

# The State as the Enemy of the Ethnos

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The academic literature on nationalism and ethnicity is an intellectual disaster; the harshest polemics and rants against even the most moderate nationalist position passes the phony “peer-review” process and usually renders nationalism somewhat akin to National Socialism. The concept of the nation is nearly treated as identical to the state and its apparatus, and ethnicity is little more than a residual category of all that is not covered by the ideas of “nation” or “state.”

Making matters worse, the question of “nationalism” in both historical and political journals is basically critical, making the claim regularly that nationalism is a recent phenomenon based on “myth” and “manipulation.” In other words, it is not an idea taken seriously. At present, it is the greatest threat to the oligarchial elites who presently control much of the globe’s politics.

The academic nonsense regularly published on nationalism is based on a subtle confusion of terminology that is at the basis of my personal interest in this field: the distinction between nation, state and ethnicity. These are far from synonymous, and in many ways they are nearly exclusive of one another. In making these necessary distinctions, the central concepts of ethnic nationalism are made clear.

By ethnicity I mean a body of tradition centered on a shared language, a shared universe of meaning. Ethnicity is solely a product of history; the struggle for survival, and nearly all traditional ethnic institutions have been formed for the sake of protection, security and the basic issues of survival.

Appeals to tradition make little sense unless this universe of shared meaning exists. Language is shaped by historical experience and this complex of experience and language are vital ingredients for tradition to function.

Conservatives have spent the last two hundred years speaking on the idea of “tradition,” which, by itself is a meaningless abstraction, without bothering to discuss its ethnic and linguistic roots. By tradition I mean something similar to the concept of ethnicity, that is, a set of basically unspoken norms and meanings that have developed out of a people’s struggle for survival.

Tradition does not make any sense outside of ethnicity. Ethnicity is the primary basis of social life because it is what philosophers call a “first order” loyalty, that is, civil society, however one conceives of it, or whatever social agenda one might have, is utterly dependent upon this universe of shared meanings that derive from historical experience, objectified in cultural institutions and language.

The state is ethnicity’s radical opposite. What in the ethno-national collective is free-flowing and developing, the state seeks to make rigid; to compartmentalize and administer. The ethnos is based around a shared culture; the state is based upon coercion, violence and bureaucracy. The ethnic group maintains order through the tradition of its own history and development, the state relies on police, armies, psy-ops, secret agents and manipulation. The ethnic group is a diverse organism of traditional institutions and folkways while the state is based upon a culture-less, utilitarian organization of domination, control and exploitation. And it is

partially on this basis that I have referred to the “nation state” as a myth.

The life of the ethnic organism can easily be described as the daily manifestation of the general will, that is, those things that any specific people share in common as a people; those marks that make them a specific people. It is a set of public meanings and unspoken understandings that makes all civil life possible. It is not an appeal to tradition; it is the framework of meaning that permits tradition to be understood at all.

Even further, it is the foundation of tradition, without which political or civic discussion cannot take place. It is nearly impossible to conceive of a political culture where the interplay of institutions, historical experience and a shared vocabulary are absent. It would be a merely arbitrary set of slogans backed up, inevitably by threats of violence. It is contemporary America.

The nation is another matter altogether, and it is here where the academic mentality fails completely; it is a slippery and vague concept that I often refrain from using. Depending on whom one reads, the nation is identical with the state, the ethnic group, or this non-existent monster from the vaults of academic mythology called the “nation state.”

It is not uncommon to hear one speak of the “Swiss nation,” the “Iraqi nation” or the “Belgian nation” when in fact these are states—governments with arbitrary borders—that have several nations living within them. In this case the word “nation” can only mean the legally constituted state, and, if this is true, the word is useless.

This usage seems to me to be an abuse of the language. It is true that the 19th century theorists of nationalism such as G.W.F. Hegel used the term “state” to describe not merely the agencies of bureaucratic coercion we in the English speaking world refer to as the “state,” but also to the cultural and linguistic complex that this state embodies. For Hegel, as well as others such as Bernard Bosanquet—and this is central—the nation, the cultural life of a people, and the state were one and the same thing.

Whether this complex shows itself as bureaucratic and coercive or communal and cultural was of no consequence, they were merely two sides of the same coin, sometimes needing to show strength, sometimes needing to create unity.

It is my opinion that this older, very continental, view is naïve. Part of the confusion among the academic literature on nationalism derives from a legitimate source, the extreme difficulty of separating the pre-modern ethnic groups within Europe from the rise of the state in the 16th century and the rather artificial culture that it created.

Normally, academics such as Eric Hobsbawm or Ernst Gellner enjoy delegitimizing nationalism by claiming that it was these modern states that encouraged or even created a “national culture.” Therefore, this “national culture” is synthetic and the product of manipulation, confined to the cities and a handful of intellectuals, the national culture was primarily, if not solely, the product of political manipulation.

Gellner has made the claim that “nationalism” developed only in the milieu of the statist industrial revolution, where the need for regularity and standardization that industry required, and still requires, necessitated the creation of a “national culture” that would bring all groups within its view.

This view is easy to eliminate largely because most ethnic nationalisms have developed in agrarian societies such as Ireland, Serbia, Greece, Turkey, Czechia, Ruthenia, Russia, Ukraine or Scandinavia.

In the case of France in particular, it is clear that, in many respects, the “national culture” postdates the state. It might also be noted that France, up until the post World War I era, was largely pastoral.

In Germany it is quite the opposite. As the centralized French state developed in the post-revolutionary era, the Celtic ethnos in the north of the country was forbidden to speak its language or use any of its symbols. Other dialects within the state were discouraged or banned outright; in fact, this process predates the revolution. Medieval France was a mess of languages that were often mutually incomprehensible. The state, it might be said, standardized the language and therefore the nature and tone of civic debate.

Now, as often as this example is trotted out, this sort of manipulation was not the case in Scotland, Russia, Scandinavia, Germany, Serbia, Greece, Russia or Poland. Certainly the Jews are another example here. Even in the absence of unifying political structures or industrialization, the more powerful agencies of language and religion unified the cultural life of these nations. These created a sense of unity and togetherness long before the state came into existence. The unified cultural life of these nations was well-known and functioning at least as early as the middle ages.

Therefore, the academic critique of nationalism presupposes agreement as to what the “nation” is. This is the problem. Generally, professional historians seem to accept the notion that state and nation are basically inseparable and that whenever anyone speaks of national culture or even ethnic tradition, one is, at least partially, speaking of a synthetic creation of the state.

Those, such as me, who stress ethnicity over the state, are certainly willing to accept this critique in certain historical cases. It is a fact that states have created cultures that are more a product of bureaucratic fantasy than historical fact. This merely obscures the point that the state builds its pseudo-nationalism on the backs of traditional, local and ethnically based institutions.

The state demands absolute loyalty; no one may use force against any other citizen except the state, and the state, therefore, is the center of political loyalty, political action and political standardization. Now, if this is the definition of “nationalism” I am not a nationalist, and I fear that most who presently call themselves nationalists would not exactly accept this definition.

Here, possibly is the main distinction between ethnos and nation. The state came into existence by destroying the independent existence of the ethnic groups that formerly developed since medieval or even ancient times. Others, such as Germany, voluntarily joined the German Confederation because it was already a historical fact that trade and language were already joining the “Germanic peoples” together. In the United States, alternatively, the television monoculture has all but destroyed the separate ethnic nations that have always existed on its soil.

Empires in the past have generally been a-ethnic, at least in its official theory. The Habsburgs, for example, thought of themselves as a universal protector of Christendom that maintained numerous ethnic groups in basic cultural independence under its scepter. The Roman Empire tolerated and largely enfranchised ethnic politics, and the “Byzantine Commonwealth” can, at its height, only be called a confederation of ethnic principalities. The Russian Empire maintained the cultural independence of its subject nations, even going so far as to write different constitutions for different parts of the empire.

Many of the empires of years past were not states in any modern sense of the term. Many of them were wedded to medieval or ancient concepts of political authority that did not need any form of central control, and the day to day life of the peasant or artisan was regulated by the church calendar, the commune, or the guild. There was no state in the ethnic life of old Europe

Only today, the American Imperium, the most violent and most heavily armed empire in history, has taken upon itself the mission of reducing the world’s ethnicities to, at best, superficial entities in the global marketplace or, at worst, irritants to a world wide market that are slated for extinction. The American Empire treats its “global village” in the same way it has

treated its own (European) ethnics, as playful indulgences without any political content whatsoever.

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Nowhere is this fraud of the “nation state” more obvious than in the third world. The number of civil wars and carnage that has come from the post-colonial state system is immeasurable. Nearly every country in Africa is an artificial creation, trapping within its arbitrary borders numerous ethnic groups that often are at war with one another. Therefore, the state in black Africa is merely the plaything of western-educated native elites who either pretend that ethnicity does not exist or, more commonly, use the levers of state power to benefit one ethnic group over another.