NATIONS AND NATIONALISM

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Social Entropy and Equality in Industrial Society

The transition from agrarian to industrial society has a kind of entropy quality, a shift from pattern to systematic randomness. Agrarian society, with its relatively stable specializations, its persisting regional, kin, professional and rank groupings, has a clearly marked social structure. Its elements are ordered, and not distributed at random. Its sub-cultures underscore and fortify these structural differentiations, and they do not by setting up or accentuating cultural difference within it in any way hamper the functioning of the society at large. Quite the contrary. Far from finding such cultural differentiations offensive, the society holds their expression and recognition to be most fitting and appropriate. Respect for them is the very essence of etiquette.

Industrial society is different. Its territorial and work units are *ad hoc*: membership is fluid, has a great turnover, and does not generally engage or commit the loyalty and identity of members. In brief, the old structures are dissipated and largely replaced by an internally random and fluid totality, within which there is not much (certainly when compared with the preceding agrarian society) by way of genuine sub-structures. There is very little in the way of any effective, binding organization at any level between the individual and the total community. This total and ultimate political community thereby acquires a wholly new and very considerable importance, being linked (as it seldom was in the past) both to the state and to the cultural boundary. The *nation* is now supremely important, thanks both to the erosion of sub-groupings and the vastly increased importance of a shared, literary-dependent culture. The state, inevitably, is charged with the maintenance and supervision of an enormous social infrastructure (the cost of which characteristically comes close to one half of the total income of the society). The educational system becomes a very crucial part of it, and the maintenance of the cultural/linguistic medium now becomes the central role of

education. The citizens can only breathe conceptually and operate within that medium, which is co-extensive with the territory of the state and its educational and cultural apparatus, and which needs to be protected, sustained and cherished.

The role of culture is no longer to underscore and make visible and authoritative the structural differentiations within society (even if some of them persist, and even if, as may happen, a few new ones emerge); on the contrary, when on occasion cultural differences do tie in with and reinforce status differences, this is held to be somewhat shameful for the society in question, and an index of partial failure of its educational system. The task with which that system is entrusted is to turn out worthy, loyal and competent members of the total society whose occupancy of posts within it will not be hampered by factional loyalties to sub-groups within the total community; and if some part of the educational system, by default or from surreptitious design, actually produces internal cultural differences and thereby permits or encourages discrimination, this is counted as something of a scandal.

Obstacles to entropy

All this is only a reformulation of our general theory of the bases of nationalism, of the new role of culture in mobile, educated, anonymous societies. But an important point is brought out by stressing the need for this random-seeming, entropic mobility and distribution of individuals in this kind of society. Within it, though sub-communities are partly eroded, and their moral authority is much weakened, nevertheless people continue to differ in all kinds of ways. People can be categorized as tall and short, as fat and thin, dark and light, and in many other ways. Clearly, there is simply no limit to the number of ways in which people can be classified. Most of the possible classifications will be of no interest whatever. But some of them become socially and politically very important. They are those which I am tempted to call entropy-resistant. A classification is entropy-resistant if it is based on an attribute which has a marked tendency *not* to become, even with the passage of time since the initial establishment of an industrial society, evenly dispersed throughout the entire society. In such an entropy-resistant

case, those individuals who are characterized by the trait in question will tend to be concentrated in one part or another of the total society.

Suppose a society contains a certain number of individuals who are, by an accident of heredity, pigmentationally blue; and suppose that, despite the passage of a number of generations since the initial establishment of the new economy, and the official promulgation and enforcement of a policy of *la carrière ouverte aux talents*, most blues stubbornly persist in occupying places either at the top, or at the bottom, of the society in question: in other words, the blues tend to capture either too many, or too few of the advantages available in this society. That would make blueness a social-entropy-resistant trait, in the sense intended.

Note, by the way, that it is always possible to invent traits which, at any given moment, may seem entropy-resistant. It is always possible to invent a concept which will apply only to this or that class of people. But the entropy-resistance of a concept, in this sense, will normally be of interest only if it is a reasonably natural notion, one already in use in the society in question, rather than artificially invented for the present purpose. Then, if it is unevenly distributed in the wider society, trouble may well ensue.

The rest of this argument can now easily be anticipated: entropy-resistant traits constitute a very serious problem for industrial society. Almost the reverse was true of agrarian society. Far from deploring entropy-resistant traits, that kind of society habitually invented them, whenever it found itself insufficiently supplied with this commodity by nature. It liked to suppose that certain categories of men were natural rulers, and that others were natural slaves, and sanctions were deployed – punitive, ideological – to persuade men to conform with these expectations and indeed to internalize them. The society invented dubious human attributes or origins whose main purpose was, precisely, to be entropy-resistant. The religious elite in Muslim tribal lands is often defined and legitimated in terms of descent from the Prophet; status among central Asian tribes is often expressed in terms of descent from Genghiz Khan's clan; European aristocracies frequently believe themselves to be descended from a distinct conquering ethnic group.

Entropy-resistance creates fissures, sometimes veritable chasms, in the industrial societies in which it occurs. How does this fissure-proneness differ from that engendered merely by cultural differences

and communication problems which take place in early industrial society, and which were discussed in the preceding section?

The two phenomena do have a certain affinity and overlap. But the differences are also important. The differential access to the language/culture of the more advanced political and economic centre, which hampers natives of more peripheral cultures and impels them and their leaders towards a cultural and eventually political nationalism, is, of course, also an entropy-resistance of a kind. The migrant labourers who do not even speak a dialectal variant of the main state language used by bureaucrats and entrepreneurs, will, for that very reason, be far more likely initially to remain at the bottom of the social hierarchy, and hence incidentally be less able to correct and compensate the disadvantages which haunt them, either for themselves or for their children. On the other hand, when their language (or rather, a standardized and streamlined version of one of its dialects) becomes the educational, bureaucratic and commercial language of a newly independent nationalist state, these particular disadvantages will disappear, and their cultural characteristics will cease to be entropy-resistant.

But it is important to note that in our hypothetical case they could *also* have escaped their handicap by assimilating to the old dominant language and culture; and in fact, many men did take this path. There is no reason to suppose that those who have trodden it are less numerous than those who took the nationalist option. Indeed, many must have taken both paths, successively or simultaneously.[1] For instance, many have become irredentist nationalists on behalf of a culture which was not that of their genuine origins, assimilating first, and then taking up political cudgels to ensure full high culture status, and its own political state roof, for their new culture.

But what differentiates this kind of case, crucially important though it is, from other kinds of entropy-resistance, is this: if all that is really at stake is a communication gap (but crucially linked to general status and economic disadvantage), then this can be remedied by either of the two methods discussed: a successful nationalism, or assimilation; or an overlap of both. But there are forms of entropy-resistance whose fissiparous social consequences cannot be remedied by correcting the communication disadvantage alone. The second option, of assimilation through education, is barred. There is

[1] F. Colonna, *Instituteurs Algériens, 1883–1939*, Paris, 1975.

more than a communication barrier involved. If the first option (successful irredentism, in effect) also happens to be closed by the balance of political power, the situation is grave, and will continue to fester.

Failure to communicate, such as arises between entrants from an alien culture into an industrializing area, is one form of entropy-inhibition (though one which can often easily be overcome in a generation or so); but the obverse does not hold, and not all entropy-inhibitions are due to a mere failure to communicate. Those which are not due to a mere communication failure, and are remediable neither by assimilation into the dominant pool, nor by the creation of a new independent pool using the native medium of the entrants, are correspondingly more tragic. They constitute a problem whose solution is not yet in sight, and which may well be one of the gravest issues that industrial society has to face.

Let us return to our hypothetical case of a pigmentationally blue sub-population within the wider society, and let us suppose that for one reason or another this population is concentrated near the bottom of the social scale. Industrial societies are quite inegalitarian in providing their citizens with a wide variety of social positions, some very much more advantageous than others; but they are also egalitarian in that this system of posts forms a kind of continuum (there are no radical discontinuities along it), and that there is a widespread belief, possibly exaggerated but not wholly devoid of truth, that it is possible to move up and down, and that rigid barriers in the system are illegitimate. Compared at any rate with most agrarian societies, industrial society is astonishingly egalitarian, and there is, in developed industrial society, a marked convergence of life-styles and a great dimunition of social distance. But in our hypothetical case of a blue-coloured population, which is concentrated at the bottom, the conjunction of easy identifiability (blue is a conspicuous colour) with the non-random, counter-entropic distribution of this category of people (the blues) has some very unfortunate consequences.

It is safe to assume that *populations* frequently differ in some measure in their innate talents. The supposition that all talents are distributed with absolute equality is about as probable as a land which is totally flat. It is equally obvious that when it comes to the deployment of talents, social factors are far more important than innate endowment. (Some of the populations most closely associated

with the achievements of humanity in recent centuries were backward savages not so many generations earlier, though it is unlikely that their genetic equipment could have changed much in the brief period which elapsed between their barbarism and their world-historical prominence – which seems to prove this point.) The whole question does not matter too much, in as far as it is obvious that the spans of ability occurring within given 'ethnic' or 'racial' groups are far greater than the differences between the averages of such diverse groups.

Something very important follows from all this. The blues are concentrated at the bottom, and it may even be that their performance is, on average, inferior to that of groups more randomly distributed. No-one knows whether this is due to genetic differences or to social factors. But one thing is certain: *within* the blue population, there will be many who are much abler, much more fit in terms of whatever criteria of performance may currently be relevant and applied, than very many members of non-blue segments of the total population.

What will now happen, in the situation as described and defined? The association of blueness with low position will have created a prejudice against blues. When those at the bottom appear to be, chromatically or in whatever way you choose, a random sample of the population, then the prejudice against them cannot spread to some other specific trait, for occupancy of the lowest position is not specifically connected with any other trait, *ex hypothesi*. But if so many of those at the bottom are blue, then the prejudice which is engendered among slightly higher strata against those below them by the fear of being pushed downwards, inevitably spreads to blueness. In fact, non-blue groups low down the scale will be specially prone to anti-blue feelings, for they will have precious little else to be proud of, and they will cling to their only and pathetic distinction, non-blueness, with special venom.

However, very many of the blues will be on the way up, in spite of prejudice against them. The concentration of the blues at the bottom is only statistical, and many blues (even if they are themselves but a minority within their own blue sub-population) will, by dint of hard work, ability or luck be on the way up and have achieved a higher position. What happens to them?

We have assumed that blueness is, for one reason or another, ineradicable. So the condition of the ascending blues will be painful and fraught with tension. Whatever their individual merits, to their

random non-blue acquaintances and encounters (and it is of the essence of a mobile complex industrial society that so many human contacts are random, fleeting, but nonetheless significant), they will still be the dirty, lazy, poor, ignorant blues; for these traits, or similar ones, are associated with the occupancy of positions low down on the social scale.

In all this, the rising blue is perhaps not much worse off than the rising Ruritanian migrant worker in our previous example; but there is one overwhelmingly important difference. Ruritanian culture can be shed; blueness cannot. We have also assumed that the Ruritanians had a territorial base: there is an area, the Ruritanian heartland, where peasants speaking some version of Ruritanian were in a majority. So, once again, Ruritanians had two ways out: assimilation into Megalomanian language or culture, or the establishment of a glorious independent Ruritania, where their patois would be turned into an official and literary language. Each of the two alternatives has been successfully tried in different places and by different people. *Ex hypothesi*, however, the blues are devoid of the first of these two options. Their give-away blueness stays with them, do what they will. Moreover, Megalomanian culture is old and has a well-established self-image, and blueness is excluded from it.

What about the second option, the establishment of national independence? As a matter of historical and contemporary fact, populations finding themselves in the kind of situation corresponding to those of our blues sometimes do, and sometimes do not, possess a territorial base of their own. In the former case, they thereby do have at least one of the two options available to the Ruritanians, and if it is politically and militarily feasible they may take it. If, however, the hypothetical blues possess no territorial base in which they can plausibly hope to establish an independent blue land, or alternatively, if they do have one, but this blue homeland is, for one reason or another, too exiguous and unattractive to secure the return to it of the blues dispersed in other regions), then the plight of the blues is serious indeed.

In this kind of situation grave sociological obstacles, not easily removable by mere good will and legislation or by political irredentism and activism, block the way to that cultural homogeneity and social entropy which is not merely the norm of advanced industrial society, but also, it seems, a condition of its smooth functioning. Where this systematic entropy-inhibition occurs, it may

well constitute one of the gravest dangers that industrial society must face. Conversely, while the blue populations are blocked in both directions, neither smooth assimilation nor independence being easily available to them, some other populations may be doubly blessed. In a federal state, populations such as our hypothetical Ruritanians may simultaneously possess an autonomous Ruritania in which Ruritanian is the official language, and yet also, at the same time, thanks to the small cultural distance between them and other cultures in the federal state, and to the non-identifiability of assimilated Ruritanians, be able to move smoothly, frictionlessly, in an entropic way, in the wider state. It is, I suppose, for Ruritanians to decide whether this double advantage is worth the price they pay; namely, that the Ruritanian canton or federal autonomous republic is not fully independent. Some cases which fit this general description remain within the wider federal state voluntarily, and some have been deprived of this option by force. Quebec would seem to exemplify the first situation; Iboland, in Nigeria, the second.

The question then arises: what are the kinds of attribute in the real world which resemble the 'blueness' of our hypothetical example? Genetically transmitted traits are one specimen of such blueness, but one specimen only; and the other, non-genetic species of it are at least as important. One must also add that not *any* genetically transmitted trait will have the effect of producing a fissure in society. Ginger-headedness, for example, causes some people to be teased as children; and on the other hand, redheads among women are sometimes deemed specially attractive. Moreover, some ethnic groups are said to have a disproportionate number of red-headed members; but despite these facts and/or folk beliefs, red hair does not, all in all, generate conflicts or social problems.

Part of the explanation must be, to use the term previously introduced for this purpose, that red hair is fairly entropic, notwithstanding any alleged ethnic correlation. Physical traits which, though genetic, have no strong historic or geographical associations tend to be entropic; and even if they do mildly correlate with social advantage or disadvantage, this tends to remain socially unperceived. By contrast, in Ruanda and Urundi physical height related to ethnic affiliation and political status in a very marked way, both in fact and in ideology, the conquering pastoralists being taller than the local agriculturalists, and both being taller than the pygmies. But in most other societies, this correlation is loose enough not to become socially

significant. Etonians, it appears, are on average taller than others; but tall guardsmen in the ranks are not deemed upper class.

Physical or genetically transmitted traits are but one kind of 'blueness'. What of the others? It is a supremely important and interesting fact that some deeply engrained religious-cultural habits possess a vigour and tenacity which can virtually equal those which are rooted in our genetic constitution. Language and formal doctrinal belief seem less deep rooted and it is easier to shed them; but that cluster of intimate and pervasive values and attitudes which, in the agrarian age, are usually linked to religion (whether or not they are so incorporated in the official high theology of the faith in question) frequently have a limpet-like persistence, and continue to act as a diacritical mark for the populations which carry them. For instance, at the time when Algeria was legally counted as a part of France, the assimilation of Algerian migrant workers in France was not hampered by any physical, genetic difference between, say, a Kabyle and a southern French peasant. The generally impassable fissure between the two populations, precluding an assimilationist solution, was cultural and not physical. The deeply rooted communal conflict in Ulster is not based, obviously, on any communications gap between the two communities, but on an identification with one of two rival local cultures which is so firm as to be comparable to some physical characteristic, even if, in reality, it is socially induced. Terrorist organizations whose nominal doctrine, or rather verbiage, is some kind of loose contemporary revolutionary Marxism, are in fact exclusively recruited from a community once defined by a religious faith, and continuing to be defined by the culture which had been linked to that faith.

A fascinating and profoundly revealing event recently occurred in Yugoslavia: in Bosnia the ex-Muslim population secured at long last, and not without arduous efforts, the right to describe themselves as Muslim, when filling in the 'nationality' slot on the census. This did not mean that they were still believing and practising Muslims, and it meant even less that they were identifying as one nationality with other Muslims or ex-Muslims in Yugoslavia, such as the Albanians of Kosovo. They were Serbo-Croat speakers of Slav ancestry and Muslim cultural background. What they meant was that they could not describe themselves as Serb or as Croat (despite sharing a language with Serbs and Croats), because these identifications carried the implications of *having been* Orthodox or

Catholic; and to describe oneself as 'Yugoslav' was too abstract, generic and bloodless.

They preferred to describe themselves as 'Muslim' (and were now at last officially allowed to do so), meaning thereby Bosnian, Slav ex-Muslims who feel as one ethnic group, though not differentiable linguistically from Serbs and Croats, and though the faith which does distinguish them is now a lapsed faith. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes once observed that to be a gentleman one does not need to know Latin and Greek, but one must have forgotten them. Nowadays, to be a Bosnian Muslim you need not believe that there is no God but God and that Mohamed is his Prophet, but you do need to have lost that faith. The point of transition from faith to culture, to its fusion with ethnicity and eventually with a state, is neatly illustrated by an exchange in that classic study of the role of the military in a developing country, Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters*:

> *Tuzenbach*: Perhaps you think – this German is getting over-excited. But on my word of honour, I'm Russian. I cannot even speak German. My father is Orthodox.

The Baron, despite his Teutonic name and presumably ancestry, defends his Slav status by reference to his Orthodox religion.

To say this is not to claim that each and every pre-industrial religion will tend to make a new appearance as an ethnic loyalty in the industrial melting-pot. Such a view would be absurd. For one thing, as in the case of languages and of cultural differentiations, the agrarian world is often far too well provided with religions. There were too many of them. Their number was too large, when compared with the number of ethnic groups and national states for which there can possibly be room in the modern world. So they simply could not all survive (even in transmogrified form, as ethnic units), however tenacious they might be. Moreover, as in the case of languages, many of them are not really so very tenacious. It is the high religions, those which are fortified by a script and sustained by specialized personnel, which sometimes, but by no means always, become the basis of a new collective identity in the industrial world, making the transition, so to speak, from a culture-religion to a culture-state. Thus in the agrarian world, high culture co-exists with low cultures, and needs a church (or at least a clerkly guild) to sustain it. In the industrial world high cultures prevail, but

they need a state not a church, and they need a state *each*. That is one way of summing up the emergence of the nationalist age.

High cultures tend to become the basis of a new nationality (as in Algeria) when before the emergence of nationalism the religion defined fairly closely *all* the under-privileged as against the privileged, even or especially if the under-privileged had no other positive shared characteristic (such as language or common history). There had previously been no Algerian nation prior to the nationalist awakening in this century, as Ferhat Abbas, one of the principal early nationalist leaders in that country, observed. There had been the much wider community of Islam, and a whole set of narrower communities, but nothing corresponding even remotely to the inhabitants of the present national territory. In such a case a new nation is in effect born, defined as the totality of all the adherents of a given faith, within a given territory. (In the case of the Palestinians today, language and culture and a shared predicament, but not religion, seem to be producing a similar crystallization.) To perform the diacritical, nation-defining role, the religion in question may in fact need to transform itself totally, as it did in Algeria: in the nineteenth century, Algerian Islam with its reverence for holy lineages was for all practical purposes co-extensive with rural shrine and saint cults. In the twentieth century it repudiated all this and identified with a reformist scripturalism, denying the legitimacy of any saintly mediation between man and God. The shrines had defined tribes and tribal boundaries; the scripturalism could and did define a nation.

Fissures and barriers

Our general argument might be re-stated as follows. Industrialization engenders a mobile and culturally homogeneous society, which consequently has egalitarian expectations and aspirations, such as had been generally lacking in the previous stable, stratified, dogmatic and absolutist agrarian societies. At the same time, in its early stages, industrial society also engenders very sharp and painful and conspicuous inequality, all the more painful because accompanied by great disturbance, and because those less advantageously placed, in that period, tend to be not only relatively, but also absolutely miserable. In that situation – egalitarian expectation, non-egalitarian reality, misery, and cultural homogeneity already desired

but not yet implemented – latent political tension is acute, and becomes actual if it can seize on good symbols, good diacritical marks to separate ruler and ruled, privileged and underprivileged.

Characteristically, it may seize on language, on genetically transmitted traits ('racism'), or on culture alone. It is very strongly impelled in this direction by the fact that in industrializing societies communication and hence culture assumes a new and unprecedented importance. Communication becomes important because of complexity, interdependence and mobility of productive life, within which far more numerous, complex, precise and context-free messages need to be transmitted than had ever been the case before.

Among cultures, it is the ones linked to a high (literate) faith which seem most likely to fill the role of crystallizer of discontent. Local folk faiths and cultures, like minor dialects, are less likely to aspire so high. During the early period of industrialization, of course, low cultures are also liable to be seized on and turned into diacritical markers of the disadvantaged ones, and be used to identify and unite them, if they look politically promising, notably if they define large and territorially more or less compact populations. During that early stage, several contrasts are liable to be superimposed on privilege and underprivilege: ease of access to the new style of life and its educational precondition, as opposed to hampered access (easy or inhibited communication), a high and low culture.

This is the type of fissure-generation where the lack of actual communication is crucial, because it marks out and highlights an objective difference. Later, when owing to general development the communication barrier and the inequalities are no longer so great, and when a shared industrial style enables people to communicate even across diverse languages, it is rather the persistent unevenly distributed ('counter-entropic') traits which become really crucial, whether they be genetic or deep-cultural. At that stage, the transformation of erstwhile low cultures into a new high one, in the interests of providing a banner for a whole wide category of the underprivileged who may previously have lacked any way of hailing each other and uniting, is no longer quite so probable; the period of acute misery, disorganization, near-starvation, total alienation of the lower strata is over. Resentment is now engendered less by some objectively intolerable condition (for deprivation now is, as the phrase goes, relative); it is now brought about above all by the

non-random social distribution of some visible and habitually noticed trait.

The difference between the two stages, early and late, can be put as follows. In the early stage there is a terrible difference between the life chances of the well-off and the starving poor, those who can swim in the new industrial pool and those who are only painfully learning to do so. Even then, the conflict will seldom become acute or escalate indefinitely, contrary to Marxist predictions, unless the privileged and the others can identify themselves and each other culturally, 'ethnically'. But if they can so tell each other apart, then, generally speaking, a new nation (or nations) is born; and it can organize itself around either a high or a previously low culture. If a high culture is not ready-made and available, or has already been taken over by a rival group, why then a low one is transformed into a high one. This is the age of the birth (or allegedly 'rebirth') of nations, and of the transmuting of low cultures into newly literate high ones.

The next stage is different. It is no longer the case that an acute objective social discontent or a sharp social differentiation is seeking out any old cultural differentiation that may be to hand, and will use it if it can to create a new barrier, indeed eventually a new frontier. Now it is only a genuine prior barrier to mobility and equality which will, having inhibited easy identification, engender a new frontier. The difference is considerable.

A diversity of focus

Some special cases deserve specific comment. Islamic civilization in the agrarian age conspicuously illustrated our thesis that agrarian societies are *not* prone to use culture to define political units; in other words, that they are not given to being nationalistic. The loose guild of *ulama*, of scholars-lawyers-theologians,[1] who set the tone and morally dominated the traditional Muslim world, was trans-political and trans-ethnic, and not tied to any state (once the Khalifate with its monopolistic pretensions to providing the unique political roof for the entire community had disintegrated), nor to any 'nation'.

[1] N. Keddie (ed.), *Scholars, Saints and Sufis*, Berkeley, 1972; E. Gellner, *Muslim Society*, Cambridge, 1981.

The folk Islam of shrine and holy lineage, on the other hand, was sub-ethnic and sub-political (as far as major units, resembling historic and 'national' states, are concerned), serving and reinforcing instead the vigorous local self-defence and self-administration units (tribes). So Islam was internally divided into a high and a low culture, the two flowing into each other, of course, and intimately related and intertwined, but also periodically erupting into conflict, when 'remembrancers' revived the alleged pristine zeal of the high culture, and united tribesmen in the interests of purification and of their own enrichment and political advancement. But the changes produced in this way did not, in the traditional order (though they occurred quite often) produce any deep, fundamental structural change. They only rotated the personnel, they did not fundamentally alter the society.[1]

With the coming of the travail of modernization, things turned out quite differently. We have argued that in general this means, among other things, the replacement of diversified, locality-tied low cultures by standardized, formalized and codified, literacy-carried high cultures. But Islamic society was ever ideally prepared, by an accident of history, for this development. It possessed within itself both a high and a low culture. They had the same name, and were not always carefully distinguished and often deliberately conflated and fused; they were linked to each other. Both, in the past, could be and were the means of a whole-hearted, passionate identification with a (supposedly unique) Islam, as an absolute, uncompromising and final revelation. Islam had no church perhaps, but the church it did not have was a broad one. In the modern world, the low or folk variant can be and is disavowed, as a corruption, exploited if not actually invented or instigated by the alien colonialist enemy, while the high variant becomes the culture around which a new nationalism can crystallize. This is particularly easy in the case of the one linguistic group whose language is linked to that of the unique revelation; it is also easy in those cases in which the entire nation is identified with Islam and is surrounded by non-Muslim neighbours (Somalis, Malays); or when the entire discriminated-against population, though not linguistically homogeneous, is Muslim and opposed to non-Muslim privileged power-holders (Algeria), or when the nation is habitually defined in terms of one Muslim sect, and its

[1]Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, tr. F. Rosenthal, London, 1958.

resentment directed against a provocatively secularized and Westernized ruling class and against non-Muslim foreigners (Iran).

The uniqueness of Islam can perhaps be brought out best if we recapitulate our general theme. The agrarian age of mankind is a period in which some can read and most cannot, and the industrial age is one in which all can and must read. In the agrarian age, literate high cultures co-exist with illiterate low or folk cultures. During the period of transition between the two ages, some erstwhile low cultures become new high cultures; and on occasion a new high culture can be invented, re-created by political will and cultural engineering, based on elements drawn from a distant past, and reassembled to create something in effect quite new, as in Israel.

But the high cultures which survive the period of transition cease to be the medium and hallmark of a clerisy or a court and become instead the medium and emblem of a 'nation', and at the same time undergo another interesting transformation. When they were carried by a court or courtly stratum or a clerisy, they tended to be trans-ethnic and even trans-political, and were easily exportable to wherever that court was emulated or that clerisy respected and employed; and on the other hand, they were liable to be closely tied to the usually rigid, dogmatic theology and doctrinal corpus, in terms of which the clerisy in question was defined, and the court legitimated. As is the way of literate ideologies of the agrarian age, that corpus of doctrine had absolutist pretensions, and was reinforced by claiming on its own behalf not merely that it was true (what of that?) but that it was the very *norm* of truth. At the same time it issued virulent imprecations against all heretics and infidels, whose very doubts about the unique and manifest truth was evidence of their moral turpitude, of 'corruption on earth', in the vivid phrase used in death sentences by the agrarian-faith-reviving regime at present in control of Iran. These ideologies are like fortresses – *Eine feste Burg ist mein Gott* – which retain all sources of water within their bastion and thus deny them to the enemy. They hold not merely a monopoly of truth (a trivial matter, that), but above all, of the very sources and touchstones of truth. The wells are all located within the ramparts, and that settles the matter, for the enemy cannot reach them.

This was all very well, and a great advantage to them in the agrarian age, when they only encountered enemies at worst similar to themselves, and often feebler, unsophisticated, unfortified folk religions. The industrial age is based on economic growth. This in turn

hinges on cognitive growth, which was ratified (and perhaps even significantly aided) by Cartesian and empiricist philosophies. Their essence was to de-absolutize all substantive conviction about the world, and to subject all assertions, without exception, to neutral scrutiny by criteria ('experience', 'the light of reason') located beyond the bounds and the ramparts of any one belief system. That puts paid to their absolutist pretensions, for they must bow to a judge outside their control. Evidence becomes king, or at least king-maker. The wells of truth are henceforth located in neutral territory, and no-one can claim to own them.

That, at any rate, is the purely intellectual, doctrinal aspect of a complex story, the whole of which cannot be pursued here, by which the absolutist high cultures of the agrarian age are obliged to shed their absolutism, and allow the wells of truth to pass into public, neutral control. In brief, the price these high cultures pay for becoming the idiom of entire territorial nations, instead of appertaining to a clerkly stratum only, is that they become secularized. They shed absolutist and cognitive pretensions, and are no longer linked to a doctrine. Spain was one of the most retarded exceptions to this, having retained at a remarkably late date a nationalist regime which incorporated the endorsement of absolutist Catholic claims in its image of the nation. During the earlier and timid stages of Francoist liberalization, the legalization of public Protestant worship was opposed as a kind of provocative disturbance of Spanish unity and identity. An absolute doctrine for all and a high culture for *some*, becomes an absolute culture for *all*, and a doctrine for some. The Church must surrender and dissolve itself if it is to capture the entire society. The Great Tradition must throw off its erstwhile legitimating doctrine, if it is to become the pervasive and universal culture.

In general, what had once been an idiom for some and an obligatory prescribed faith for all, becomes an obligatory idiom for all, and a watered-down, non-serious, Sunday-suit faith for some. That is the generic fate of high cultures, if they survive the great transition. In the classical North-West European case, one may say that the process had two stages: the Reformation universalized the clerisy and unified the vernacular and the liturgy, and the Enlightenment secularized the now universalized clerisy and the now nation-wide linguistic idiom, no longer bound to doctrine or class.

It is interesting to reflect what would have happened in Western Europe had industrialization and all it involves begun during the

High Middle Ages, before the development of vernacular literatures and the emergence of what was eventually destined to become the basis of the various national high cultures. There would clearly have been the prospect of a clerkly-led Latin, or perhaps Romance, nationalism, as opposed to the relatively more local nationalisms which did eventually crystallize, secularizing no longer a trans-political clerkly high culture, but a half-clerkly, half-courtly one. Had it all happened earlier, a pan-Romance nationalism would have been as plausible as the pan-Slavism which was taken seriously in the nineteenth century, or the pan-Arab nationalism of the twentieth, which were also based on a shared clerkly high culture, co-existing with enormous differences at the low or folk level.

Islam is precisely in this condition, experiencing a number of transformations simultaneously. The most protestant of the great monotheisms, it is ever Reformation-prone (Islam could indeed be described as Permanent Reformation). One of its many successive self-reformations virtually coincided with the coming of modern Arab nationalism, and can only with great difficulty be disentangled from it. The emergence of the nation and the victory of the reform movement seem parts of one and the same process. The dissolution of the vigorous old local and kin structures, whose strong and sometimes deadly shadows survive as pervasive patronage networks dominating the new centralized political structures, goes hand in hand with the elimination of the saint cults which had ratified the mini-communal organization, and their replacement by a reformed individualist unitarian theology, which leaves the individual believer to relate himself, singly, to one God and one large, anonymous, mediation-free community – all of which is virtually the paradigm of the nationalist requirement.

Other high cultures which make the transition need to pay the price of abandoning their erstwhile doctrinal underpinning and support. The bulk of the doctrines they had carried so long are so utterly absurd, so indefensible in an age of epistemic (evidence-revering) philosophies, that they become an encumbrance rather than the advantage which they had been. They are gladly, willingly shed, or turned into 'symbolic' tokens meant to indicate a link to the past, the continuity of a community over time, and evasively ignored as far as their nominal doctrinal content goes.

Not so with Islam. Islam had been Janus-faced in the agrarian days. One face was adapted to the religiously and socially pluralistic

country folk and groupings, the other set for the more fastidious, scholarly, individualist and literate urban schoolmen. Moreover, the dogma made obligatory for the latter was purified, economical, unitarian, sufficiently so to be at least relatively acceptable even in the modern age, when the baroque load carried by its rival on the north shore of the Mediterranean is pretty intolerable, and needs to be surreptitiously toned down and cast away, bit by bit. Little of this underhand purification is required south of the Mediterranean – or rather, the purification had *already* been carried out, loud and clear, in the name of freeing the true faith from ignorant, rural, if not alien-inspired superstition and corruption. Janus has relinquished one of his two faces. So, within the Muslim world, and particularly of course within the Arab part of it (but also among what might be called the Arab-surrogate nations, who happen locally to define themselves as *the* Muslims of a given area), a nationalism based on a generalized anonymous territorial community can perpetuate the specific doctrines previously carried by a clerkly stratum, proudly and without disavowing them. The ideal of the *ulama* comes closer to reality, at least within various nation-size territories, than it had been in the days of the kin-defined fragmentation.

Doctrinal elegance, simplicity, exiguousness, strict unitarianism, without very much in the way of intellectually offensive frills: these helped Islam to survive in the modern world better than do doctrinally more luxuriant faiths. But if that is so, one might well ask why an agrarian ideology such as Confucianism should not have survived even better; for such a belief system was even more firmly centred on rules of morality and the observance of order and hierarchy, and even less concerned with theological or cosmological dogma. Perhaps, however, a strict and emphatic, insistent unitarianism is better here than indifference to doctrine coupled with concern for morality. The moralities and political ethics of agro-literate polities are just a little too brazenly deferential and inegalitarian for a modern taste. This may have made the perpetuation of Confucianism implausible in a modern society, at least under the same name and under the same management.

By contrast, the stress on the pure unitarianism of Islam, jointly with the inevitable ambiguity of its concrete moral and political precepts, could help to create the situation where one and the same faith can legitimate both traditionalist regimes such as Saudi Arabia or Northern Nigeria, and socially radical ones such as Libya, South

Yemen or Algeria. The political conjurers could build their patter around the strict theology, while they shuffled the cards dealing with political morality according to their own preference, without attracting too much attention. The unitarianism, the (sometimes painful) forswearing of the solaces of spiritual mediation and middlemen, took the believers' minds away from the intellectual transformations, which were turning a faith that had once dealt with the inheritance of camels into one prescribing or proscribing, as the case might be, the nationalization of oil wealth.

If Islam is unique in that it allows the use of a pre-industrial great tradition of a clerisy as the national, socially pervasive idiom and belief of a new-style community, then many of the nationalisms of sub-Saharan Africa are interesting in that they exemplify the opposite extreme: they often neither perpetuate nor invent a local high culture (which could be difficult, indigenous literacy being rather rare in this region), nor do they elevate an erstwhile folk culture into a new, politically sanctioned literate culture, as European nationalisms had often done. Instead, they persist in using an *alien*, European high culture. Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the best, and certainly the most extensive, testing grounds for the attribution of great power to the principle of nationalism, which requires ethnic and political boundaries to converge. Sub-Saharan political boundaries defy this principle almost without exception. Black Africa has inherited from the colonial period a set of frontiers drawn up in total disregard (and generally without the slightest knowledge) of local cultural or ethnic borders.

One of the most interesting and striking features of the post-colonial history of Africa has been that nationalist, irredentist attempts to remedy this state of affairs, though not totally absent, have nevertheless been astonishingly few and feeble. The efforts either to replace the use of European languages as the state administrative medium, or to adjust inter-state boundaries so as to respect ethnicity, have been weak and infrequent. What is the explanation? Is nationalism not a force in black Africa after all?

We have suggested a dichotomy between 'early' or communication-gap nationalisms (in which the additional disadvantage a dislocated ex-rural population incurs through not sharing the dominant culture exacerbates its resentment over its other, 'objective' deprivations), and a 'late' nationalism, engendered by obstacles other than those of communication. In terms of this important contrast, African

than the others. The region in which the struggle between these two faiths had traditionally gone on without a decisive victory for either, the Horn of Africa, is also the area with the best examples of what may be called classical nationalisms. It has been said of the Boers that the only things which really distinguished them from their Bantu enemies, when both were entering South Africa from different directions, was the possession of the Book, the wheel and the gun. In the Horn of Africa both the Amharas and the Somalis possessed both gun and Book (not the same Book, but rival and different editions), and neither bothered greatly with the wheel. Each of these ethnic groups was aided in its use of these two pieces of cultural equipment by its links to other members of the wider religious civilization which habitually used them, and were willing to replenish their stock. Both the Somalis and the Amharas were aided by these bits of equipment in state-formation. The Somalis created a few of those characteristic Muslim formations based on urban trade and tribal pastoral cohesion, brought together by some religious personage; the Amharas created in Ethiopia the one really convincing African specimen of a feudalism, a loose empire with local territorial power-holders, linked to a national Church.

The gun and the Book, with their centralizing potential, enabled these two ethnic groups to dominate the political history of this large region, though neither of them was numerically predominant. Other ethnic grups without the same advantages, even when far more numerous – notably the Oromo (more commonly known as the Galla) – were unable to stand up to them. At the time of the temporarily successful Somali advance against the Ethiopians in the 1970s, it was plausible, and from the Somali viewpoint attractive, to present the Oromo as a kind of human population without a set form, a pre-ethnic raw material, waiting to be turned either into Amharas or into Somalis by the turn of political fortune and religious conversion. This would make sense of their Somalization, should it come to pass. The Oromo were to be seen as an enormous population of Adams and Eves, from whom the apple of ethnicity had as yet been withheld, and who were familiar only with the rudimentary fig leaf of age-set organization. When incorporated in the Amhara state, their local chiefs would become its officials and eventually go Christian and Amhara; but if brought into the Somali sphere, Islamization in the name of the great local saint cults would eventually mean Somalization. Since the Somali defeat in the war, however, the prospects

of resisting Amhara domination in the Horn hinge largely on stimulating the various national liberation fronts at long last emerging within the Ethiopian empire, including that of the Oromo, who as the largest group are also emerging as the most important; and hence we are now less likely to hear of their pre-cultural status as ethnic raw material.

The Amhara empire was a prison-house of nations if ever there was one. When the old Emperor was toppled in 1974, the new rulers promptly announced, as new rulers are liable to do, that henceforth all ethnic groups were equal, and indeed free to choose their own destiny. These admirable liberal sentiments were followed fairly soon by a systematic liquidation of intellectuals drawn from the non-Amharic group, a regrettably rational policy from the viewpoint of inhibiting the emergence of rival nationalisms within the empire.[1]

In brief, both these vigorous and, for the present, dominant nationalisms illustrate the advantage of the availability of an old high culture, once an invaluable asset for state-formation, but now also crucial for the attaining of an early political sense of ethnicity. In each of these cases the ethnic group in question seems, within the local area, co-extensive with its own faith, thus greatly aiding self-definition.

The Somalis are also interesting in that they are one of the examples (like the Kurds) of the blending of old tribalism based on social structure with the new, anonymous nationalism based on shared culture. The sense of lineage affiliation is strong and vigorous (notwithstanding the fact that it is officially reprobated, and its invocation actually proscribed), and it is indeed crucial for the understanding of internal politics. This does not, I think, contradict our general theory, which maintains that the hold of a shared literate culture ('nationality') over modern man springs from the erosion of the old structures, which had once provided each man with his identity, dignity and material security, whereas he now depends on education for these things. The Somalis possess a shared culture, which, when endowed with its own state (as indeed it is), can ensure for each Somali access on good terms to bureaucratic employment.

[1]Ioan Lewis, 'The Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) and the legacy of Sheikh Hussein of Bale', in J. Tubiana (ed.), *Modern Ethiopia*, Rotterdam, 1980; and I.M. Lewis (ed.), *Nationalism and Self-determination in the Horn of Africa*, Indiana, 1983.

The life chances and psychic comfort of an individual Somali are manifestly better within such a state, based on his culture, than they are within a neighbouring state not so based. At the same time, however, many Somalis remain pastoralists with an interest in the pasture rights defined in the old terms, and retain reciprocal links with kinsmen, links which appear not to be altogether forgotten in the give and take of political life.

What it all amounts to is this: in most cases, the appeal of the new, education-transmitted ethnicity comes from both push and pull: the attraction of the new employment opportunities and the repulsion arising from the erosion of the old security-giving kin groupings. The Somali case is not unique, even if it is particularly conspicuous. Persistence of pastoralism and certain kinds of labour migration or of trade networks may cause extensive kin organization to survive in the modern world. When this happens, we get a juxtaposition of tribal loyalty to structure and of national loyalty to culture (and a literate culture at that). But it is scarcely conceivable that the modern world could have emerged had the structural, mini-organizational rigidities remained strong *everywhere*. The great stories of successful economic development were about societies whose wealth and power had the demonstration effect which pointed humanity towards the new style of life; and those stories or paradigms were not and could not be of that kind. The general emergence of modernity hinged on the erosion of the multiple petty binding local organizations and their replacement by mobile, anonymous, literate, identity-conferring cultures. It is this generalized condition which made nationalism normative and pervasive; and this is not contradicted by the occasional superimposition of both of these types of loyalty, the occasional use of kin links for a kind of interstitial, parasitic and partial adaptation to the new order. Modern industry can be paternalistic, and nepotistic at the top; but it cannot recruit its productive units on the basis of kin or territorial principles, as tribal society had done.

The contrast I am here drawing between culture-mediated nationalism and structure-mediated tribalism is, of course, meant to be a genuine analytical distinction between two objectively distinguishable kinds of organization; it must not be confused with the relativistic or emotive opposition between *my* nationalism and *your* tribalism. That is merely the language of praise and invective by means of which rival potential nationalisms combat each other, in which 'I am a patriot, you are a nationalist and he is a tribalist', and that

remains so whoever happens to be speaking. In this sense nationalisms are simply those tribalisms, or for that matter any other kind of group, which through luck, effort or circumstance succeed in becoming an effective force under modern circumstances. They are only identifiable *ex post factum*. Tribalism never prospers, for when it does, everyone will respect it as a true nationalism, and no-one will dare call it tribalism.