

*Ethnonationalism in the Contemporary World. Walker Connor and the study of nationalism*

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Nationalism is one of the most burning and controversial topics in the contemporary world, and it is hence no surprise that it is the subject of many publications. While monographs and articles on the topic can of course be of great value, there is, given the controversial nature of nationalism, a particular place for edited collections of papers, as they can conveniently present a range of views within a single volume. The current volume achieves this presentation of varied opinions most effectively, and yet is not too diverse as a *leitmotiv* is provided by the work of the North American social scientist Walker Connor. Despite collecting 14 papers by 13 authors, the editor, Daniele Conversi achieves not only unity in diversity in terms of the ideas presented, but also, through a user-friendly quadripartite structure, moves easily from theoretical background through case studies to wider implications.

The book is well produced, but certain passages, presumably written in English by speakers of other languages, could have benefited from the attentions of a translator.

One of the most controversial topics in the study of nationalisms is the age of the phenomena; how old are nations, and hence nationalisms, the movements to defend and promote them? Social scientists tend to assume that the nationalist in the street is a primordialist, that is someone who assumes nations and nationalisms are ancient in some often ill-defined sense, a view propounded, for example, by the former British Conservative Prime Minister John Major when he famously stated that England was a thousand years old. In contrast there is near unanimity among academic scholars of nationalism that the phenomena, at least in a form recognisably similar to their present form, are modern, at the most around two to three hundred years old, although of course it is undeniable that entities bearing the same names as modern nations may go back a great deal longer. Here, however, the unanimity ends; while most regard the phenomena as modern, there is widespread disagreement on the age of the collective identities which underpin nations. Some, like Ernest Gellner (see discussion in Chapter One of the current book) regard the all aspects of the phenomena as essentially modern, while others, to whom the term 'ethnosymbolists' is often applied, stress the long history of the relevant collective identities. Anthony D. Smith and Joshua Fishman, both with contribution to the current volume, can be regarded as ethnosymbolists, as can the scholar whose work provides a focus for the volume, Walker Connor. What is interesting about Connor, and what allows his work to provide such a fruitful starting point for the volume, is his stress upon the very recent nature of nations and nationalism in a recognisably current form, alongside a stress on the crucial role in these phenomena of precursor identities, particularly ethnic identities. This perspective provides a highly important corrective to

the trend among 'modernists' to suggest that the role of the state is vital to nationalism, since both can be seen as modern phenomena; Connor stresses that states and nations can in principle be largely independent entities, an insight borne out by the intense nationalism in many contemporary Central and Eastern European nations, where there is little or no history of states controlled by the nations in question. He also casts doubt upon the importance of the distinction between ethnic and civic nationalisms, prominent in much current literature, seeing all nationalisms as having a strong ethnic component, and likely over time to become more ethnic in character, an insight borne out by recent growths in ethnic sentiment in such supposedly classic civic nations as France and Switzerland.

Conversi's book starts with two introductory chapters: his own outlines some of the most salient points in Connor's thinking, and Connor's own essay 'Nationalisms and political illegitimacy'. We then move into 'Part 1. Modernity and emotions', in which three authors give their perspectives on the importance of the pre-national, the ethnic, the emotional to contemporary nations: Anthony D Smith on 'Dating the nation', Donald Horowitz on 'The primordialists' and Joshua A Fishman on 'The primordialist-constructivist debate today: the language-ethnicity link in academic and in everyday-life perspective'. All three essays contribute crucial insights to the debate, but I would single out Horowitz's insistence the primordialists cannot simply be dismissed as 'wrong', but must be taken seriously. In my own view Fishman rather over-states the significance of language in ethnic and national identity; it certainly is usually highly important, but human groups vary greatly in the place they accord to language.

Part II provides a highly welcome link between theory and phenomena in the world, with case studies on the Basque Country, South Africa and Canada. William A Douglass tackles the difficult case of the strong racist element in at least some incarnations of Basque nationalism. John Stone on South Africa provides an timely lesson in why facts cannot and should not be adapted to fit a prevalent theory, and John Edwards on Canada shows an nationalism that of the French Canadians moving from a more civic to a more ethnic type, bearing out Connor's thesis of the primacy of the ethnic component in national movements.

Part III, 'Applied Connorian perspectives' moves from nation-based case studies, to showing the applicability of Connor's views to widespread problems. Brendan O'Leary's essay 'Federations and the management of nations: agreements and arguments with Walker Connor and Ernest Gellner' is an excellent examination of the possibilities for establishing viable state structures where the (relatively) monoethnic nation-state is not an option. William Safran's 'Ethnic conflict and third-party mediation: a critical view' seems to me to invite the bleak conclusion that third parties almost always fail to understand adequately the complexities of other people's ethnic and national identities. John Coakley's 'Religion and nationalism in the First World' is a timely reminder that the religions component of identities has been highly significant in shaping the character of contemporary nations.

Part IV, 'Wider implications' directs attention to matters not hitherto clearly addressed in the volume: the territorial component of national identity in Robert J Kaisers 'Homeland making and the territorialisation of national identity' and the utilitarian functions of identities in Thomas Spira's 'Ethnicity and nationality: the twin matrices of nationalism'. This latter paper seems to make the unhelpful equation of ethnicity with 'minority ethnicity', but this is not clear; alone among the papers in the volume this paper suffers from some lack of clarity and poor expression.

The volume ends with a bibliography of Connor's work, 1967-2001, but before reaching this we can enjoy Conversi's excellent 'Resisting primordialism and other *-isms*: in lieu of conclusions.' In this he reaffirms what is perhaps the core insight of the book: in order to understand nationalism, primordialism must, following Connor, be taken seriously, but this does not mean that serious scholar of primordialism must become primordialists themselves; this charge has been levelled at Connor, quite unjustly as Conversi demonstrates.

That primordialism be taken seriously is chillingly re-argued in the paper's penultimate page; current trends in what Conversi labels 'free-market fundamentalism' may actually be leading to an "incremental [rise] in nationalism and xenophobia" and even some technological innovations, such as the mobile phone, may be "reinforcing ethnic exclusivism, family ties and parental control".

Daniele Conversi is to be warmly congratulated on producing this edited volume; allowing the contributors too debate with each other, as it were, around the theme of the primordial roots of the very modern phenomena of nations and nationalism raises many questions, suggests some highly relevant answers, and points the way to fruitful new research on this vital dimensions of social and political life.

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