ordinary people. For Prussians and other Germans aligned in the so-called national storm against the French, the emancipation of the people as a collective had precedence over the emancipation of the individual person. Thereby the old elites in Prussia could remain in power granting only minor concessions in the way of legal reform.

In order to realise the newness of the idea of nationalism at the time of the French occupation one has to consider that for many Germans it was still conceivable to make an alternative choice. They would have rather lived as free citizens under French rule, thereby preferring individual emancipation over collective liberation. In this case Germans would have remained a nation culturally, but not politically. Politically, they would have been part of a French empire that would have brought them many modernising benefits like the French civil code, religious freedom, emancipation of the Jews, and maybe democracy one day. This was a viable alternative for some to whom the concept of a nation, based on common language or descent had no meaning. Instead they hailed the French revolutionaries in their subversion

of the old feudal order. Some German poets and writers demonstrated this by accepting honorary French citizenship like Klopstock and Schiller (Brunschwig 1947, 1975: 278). And after Napoleon had shattered Prussia, the philosopher Schelling wrote to Hegel: “The stupidity, the deep baseness of the governments whose fall we are witnessing was inconceivable for us. Now it is clear and I would not lament but help the old to expire wherever possible.”¹⁸

Expiring, however, was not an option for the Prussian or Austrian elites whose demise as leaders of independent states this would have entailed. They therefore took up an idea that had already been ventilated by political Romantics for about a decade. Thereby an idea that would have been politically inconsequential became historically efficacious. Thus it is not the German romantic movement that has “caused” the first instance of ethnic nationalism in Europe, if causation can at all be used as a category in the world of social science and history. It was rather the fact that the ideas of the movement were available as the occasion arose for their use. And so were the proponents of the romantic movement themselves. Ernst Moritz Arndt (1769-1860), Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829) and Adam Müller (1779-1829) went along with the nationalist mobilisation by either joining the propaganda department in Vienna or taking up arms in Prussia (like Savigny, Wolf, Arnim) to join the “national storm” against Napoleon (Safranski 2007: 185ff). A closer look into the political ideas of the German Romantics will reveal why they were so useful for the Austrian and Prussian elites. The following is again based on the work of Hans Kohn.

German Romanticism

German political romanticism, in large parts, was a response to modernity, to industrialisation and capitalism, to urbanisation and cosmopolitanism. The Romantics propagated continuity versus change. They idealised the rural and feudal economy of the middle ages versus the emerging capitalist economy. The German Romantics followed the conservative Anglo-Irish thinker and statesman Edmund Burke (1729-1797) in their detestation of an abstract intellectualism that was seen as underlying the French Revolution. They believed that the principles of 1789 had failed because they were conceived without regard for history. Against abstract Enlightenment universalism the Romantics posited their cultural relativism.

As commonly told, the history of political romanticism in Germany begins with Johann Gottfried Herder. Herder defended what he perceived as the cultural values of nationality which he saw rooted in the vernacular languages of the peoples that he described in his philosophical ethnography. He was against Latin or French as the dominant languages of education and rejected Enlightenment cosmopolitanism on grounds that it be too abstract. For him each nationality was an independent carrier of a general humanity that lives and unfolds in all nations (Kohn 1960: 9f). Herder’s philosophical ethnography, however, was embedded in the context of enlightened humanism and rational morality which the Romantics rejected (Kohn 1950: 445f). Early Romantics like Novalis (Georg Friedrich Philipp Freiherr von Hardenberg, 1772-1801) idealised the medieval Christian age.

Novalis looked back to an idealised Christianity, which once had brought spiritual unity to medieval Europe.

Later figures of the romantic movement like Friedrich Schlegel and Adam Müller discarded this Christian universalism in favour of national particularism and an idealisation of “folk-spirit” (*Volksgeist*). Their political thought was influenced by Burke (1999). As early as 1789 August Wilhelm Schlegel, elder brother to Friedrich Schlegel, complained against Enlightenment humanism: “The word Fatherland has lost its magic power; the place of patriotism has been taken by a more general but therefore also colder interest for mankind” (Kohn 1950: 447). In 1803 his younger brother remarked: “Recently I think I have discovered that our people has a very great character.”¹⁹ The Schlegels had discovered ethnic nationalism for themselves.

A crucial event in the life of Friedrich Schlegel that underlines his conversion to nationalism must have been a journey to Paris in 1802 where he seems to have experienced a sense of alienation in the face of this mega city of an early modern age. Having travelled through rural Thuringia and alongside the Rhine river through a largely agrarian Germany, coming to Paris he must have experienced a cultural shock of sorts. He abhorred modern city life with its industry and commerce and was taken by a nostalgia for a time of “joyous living and high morality” when people stayed “in castles upon hilltops” (Kohn 1950: 458). Thus he writes: “Since men have gathered in the valleys and around the great roads, greedy for alien ways and alien money, the heights and castles stand deserted” (ibid: 457).

It is worth noting here the allusion to the “alien ways” of capitalist, urban modernity and the romanticisation of the agrarian world of the Middle Ages. For many Germans during the 19th and 20th centuries, urbanisation, capitalism and its “alien ways” were identified with the recently emancipated and upwardly mobile Jews who assimilated fast into German society and reached the most prestigious positions in the academic, intellectual and cultural life of the newly founded nation state (since 1871). Thus German anti-Semitism in parts can be read as a reaction to modernity using the Jews as a scapegoat for developments with which the population in rural areas and small towns could not cope.²⁰ Identity politics uses the debasement of the “other” to raise the esteem and the coherence of the “self”. The “other” for the Germans has varied over time. The *Turk*, the *French* or the *Jew* were all prominent “others” at different times. As soon as romanticism became politicised in the anti-Napoleonic wars, it fell into array with anti-French sentiments. When in 1808 Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) held his *Addresses to the German Nation*, the debasement of the French was part and parcel of the valorisation of the German self (Fichte 1808).

This move towards ethnic nationalism in Germany risked to lose the politically emancipatory element of nationalism still present in the writings of Kant and Herder. Individual liberty could easily be sacrificed for the sake of collective liberation when the individual person loses its autonomy and becomes a member of a society metaphorically represented as an organism. Fichte speaks of the nation as of a single great individual. Rüdiger Safranski in his seminal work on the German romantic movement points out that after 1800 the tendency increased among

the romantics to think in the direction of the collective. The newly awakened interest in myth and religion answered to the needs of newly disoriented people for inclusion and belonging. Instead of grasping the opportunity of self-determination offered to them by modernity, they asked themselves, what are my roots, what determines me? Passive organic growth replaced active political deliberation, the organic community replaced political society (Safrański 2007: 174).

The ideal community of romanticism, writes Hans Kohn, promises to unite everyone in an organic way in which everybody would be part of the whole without conflict or friction. In such a perfect community, individual and society are no longer in need of legal and constitutional guarantees in their relationship. Individual and community become two sides of one perfect life which would be far beyond and above all legal guarantees and the need for them (Kohn 1950: 445). Law codified to modern principles was rejected as much as the concept of natural law founded on reason. Instead, the historical “folk-spirit” had to determine the constitution and the laws of a nation. For them true law could only be common law, customary law rooted in the remote past. The individualism of modernity thus finds its complement in the total community. If modern politics is about the non-violent resolution of conflict then this view of an harmonious organism is essentially apolitical (Dusche 2006). It suppresses the idea of conflict and fails to integrate conflict as a normal part of human existence. Whoever raises conflicting ideas or claims risks to make himself or herself suspicious to the community. The idea of community thereby implies the total submission of the individual under the whole. Its future can not be conceived as a matter of individual or collective choice but only as a continuation of the past in a collective fate. The romantics saw the individual rooted in the past and determined by it. It appeared conditioned by the peculiar traditions of the national community.

Though they had no factual foundation for it, the Romantics were convinced that the national features characterising the German nation were never as pronounced as in the middle ages. The medieval past set the model and it gained central importance for cultural life. The modern concept of individuality, unique and all-containing, was transferred from the individual to the collective level. The nation was no longer a legal society of individuals entering into union according to general principles and for mutual benefits but a naturally growing organism. The romantics did not establish clear distinctions between the national community and the state. Their conception of the state resembled the feudal patriarchal association of persons held together by ties of affection and mutual responsibility (Kohn 1950: 446).

Romanticism and Nationalism

It is important to note that although nationalism refers to a people as a sovereign, it is the insignia of the rural feudal elite that are invoked by the romantics, an elite that stands for the old regime and that feels threatened by the popular upsurge in neighbouring France. In the case of German nationalism, the militant underpinnings of that move are made obvious from the very beginning. Adam Müller, the political philosopher of the romantic movement, regarded perpetual peace, whether assured by a

universal monarchy or by a league of democratic republics as conceived by Kant (1795), as a misfortune that would bring human development to a standstill. Instead he embraces war as a means to instil cohesion and solidarity among the people (Müller 1809). Friedrich Schlegel who outlines his political thought in his philosophical lectures held in Vienna from 1804 to 1806, considers republicanism, which eight years before had appeared to him the most perfect form of government, only a pathway to civil discord, destruction and confusion. Only monarchy could be a true guardian of peace – not a constitutional monarchy but the medieval hierarchical order of estates under the moral guidance of the church. The concept of nation, he writes, requires that all its members should form, as it were, only one individual. This fictitious corporate personality becomes a jealous guardian of the lives of the single and real individual which it comprises and which it undertakes to mould. To form a true nation – and this meant to Schlegel to resemble a closely knit and all inclusive family – he demanded that all its members be held together by ties of blood, of descent from the same ancestors. The greater the community of blood, and the stronger therefore the perseverance of the past, the more the people would form a nation. Schlegel saw in the unity of language the indisputable testimony of common descent, a claim lacking in empirical foundation, as Kohn notes (1950: 459f).

The veiling of the fact that the creation of nations is for the most part the work of men is of course essential for ethnic nationalism to succeed for if ethnic nationalism is the response of the old regime to the challenge of popular sovereignty, it is essential to keep the people out of the nation’s business. The democratic aspirations of civic nationalism were intelligently transformed into a symbolic form of participation, not participation of independently reasoning individuals in a clearly defined common cause (*res publica*) but partaking of members in a body, in a larger organism where no member is ever self-sufficient and the whole assumes total control over its organs and extremities.

In the words of Müller, the state is the “totality of all human concerns” (ibid: 465). This totalitarian way of conceiving the political is depicted as grounded in nature, or in religion, or in both. The romantic concept of the patriarchal state was an expression of rejection of the new age of liberalism. Individual liberty was regarded as a threat to an established order declared sacrosanct. According to Müller, man should not act for and out of himself. His deeds should only continue the deeds of the ancestors. Müller believed that the errors of the French Revolution originated in the belief that the state was designed to assure the security and prosperity of its members. He did not believe that the state was there for its citizens but that the members had to sacrifice their needs for the nation (ibid: 467ff).

This accounts for the time and the circumstances under which ethnic nationalism was first conceived in German-speaking lands at the beginning of the 19th century. In the following I will give a brief sketch of how ethnic nationalism served as a model for subsequent nationalist movements in Europe and in other parts of the world. German ethnic nationalism served as a model for central and eastern European peoples such as Hungarians, Czechs, Romanians and Serbs. The nationalism of the European Jews and

Zionism present an interesting and very special case.²¹ Peoples further east followed suit, like Turks and Arabs. Ethnic nationalism radiated farther into Africa and Asia. In the case of India, the carriers of ethnic-nationalist ideas were often students in western universities such as Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948) who studied in London from 1892 to 1896; Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) who studied in London, Cambridge and Munich from 1905 and received his PhD from the University of Munich in 1908; and Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966) who studied in England from 1906 to 1910 and was jailed until 1924 in the Andaman Islands where he read western and German political theory and taught nationalism to his fellow prisoners.

Ethnic Nationalism and Colonial India

The following brief hints at the influence of ethnic nationalist ideas in the Indian subcontinent are drawing mainly from two studies. The first is on ethnic nationalism in Bosnia, India and Pakistan by Carsten Wieland (2006), a German scholar who did parts of his PhD from the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. The second study is on Italian fascism, German Nazism and Hindu nationalism by Tobias Delfs (2008).

By the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the ideology of ethnic nationalism had been further transformed. From a primarily language and culturally based notion, the concept of the nation had acquired racial undertones. Following Herbert Spencer (1857), social Darwinism, declared Darwin's "survival of the fittest" as a natural law among racially defined nations. This school of thought helped the European powers to justify their dominance over non-European peoples and their hegemony vis-à-vis each other.

According to Wieland and Delfs, the ideas of the German Romantics influenced the ideologues of Hindu nationalism such as V D Savarkar and M S Golwalkar (1906-1973). They point to a

conglomerate of European influences that affected the development of ethnic nationalism in India. The transfer of ideas was eclectic and after the assassination of Gandhi in 1948 the proponents of Hindu nationalism avoided any open association with European fascism. But Delfs makes out an affinity between Hindu nationalism and European fascism due to common ideological reference points (Delfs 2008: 149). These references include Herder, Schlegel, Fichte and later thinkers such as Heinrich von Treitschke and Friedrich Nietzsche as well as British utilitarians like John Stuart Mill and social Darwinists such as Herbert Spencer and Aldous Huxley.

Curiously, as Delfs points out, Hindutva ideologues became epigones of an obscure Swiss theorist by the name of Johann Caspar Bluntschli (1808-81). Savarkar read and taught Bluntschli while he was imprisoned on the Andamans from 1910-24. Thereby this obsolete jurist, whose influence on European fascism could never be ascertained, became influential for the Hindutva ideologues. In his theories of state and nation, Bluntschli distinguished between "principal nation" and "alien nation". Bluntschli's idea of a racially superior principal nation and a racially inferior alien nation appealed to Savarkar because it allowed him to compensate the British claim to racial superiority with the Hindu claim to superiority vis-à-vis the imagined Muslim race. Savarkar and his followers applied this ideology to the Indian context where Hindus were to be the principal nation and Muslims the alien nation.

On the whole, nationalism in India avoided the pitfall of ethnic nationalism. But it could not prevent the partition of the subcontinent and the tragedies that went along with it. Thus while we are commemorating the coming together of one people after the fall of the Berlin Wall, we remember the many walls still standing high between people differentiated by references to religion, race and ethnicity.

NOTES

- Smith (2005); Bayly (2006: 84ff) distinguishes earlier "patriotism" from later "nationalism".
- The anecdote about Tipu Sultan who called himself "Citizen Tippoo" and "ally of Napoleon" recounted in Mitra 2009: 52f.
- The Mughal Empire continued to be perceived as the prime source of legitimacy of rule in India even by the mutineers of 1857 (Chandra 2009: 155). This the British knew well and tried to obtain, in the public eye, the status of the protector of the emperor (Pernau and Jaffery 2009: 3f).
- Raina (2009). Bayly points out that even "racism", originally conceived as a universal dogma, turns "nationalistic" and begins speaking in terms of national races like the British, the French or the "Teutonic" (Bayly 2006: 293).
- This would be a project of "intellectual history of historiography" as envisaged by Iggers (2006: 84). Such a project would also take into account the aesthetics of receptions and the reader-response dimension of history writing (Jelavich 2006: 234; Geary 2002).
- In contrast to Europe, and particularly Germany, the term "nationalism" tends to carry a rather positive connotation in India (Chandra et al 2000: 1).
- Some authors use the term "sub-nationalism" for secessionist movements (Mitra 2008: 195ff).
- See Gellner 2006; Hobsbawm 1990; Anderson 1991; for a detailed discussion see Smith 2005: 45 ff.
- The term is used by Smith 2005: 49ff.
- In view of the Turkish threat the church issued decrees commanding "Türkenläuten" (12 o'clock ringing of church bells as a call for prayer), Türkenpredigten (sermons), päpstliche Türkenbulen (papal bulls), Türkenablässe (indulgences), Türkenzehnten (tithes); see Langewiesche 2000: 29.
- Cf Russell and Einstein 1955; Einstein 1929, 1993; Dusche 2009.
- In a letter to Abla Bose quoted in Sen 2005: 108.
- Quoted in Sen 2005: 92. For the controversy between Gandhi and Tagore on nationalism see Sen 2005: 91ff.
- Nehru, 1946: 53; for further discussions of Nehru on nationalism and internationalism see Zachariah 2004, 2006: 33f.
- See Kohn (1944); see also Kohn 1950, 1960, 1965.
- The locus classicus is Renan's (1882) idea of the nation as a "daily plebiscite".
- The "people" of ethnic nationalism is defined by common language, religion, descent or the like. For Friedrich Meinecke, prominent historian of German nationalism, the nation had its basis in "a natural core" (naturhafter Kern) emerging from the "consanguinity" (Blutsverwandtschaft) of its members. Membership here is a matter of fate (Schicksalsgemeinschaft) and not of choice (Meinecke 1907).
- Ibid, 283, and further he writes: "The revolution has reached Germany. I mean to say only now

there is room for a new world" (ibid 287, translation MD).

- Ibid, 456, Kohn quotes from Friedrich Schlegel's "Reise nach Frankreich" which appeared in *Europe*, Frankfurt am Main, 1803 (Schlegel 1803).
- German Romanticism, however, cannot simply be identified with Nazism. While the idea of a revolution from the right, activism, contempt for liberal thought, the enthusiasm for the Volk and the note of irrationalism are certainly features that romanticism shares with Nazism, the Fascist organisation of society around a dictatorial leader, and party, the ruthless demands for conformity, the nihilistic disregard for historically established patterns, morals, and institutions, the doctrine of race by which to interpret history and order society demonstrate divergences from the core of romantic thought. In the history of political thought, according to Lougee (1957: 644f) romanticism appears rather as a precursor of conservatism.
- See Sand 2009; Brenner 2002.

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