

NATIONALISM: SOME METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

1: *The Resilience of Nationalism*

At the beginning of the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels invoked the spectre of communism and predicted that it would haunt Europe until the final victory of the proletariat. But blinded by their own discovery, they failed to see the importance of an emerging and even more threatening political force: nationalism. A century and two score years later, it is not easy to decide which of these two *idées-forces*, to use Fouillée's felicitous expression, had the upper hand in European as well as in world affairs. There is little doubt, though, that nationalism has been, and still is, probably the most important political force of modern times. And yet it has been poorly understood and theorized by the different social scientific traditions. A long time after Vico wrote in his *The New Science*

that this world of nations has certainly been made by men, and its guise must therefore be found within the modifications of our human mind. And history cannot be more certain when he who creates things also narrates them (1975: 62-3),

we do not agree as to what a nation is, or what we mean by national identity, or how we account for nationalist movements.

In the period immediately following the Second World War it was thought, somewhat optimistically, that the end of nationalism was in sight. E.H. Carr could refer with confidence to 'the aftermath of the age of nationalism' (1968: 74), while pioneers in the study of nationalism such as Hans Kohn (1944) and Carlton Hayes (1960) emphasised its transient character, abhorred its effects and hoped

for a more universalistic attitude.

All in vain, because the obscure forces of nationalism prevailed over the enlightened wishful thinking of internationalists and cosmopolitans alike. In its relentless motion, nationalism spread like wildfire into the colonial world and triggered off the struggles for national liberation in what was starting to be known as the Third World. The process of decolonization, with the ensuing attempts at state-building and nation-building, could only be ignored by social scientists at their own scholarly peril. And yet, although these events generated a fair amount of literature in the 1950s and 1960s [of which Balandier (1955), Geertz (1963), Deutsch and Folz (1963), Kedourie (1960), Worsley (1964) and Wallerstein (1966) are the best-known representatives], it was considered that Third World nationalisms were the last jolts of a monster which had ravaged the world for over 150 years, but which was now moribund. But nationalisms were part of the inevitable process of modernization that had spread from Western Europe to other parts of the world, admittedly in an uneven way. In the final instance, these nationalisms could be dealt with within the framework of an evolutionary theory.

It is not surprising, then, that the spate of nationalisms against the state that have shattered the political fabric of the Western world in the last twenty years should have caught most social scientists theoretically unprepared. They had been working under the assumption that the modern industrialized societies of Western Europe were nationally well integrated, that is, they were proper nation states. Social scientists were in fact the perfect example of double false consciousness. First, they mistook what was actually state ideology for empirical reality; secondly, they believed, against a growing amount of evidence, that after a long process of nation-building Western European states were nationally well integrated. The existence within each European country of what were perceived at the time as regional differences and even strong identities were in no way felt as a challenge to the basic loyalty that the citizen felt for the nation state. Furthermore, it was believed that with the development of the EEC even the Europe of the *patries* would fade away in a not too distant future.

We could say, paraphrasing Durkheim, that social phenomena have a life of their own, independent of the opinions and desires of social scientists and politicians. The resilience shown by nationalism over a long period should have alerted social scientists to the importance of the phenomenon. But it is a fact that most nineteenth-century and twentieth-century social scientists not only ignored or misunderstood the nature of nationalism, but also underestimated its force.

It may be argued that nationalism, as the scourge of modern times, is not there to be talked about but to be uprooted as a most dangerous evil. And yet the nation still has a role to play in the foreseeable future, because, as Mazzini puts it, 'the individual is too weak and mankind too vast' (1972: 59). Of course, for those who confuse Herder with Hitler and the nation with the state all this might be anathema. In any case, even if one were to agree that nationalism is a pathological phenomenon, it would

still be the case that it is *terra incognita* for the social scientist and hence worthy of being explained.

The recent wave of nationalisms against the state in Western Europe has been a source of political destabilization which in different degrees has affected nearly all countries. The radical way in which a significant percentage of the population of Northern Ireland reject British rule may be comparable only to the militant stand adopted by ETA supporters in their struggle for an independent Basque state, but the phenomenon is much more general, if not always so virulent. The Welsh and the Scots in the United Kingdom, Catalans, Galicians and Andalusians in Spain, Friulians and other *Grenzeleute* in Italy, Walloons and Flemings in Belgium, and even the peripheral nationalities of the French state plus the Corsicans - all try to preserve a sense of national identity and rightly believe that this can only be achieved in the framework of a state that provides them with a substantial degree of political autonomy. In West Germany the federal system has, to a great extent, pre-empted the possible emergence of peripheral nationalisms, but the *Nationalefrage* has persisted more or less consciously in the mind of most people in so far as they have not accepted the *de jure* partition of Germany into two states.

2. Classical Sociology and the Nation

The reasons for the inability of social scientists to come to terms with the national question have their origins in the cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment, but they find their specific roots in the intellectual traditions of the recognised nineteenth-century founding parents of the social disciplines. The underlying political philosophies of the social scientific projects of the nineteenth century were based on either liberal or socialist conceptions of the world. No matter how different these conceptions might be, liberalism and socialism are both universalistic in nature, and hence they consider nationalism as a transient phenomenon. Only conservative and romantic thinkers perceived, in all its uncontrollable turbulence, the force of nationalism in history, but they were not interested in explaining its origins, character and development, but rather in asserting its eternal reality.

There is a consensus today that contemporary social theory stems from the confluence of three major streams of thought: Marx, Durkheim and Weber. This is not to deny the importance of thinkers like Comte, Spencer, Tocqueville, Tönnies, Simmel, Freud and others whose ideas have found a way into mainstream sociology, nor is there any suggestion that a synthesis has emerged incorporating Marx, Durkheim and Weber into a single theoretical framework. Their sociological styles are irreconcilable, both at the methodological and at the theoretical levels, though partial syntheses have been shown to be possible and fruitful. In fact, the

greatest challenge of contemporary sociology is precisely to convince its practitioners that progress will only come as a result of abandoning their recalcitrant feudal-like positions and joining in a common enterprise. But without a commonly agreed theoretical charter all attempts to transcend the present state of affairs, no matter how well intentioned, are bound to fail.

It is an idle occupation to look for a theory of nationalism among the founders of the social sciences. At best, Marx, Durkheim and Weber made occasional remarks on the nation, but on the strength of these elements it is extremely difficult, if not altogether impossible, to build up a theory of nationalism.

The founders of historical materialism were certainly aware of the nationalist phenomenon. As politically committed young intellectuals, Marx and Engels lived through the troublesome 1840s - a period in which nationalist struggles ravaged the European arena. In their formative years, then, they had to confront the nationalist demands of a variety of European peoples. To understand their attitude towards nationalism it is essential to know that they subordinated the survival of nations to the progressive march of history: some peoples were fossils from a long gone past and were therefore objectively counterrevolutionary. These reactionary nations had to be sacrificed on the altar of the mightier national states. In the articles written by Marx and Engels for the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* (1848-49), the national question was often present as part of the political scenario, but there was no attempt to explain the phenomenon except perhaps in terms of crude stereotypes of national character. It is obvious that for Marx and Engels the nation was not a central category of social existence, but rather a transitory institution created by the bourgeoisie - hence the passage in the *Communist Manifesto* to the effect that the 'proletariat has no fatherland'.

At the turn of the century, the vindication of the rights of nations changed the political panorama to the extent that to the Marxists of the Second International the national question was central to their political agenda. However, it was only within the Austro-Marxian tradition that a serious attempt was made to come to terms with the theoretical problems of the nation. Otto Bauer's *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie* (1907) presented a theory of nationalism based on the idea of national character and of national culture, though he also used the dubious idea that nations have a historical destiny to fulfil. A much better-known and more influential contribution from this period is, of course, Stalin's *Marxism and the National Question* (1913). In his definition of the nation, Stalin required the simultaneous coalescence of four elements (language, territory, economic life and psychic formation) in a historically constituted community of culture. As for Lenin, he adopted a more flexible definition of the nation, and although he was in favour, like most Marxists, of the creation of large political units, he endorsed the principle of the self-determination of oppressed nations, at least in theory.

As a whole the Marxist tradition has been extremely suspicious of nationalism, though for tactical reasons it has often made use of national sentiments to achieve socialist objectives. In any

case, within Marxist theory the nation is not a significant concept that can help to explain the dynamics of modern history. I would tend to agree with Tom Nairn's sweeping statement that the 'theory of nationalism represents Marxism's great historical failure' (1977: 329). The extraordinary developments of the 1960s and 1970s in which socialist countries have fought bitterly against each other along nationalist lines have opened the eyes of some Marxists (Horace Davis, 1978; Benjamin Anderson, 1983) to the reality that, at least at present, national interests are, in the final analysis, more important than socialist internationalism. Whether this is the beginning, within Marxism, of a genuine interest in the theory of nationalism remains to be seen.

Emile Durkheim's silence on the national question is quite intriguing, considering that in his formative period, in the 1880s, he was asking the same question that Renan formulated in 1882 - *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* In his early writings, mostly in the form of long book reviews, Durkheim made an inventory of a number of authors (Fauillée, Schäffle, Tönnies, Gumplowitz) who had contributed to the study of how national consciousness was created and maintained. The concepts that Durkheim evolved over this period - especially *conscience collective* and *représentation collective* - cried out to be applied to the study of national consciousness in contemporary societies. But towards the late 1890s Durkheim operated a double shift, which led him to an increasing concern with primitive societies and to the *refoulement*, to use B. Lacroix's expression, of the political sphere. The result was that the two basic concepts mentioned above were never put to the test for the study of modern nations.

We have to wait until the publication of a wartime pamphlet - *L'Allemagne au dessus de tout* (1915) - to find Durkheim expressing an interest in the theory of the nation. The work was basically a tract against Treitschke and other German theorists who had deified the state and were objective accomplices of the expansionist policies of Kaiser Wilhelm. In opposition to Treitschke, Durkheim praised the German tradition of the *Volksgeist* (Savigny, Lazarus, Steinthal) because in their conception of the nation they took into account the impersonal forces of history (myths, legends, etc.). In other words, they assumed that a nation had a 'soul', a character which was independent of the will of the state. It is somewhat surprising, then, that when Durkheim proposed a definition of the nation - as a 'human group whose members, either for ethnic or simply for historical reasons, want to live under the same laws and constitute the same state' (1915: 40) - he was unable to distinguish clearly between nation and state. Could this oversight be a reflection of Durkheim's role as one of the committed ideologists of the Third Republic?

The First World War, with the collapse of socialist internationalism and the rallying of the working-class parties to the interests of their respective national states, was undoubtedly the catalyst that compelled many social scientists to think about the nation. Within the Durkheimian school, this led to a number of discontinued and failed attempts to incorporate the nation into sociological theory. In 1920 to 1921 Marcel Mauss started to

write a monograph on the nation, which he never completed. From the scattered fragments that are extant (Mauss 1969, Vol. 3), we can conclude that his standpoint was no different from that of Durkheim, in that he never solved the antinomy between state and nation. The problem with Durkheim and Mauss is that they had the French historical experience of a national state too much at heart to pay enough attention to alternative conceptions. Another Durkheimian, Maurice Halbwachs, although not directly concerned with articulating a theory of the nation, was nonetheless interested in the study of one of the key elements in any definition of the nation: the idea of collective memory. His work, however, had limited diffusion, and his refined conceptual tools were applied to a variety of groups (family, class, etc.), but not to the nation (Halbwachs 1925, 1950).

Wolfgang Mommsen's *Max Weber und die deutsche Politik* (1959) empirically established for liberal and democratic ears the unpalatable truth that Weber was not only a German nationalist, but that for him the national state was the 'ultimate value'; in other words, that in the final instance, the interests of the national state should prevail over any other interests. Although in *Economy and Society* Weber defined the nation as a community of sentiment based on some objective common factor (language, traditions, customs, social structure, history, race, etc.) and the belief that this factor generated values which were worth preserving against encroachment by other communities, he insisted in creating an indissoluble bond between nation and state. To all practical purposes the nation, that is, the cultural values of a community, could only be preserved in the framework of a purpose-built state. On the other hand, Weber knew very well that the modern state could not achieve its aims exclusively by brute force. The loyalty of the individual to the state depended on the existence of a national sentiment, hence the centrality of the equation 'nation equals state'.

There is little doubt that Weber's understanding of the nation was far superior to that of Marx or Durkheim. For one thing, he was well aware that national sentiments were not the creation of the rising bourgeoisie, but that they were actually rooted in the population of a country as a whole. Because *Kultur* was the distinctive feature of a national community, Weber was very interested in the question of its preservation, transmission and change. In this context he considered crucial the role played by the intellectuals in creating a literary culture. It is unfortunate that Weber did not write, as he had actually planned to do, a history of the national state.

3. Theories of Nationalism

In the last few years there has been an exponential growth of the literature on nationalism. Any attempt to take an inventory and systematize it is a daunting task. Even fifteen years ago,

Anthony D. Smith's survey of the main theories and studies on nationalism (1971, 1973) included an impressive list of books and articles.

A somewhat cavalier way of disposing of the problem is to assume that, as a phenomenon, nationalism is theoretically intractable due to the heterogeneity of what is supposed to be explained. How can we compare ideas, processes and groups that have appeared in different historical or social contexts (Zubaida 1978)? Whether this point of view is a remnant of the golden age of Althusserian scholasticism, with its fastidious insistence on the impossibility of constructing certain theoretical objects, or an attempt to emulate the Lévi-Straussian idea that certain theoretical realities are just the illusory products of certain ways of thinking (Lévi-Strauss 1962: 149), the question is in any case worth considering. There is always the danger, though, that if this methodological prescription is applied too rigidly we could lose sight of even the core of the nationalist phenomenon.

Most studies of nationalism, whether by historians, political scientists or sociologists, are basically descriptive and narrative in type. The enormous quantity of writings on nationalism seems to dissolve into rather superficial and colourful statements. It looks as if a great number of these studies have been undertaken with a sense of expediency, as a response to urgent political needs. Not surprisingly, they are theoretically jejune. Most of these studies fail the minimum standards required to fulfil the Durkheimian criterion of using well-established facts. What this amounts to is that we cannot make a scientific inventory of the social facts of nationalism, for the simple reason that we lack the basic building blocks: good monographic studies of individual nations. That most of these studies are also theoretically thin is also to be expected. At best, nationalist theories play the old labelling and typological game. But placing often ambiguous facts in differently coloured boxes is no substitute for a fully fledged theoretical pursuit.

Some social scientists have tried to construct a theory of nationalism on the basis of the comparative method *à la* Frazer, a temptation to which sociologists have been particularly vulnerable (Smith 1981). Anthropologists, having been immunised by the Malinowskian vaccine, have been less prone to forget the first functionalist commandment: ye shall not pluck out isolated facts from a variety of historical and social contexts and compare them.

Of the general theories of nationalism, that of Ernest Gellner (1984) is by far the most widely praised and accepted. Gellner's powerful argument rests on pinning down the appearance of nationalism to the transition from agrarian to industrial society. The two models of society that Gellner uses - Agraria and Industria - are extremely abstract. But the facts of nationalism are too complex to be accounted for by a formalistic and simplistic model of the process of modernization that ignores history. It is precisely because Gellner's theory is ahistorical that it is so difficult to see whether it works or not. However, by pinpointing the precise role of language and culture, as well as education, in the development of nationalism, Gellner has probably made a lasting

contribution to the study of state-generated nationalism; it is up to historically minded sociologists to test his provocative hypotheses.

There are at least four different ways of conceiving the nation, from which derive four major explanatory frameworks: essentialism, economism, culturalism and eclecticism. The essentialist conception, originating in Herder and in Romanticism in general, assumes that nations are natural, organic, quasi-eternal entities created by God in time immemorial. Each nation is characterised by the existence of a peculiar language, a culture and a specific character (national character). As a spiritual reality, a nation has a specific contribution to make to the design that the divinity has installed for mankind. The idea that every nation has been chosen by God to perform a specific role in human history can easily be secularized, hence the appearance of ideas such as 'manifest destiny' or 'common historical destiny'. Furthermore, the essentialist vision of the nation emphasises the ideational and emotive aspects of *communitas*, but it tends to exclude economic, social and political dimensions and fails to perceive the intrinsic historicity of the nation.

The starting point for the economic conception of the nation is the assumption that national consciousness is fundamentally a type of false consciousness. In other words, that underneath the idea of the nation lie economic interests. The fact that by its own ambiguity the nationalist discourse can be used to justify or hide economic exploitation, as well as political power and cultural supremacy, is not a sufficient reason to reduce nationalism to the ideology of the ascending bourgeoisie. Economism is an extremely popular form of explanation, and as such it is favoured by Marxists and non-Marxists alike. In the modern literature this explanatory framework appears in different guises, but in the final analysis their common denominator is that they deny the specific character of the national fact.

Culturalism seems to stand as the polar opposite to economism. In fact, both are variants of a conception of society which assumes that the part can explain the whole. By focusing on culture as the key to nationalism, an array of historians and sociologists of modernity (including Kohn, Hayes, Kedourie, Gellner, etc.) have undoubtedly located a crucial factor in the development of nationalism in the last two centuries: there is a need for some sort of cultural identity at a time of rapid economic and social change, with its concomitant effects of alienation and anomie. Whether the nation also satisfies the psychological need for belonging or whether it embodies a sacred character borrowed from religion is a matter for discussion. In any case, culturalism envisages nationalism as a ready-made response to the requirements of modernization. By ignoring the long-term genesis of nationalism and its multifarious phenomenal appearances, culturalism privileges a particular moment, no matter how important, of its existence.

Eclectic explanatory frameworks are the result of the disenchantment with unidimensional, factor theories of nationalism. They follow, on the whole, the palaeofunctionalist argument that

a social precipitate originates as the result of a combination of interacting elements. The candidates for such combinations, as well as the specific weight attributed to each of them, will vary from author to author, but we can be certain of encountering geographic, economic, cultural, religious, historical and linguistic factors. Eclectic approaches are as unobjectionable as they are uninteresting. The idea that society consists of interrelated parts was a revolutionary innovation, but it belongs in the annals of the contributions made by the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment to the social sciences. Today, the minimum programme of functionalism is a pure sociological truism, and it should not be metamorphosed into a theoretical framework. The point of view adopted here, that of the concrete totality, transcends this eclectic empiricism by conceiving of society as a 'structural, evolving, self-forming social whole' (Kosik 1976: 18). The social totality is not constituted by facts; rather, the latter can only be comprehended from the standpoint of the whole.

4. *The Genesis and Development of Nationalism in Western Europe*

The fact that Western Europe was the birthplace and the *lieu classique* of nationalism justifies my standpoint that any theory of nationalism should start by trying to account for the emergence and development of nationalism in this area. Only when we are clear about the meaning of nationalism in Western Europe can we hope to come to terms with its 'diffusion' to other parts of the world.

It is my contention that a regional (Western European) theory of nationalism should provide us with the following answers:

- a) An understanding of the subjective feelings or sentiments of ethnic and national identity, along with the concomitant elements of consciousness. This is the task of an anthropological theory *sensu stricto*.
- b) An account of the genesis and evolution of the idea of the nation and of national identity and consciousness in the Middle Ages and in early modern Western Europe. This is the task of a history of mentalities.
- c) A spatio-temporal explanation of the varying structures (ideologies and movements) of nationalisms in the modern period. This is the task of a structural history.

Anthropological theories of ethnicity have suggested either that ethnic identity is the result of a primordialist affiliation (Shils 1957; Geertz 1963; Francis 1976) or that it is highly malleable and subjective, and hence at the mercy of power games (Barth 1969). Primordialist perspectives stem from extending to a wide population the belief that they descend from a common ancestor and the idea that this generates a sense of identity and of solidarity. In the instrumentalist point of view the emphasis is on the idea that identity is not given or fixed but varies in time

and according to circumstances. Ethnicity is the way in which human groups perceive reality. For a group to survive, what matters is not cultural or biological continuity but the maintenance of ethnic boundaries. Both approaches, instrumentalism and primordialism, have their own partisans and have proven fruitful, if only partially, in a variety of empirical studies. In recent times, sociobiologists have put forward the idea that the resilience of ethnic identity is rooted in the biology of nepotism - this term is understood as the procedure used by human beings to maximize their reproductive capacity (Van den Berghe 1981). This position is compatible with the idea that ethnicity may be subjected to rapid fluctuations in response to the environment. Social scientists are rightly suspicious about sociobiology, but is there biological 'reductionism' in stating that ethnicity rests in the shared belief of common ancestry?

There are serious problems in explaining the transition from ethnic to national identity, but they are partly due to the lack of in-depth historical studies on how the transformation occurred. Attempts to correlate the appearance of national sentiments with the development of capitalism, which many social scientists make, are incompatible with the fact that nations pre-exist capitalism. Soviet scholars have introduced an intermediary stage between tribe and nation, that of *narodnost*, but this only compounds the problem. John Armstrong's pathbreaking *Nations before Nationalism* (1982) considers modern nationalism as part of a long cycle of ethnic consciousness. From a different standpoint, Anthony Smith (1981) has also made a significant contribution to the understanding of this matter. But it is only the perspective of the *longue durée* which will allow us to find a way out of the blind alley in which our obsession with the modernity of nationalism has placed us. There is no miraculous appearance of the nation at the time of the French Revolution, but a long process of evolution starting in the Middle Ages.

It has been said *ad nauseam* that nations and nationalism, as we understand them today, did not exist in the Middle Ages. This is a mere truism. But to abandon for this reason any search into the processes of how nations were formed and how national sentiment developed is tantamount to sociological suicide.

The history of mentalities, in so far as it combines a variety of approaches to the study of modes of thinking, perceiving and feeling, focuses on the old Durkheimian problem of how collective representations are both a social discourse and socially generated. As a phenomenon of the *longue durée*, national consciousness is well open to the kind of scrutiny operated by historians of mentalities.

It should be clear by now that, within the field of comparative and historical sociology, my approach could be labelled structural history, were it not for the amphibology of this expression. This is an area in which we truly stand on the shoulders of contemporary giants (*Annales* historians, Barrington Moore, Charles Tilly, etc.). The work of Immanuel Wallerstein (1974, 1979) on the origins, structure and evolution of the world system

should receive special attention in so far as it is the most recent attempt to put forward a general theory of the social sciences. As such, it is a necessary starting point for any further historical and comparative endeavour. It is unfortunate, however, that Wallerstein has failed to conceptualize the nation - which he considers part of the cultural dimension of the modern world system. Furthermore, in so far as he defines national consciousness as a cultural assertion in the political arena to defend economic interests, it is clear that he cannot account for the phenomenon of nationalism except in a reductionist way. These strictures notwithstanding, a non-dogmatic and cautious use of Wallerstein's world-system theory can be a valuable tool for assessing the functional and historical verisimilitude of a given hypothesis.

The fact that Western Europe is a relatively homogeneous area, where at the same time some of the key variables for the explanation of nationalism (particularly religion, level of economic development, ethnic potential, type and timing of state formation, etc.) change from country to country, permits us to use a methodology of limited and controlled comparisons, hence avoiding the pitfalls of Frazerian comparativism.

In the modern sense of the term, national consciousness has existed only since the French Revolution. The purpose of any study in this area must be to map out the different constraints that have shaped the nationalist discourse in Western Europe into what it finally came to be: the ideology of mass movements. My theoretical assumption is that nationalism is a privileged semantic field which encapsulates the structure and dynamics of modern Western Europe in general and of each specific country in particular. The problem is how to interrogate this discourse, how to uncover the rules of its formation, how to assess its effects on society. A serious epistemological obstacle to achieving these objectives is what I would call the sociological myth of the nation state, i.e. the belief that because the nation state happens to be the paramount ideology of the modern state it must necessarily correspond to a sociological reality.

The kind of structural history that I propose here does not seek to superimpose models on reality - rather it envisages history as a result of a complex dialectical process in which no a priori primacy is given to any factor. We attend to the unfolding of the social totality in history and follow its meanderings from one place to another, from one period to the next. However, once ideas and institutions have appeared in history they acquire a life of their own, and under certain conditions, to be empirically investigated, they have a perdurable effect in society. Structural history is not in a position to explain all that happened, and why it happened. Many areas of social life, particularly in the sphere of nationalism, are the result of historical events which are difficult to predict (wars, invasions, annexations, etc.) and may always remain impervious to our queries. On the other hand, and as Barrington Moore put it, there is also much to be learned from trying to explain why something did not occur.

In conclusion, I envisage nationalism as a sort of geological

formation in so far as different layers of ideological material are deposited over time, but with the difference that past ideologies set constraints on present ones and that the latter may modify the former. The end product is an apparently motionless, but in fact continuously changing discursive formation propelled by the articulation of discursive and extra-discursive practices. This conception is perfectly compatible with the Gramscian notion of cultural hegemony, with the caveat that it is the very idea of nation as a *Gemeinschaft* that is the stake of the ideological struggles (Bourdieu 1982: 16). Finally, and paraphrasing Marx, one could say that nations make history but not in circumstances of their own choice, because the past lingers on in the present - in other words, that the way in which the past is perceived by a community plays a key role in determining the formation of a nationalist ideology and in developing a national consciousness. Now, as I have briefly shown, there are certain structural constraints that shape the ways in which people look at the past.

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