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Discussion Paper 17

**ANATOMY OF A 'POLITICAL CHAMELEON':
RE-EXAMINING FLUID SHAPES AND SOLID
CONSTANTS OF NATIONALISM
AND NATION-BUILDING**

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**Anatomy of a ‘Political Chameleon’:
Re-examining Fluid Shapes and Solid Constants of
Nationalism and Nation-building**

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Setting the Scene: Entering the ‘Jungle of Nationalism’

Subsequent to an extensive period reigned over by the Washington Consensus paradigm with its overly optimistic emphasis on the market (Milliken and Krause 2002: 753; Berger 2008: 1; Robinson 2007: 11ff.), the need for ‘bringing the state back in’ (Evans et al. 1985) has incrementally been realised. Thus, the period since the end of the Cold War and particularly since September 11, 2001 has witnessed an ‘increased willingness of the international community to intervene in the domestic affairs of states, especially with the aim of ending conflict and rebuilding institutions in post-conflict societies’ (Zaum 2007: 1). However, rather than these efforts being crowned with success, the number of states considered ‘failed’¹ has increased over the past years (Boege et al. 2008: 3).

One major reason for this sobering interim result is that projects of post-conflict reconstruction and state formation have tended to focus solely on issues such as ‘capacity building’ and ‘institutional reform’. While welcoming the renewed focus on the state, this paper argues that a second key factor has generally been neglected: the nation. Although the dawn of a ‘postnational era’ has long been prophesied (Hannerz 1996; Appadurai 1999; Bernal 2004: 4) the end of nationalism is not remotely in sight, but still represents ‘the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time’ (Anderson 1983: 3; Comaroff and Stern 1995: 3). Thus, this paper strongly argues in a manner analogous to the dictum of Evans et al. (1985) on the state, for the need of ‘bringing the *nation* back in’, if we are to better understand projects of peace building, post-conflict reconstruction and state formation.

The first of the two main propositions advanced in this paper is that nation building is a process of ‘socio-cognitive standardisation’ – i.e. a process of identity formation underwritten by the spread of social and cognitive conformity within a politically and usually geographically defined population. Socio-cognitive standardisation is understood as a procedure whereby one set of socio-cognitive elements – such as language, history or mental maps – becomes a society’s chief common framework of reference. Whether generated by industrialisation, as argued by liberal modernists (Gellner 2006), language or education, as suggested by constructivist modernists (Anderson 1983), or warfare, as postulated by bellicists and historicist modernists (Tilly 1992), it is *socio-cognitive standardisation* that constitutes the basic red line running through all of these explanations of nationalism.

As its second main proposition, the paper advances the ‘central administration thesis’. Following the modernist perspective the paper advocates that state and nation building are

¹ While the concept of the ‘failed state’ is highly contested, I understand ‘failed states’ along the lines of the Crisis States Research Centre (CSRC) as states that neither perform their basic security and development functions, nor exhibit effective control over their territories and borders (Di John 2008: 9ff.).

inextricably interlinked and that significant changes in a society's collective identity parameters are to be ascribed to modifications in its form of organisation. This is to say that alterations in a society's institutional structure generally go in tandem with alterations in its socio-cognitive configuration. In this respect, the paper argues that it is central state administration that is the prime driver for the process of socio-cognitive standardisation that underlies nation building. The fundamental hypothesis advanced here is that nation-building outcomes are largely determined by the varying ability of ruling elites to build and/or exploit central and political administrative institutions.

Two further propositions are made. Firstly, it is postulated that elites play an important role in processes of nationalism and nation building, even though they can only do so in relation to a population at large. Secondly, it is theorised that war(fare) can foster and catalyse processes of state formation, under the condition that it promotes central (political) administration and enhances socio-cognitive standardisation across the territory of a specific society. This proposition leans on the bellicist tradition – with its emphasis on the importance of war(fare) – but is distinct in that it treats war(fare) 'merely' as an antecedent condition, rather than an all-defining independent variable.

In order to develop these arguments, the paper is structured as follows: section two briefly introduces the debate on nationalism; section three revisits some of the most salient arguments made in respect to nation formation and, on this basis, establishes the argument that nationalism was a process of socio-cognitive standardisation; the fourth section bridges this first key proposition with the second main argument, namely the central administration thesis, presented in section five. Section six is dedicated to investigating the role of elites in projects of nation building and also examines how war(fare) impacts on nationalism. Before concluding, section seven sheds some light on aspects of nation(al) failure.

Introducing the 'National Chameleon'

'The concept of the nation is one of the most puzzling and tendentious items in the political lexicon' (Tilly 1975: 6) and 'one of the [most] difficult areas of social science' (Bereketeab 2000: 15). Thus it comes as no surprise that a myriad of scholars have found nationalism a hard nut to crack. Although this field of study has seen seminal works by intellectuals like Anderson (1983), Gellner (1983) and Smith (1998), none of them has been able to capture the concept of nationalism in such a way as to intellectually unite the scholarly field. Nationalism appears to be just too much of a political 'chameleon', able 'to transmute itself according to the perceptions and needs of different communities' (Smith 1995: 13). Depending on historical contexts, present realities and future visions, the 'national chameleon' changes its 'colours' and 'tinges', thus evading a common definition, generalisable indicators and measurable results.

This uncertainty partly results from the concept's inherent paradoxes. While nations claim subjective antiquity they appear to be of objective modernity; the formal universality of nationalism as a socio-cultural concept stands in sharp contrast to the irremediable particularity of its concrete manifestation; and the 'political power' of nationalism does not correspond to its 'philosophical poverty' (Anderson 1983: 6). Moreover, while nationalism defends folk culture and the protection of cultural diversity, it overrides them with more uniform and homogeneous elements – a crucial point to which this paper will return. As a result, Gellner (2006: 191ff.) reaches the conclusion that the self-image and true nature of nationalism 'are inversely related, with an ironic neatness seldom equalled even by other successful ideologies'.

While the concepts of nation, nationalism and nation building are hotly debated, they remain poorly defined. Even now, the scholarly field cannot agree on a universal definition for 'nation' as a unit of analysis (Smith 1998: 221; Jacquin-Berdal 2002: 8; Comaroff and Stern 1995: 5). This dilemma flows partly from the concept's inherent paradoxes as well as notorious terminological difficulties, but it can also be partly attributed to the numerous and conflicting approaches emanating from different schools of thought. Without attempting to review the entire gamut of scholarship (for literature reviews see Smith 1998; Jacquin-Berdal 2002: 7-42), this paper presents four common approaches, briefly elaborating on the two more influential and antagonistic ones.

While perennialists (Seton-Watson 1965; Connor 1994; Horowitz 1985) conceive of nations as 'the basic communities of history, at once ancient and immemorial' (Smith 1998: 18), ethno-symbolists (Hutchinson and Smith 1994; Smith 1983) put nationalist symbols and a mythic homeland at the centre of their explanations of nationalism. Although these two approaches have been influential, they have taken a back seat compared to another two schools of thought: primordialism and constructivism.

Primordialism (Geertz 1965; Van den Berghe 1981) mainly builds on the three following assumptions: firstly, that people who share a culture also share an identity; secondly, that the 'traditional' loyalties vested in this identity give rise to very strong common sentiments; and thirdly, that these sentiments are the irreducible foundation on which group interests and claims tend to be based. The underlying idea that a pre-established, homogeneous civil solidarity gives rise to states has been entertained from Rousseau (1763) to Berlin (1976), Greenfeld (1992) and Kohn (1994). However, as has been convincingly countered, the images of a common identity and unifying 'ethnicity' were 'only gradually invented, constructed, and reinforced, often purposefully to bolster social cohesion precisely because it was lacking' (Marx 2003: 13).

This latter argument bridges well to the modernist approach, advocated among others by Anderson (1983), Giddens (1985), Mann (1986, 1993) and Tilly (1992). Countering the primordial's position, modernism treats collective consciousness as a response to historically specific practical circumstances on the part of a given population (Comaroff and Stern 1995: 5) and argues that the nation was a 'construct dependant upon the state for its force and meaning' (Tilly 1992, cited in Smith 1998: 76). The nation is no longer understood as a product of natural, or deep rooted, historical forces, but rather as a recent historical and political development, actively instigated by citizens and their leaders.

What becomes clear from this debate is that one of the few cast-iron statements one can make with regard to nationalism is that it indeed disposes of a 'chameleonic' nature. Flowing from the notorious conceptual ambiguities, as well as the contradictory character, of the concepts of nationalism, nation and nation building, arises the problem of identifying its key drivers and underpinnings. Laitin (2007: 31) is thus correct in underscoring the 'elusiveness' of national identities, and Putzel (2000: 171) rightly acknowledges that 'collective identity is constantly in the process of change and reinvention'. In any case, the wide literature available in this field confirms that numerous scholars have put much effort into ambushing and analysing the 'national chameleon', gathering much (different and often controversial) information about its external appearance and internal mechanisms. In what follows, this paper briefly revisits some of the most prominent characteristics nationalism has been credited with, since this provides a valuable starting point and a background against which to make the argument(s).

Discovering a Pattern Behind Changing ‘Colours’: Socio-Cognitive Standardisation

One of the most prominent trends has been presenting the nation-building narrative as the awakening of national identity among a pre-defined group or the politicisation of an ethnicity that empowers it with a state of its own (Armstrong 1982; Gellner 1983; Crowther 1991; Zaprudnik 1993; Ruthland 1994). In no small measure, this prominence has resulted from the concept’s ability to unify primordialists who suggest that the demand for a nation state results from the awakening of ethnic self-awareness (Connor 1972; Smith 1986; Seton-Watson 1977: 1ff.) and constructivists who depict nation building as a process ‘in which objective differences between ethnic groups acquire increasingly subjective and symbolic significance’ (Brass 1991: 22; also Roeder 2007: 22ff.). However, as this ‘myth’ (Gellner 1983: 48) is only ‘sustained by collective amnesia’ (Laitin 2007: 82), other explanations are needed.

In what follows, the article will further pursue the modernist position, as this approach appears to be most promising in order to capture the ‘national chameleon’. Through the prism of modernism, diverse ‘colours’ defining this ‘chameleon’ have been spotted. Such ‘colours’ include language, education, industrialisation, migration and war, all of which have been identified as constituting (one of) the main mover(s) of nationalism. The subsequent sections analyse three dominant and particularly shiny ‘colours’ in this respect: language, communication and industrialisation. Covering a wide range of underlying modernist explanations – ranging from social, to cognitive, to economic aspects – they provide a broad base for my argument.

The argument proposed is that all these ‘colours’ originate in, and are based on, the same underlying pattern, namely socio-cognitive standardisation. No matter whether nationalism is sketched in the linguistic, industrial or bellicist ‘colour’, socio-cognitive standardisation remains their unifying trait. Although this proposition derives from the modernist perspective, as will be seen from this section’s conclusion it also speaks to the proposition of perennialists and ethno-symbolists.

The ‘Colour’ of Language

One of the most common narratives regarding the development of nationalism is one that strongly emphasises the importance of a commonly shared (national) language. The linkage between language and national identity goes back to the German philosophers Herder (1772) and Fichte (1807), and continues to be upheld. By way of a contemporary example, one can refer to Anderson (1983: 154) who states:

What the eye is to the lover – that particular, ordinary eye he or she is born with – language – whatever language history has made his or her mother-tongue – is to the patriot. Through that language, encountered at mother’s knee and parted with only at the grave, pasts are restored, fellowships are imagined, and futures are dreamed.

Anderson’s rich account of language and the fact that he singles it out as the main criterion of the nation (Anderson 1983: 145) clearly shows that a tongue is much more than a mere instrument of verbal communication. According to his interpretation, language is also a means for emotional understanding. That is to say that language not only transports certain information or content, but also (feelings of) identity. Anderson is not the only one to stress the importance of idioms as a means of identity creation and identification. Hobsbawm and

Ranger (1983), Gellner (1998) and Laitin (2007), for example, attribute great significance to one's native language as a considerable source of nationalism. Why?

The argument that language constructs, shapes and reflects identity more generally is widely entertained in such popular works as Shaw's *Pygmalion* and Russel's *Educating Rita*. When it comes to *national* identity, language has been argued to foster nation building due to its inclusive character (Smith 1998: 140). According to this account, language is crucial for establishing a common community and identity as it allows for internal group communication while, at the same time, drawing a demarcating line from other, external linguistic groups. As Marx (2003: 15) states, 'any collective sentiment or sense of large-scale solidarity such as nationalism does rest upon the possibility of interaction and communication among those who share or develop that sentiment'. Thus, language becomes a characteristic element and defining momentum of a national identity, if and when it is shared by a politically organised and territorially defined group of people. The result is what Anderson (1983) has termed 'imagined community' and what others have called 'narration' (Bhabha 1990), 'communication' (Deutsch 1966), and 'solidarity and legitimation' that is made possible by sharing a common language (Habermas 1979).

The crucial role of language for nationalism lies therefore in its ability to bring about (linguistic) unification across a territory and its population, as linguistic pluralisms constitute a great challenge for nationalism. According to Anderson (1983: 44ff.), for example, a great stride towards nationalism was achieved when the plurality of vernaculars and particularly 'sacred languages' was abandoned for the benefit of a commonly accepted tongue. On nationalism's altar, 'holy' Latin and 'barbarian' Bavarian were sacrificed; but not without knowing that a standard and commonly recognised literary language was to be received in turn. This move towards establishing one standard, national language made knowledge accessible to the broad population and there were – at least theoretically – no longer linguistic barriers and exclusions from 'groups of communication'. In this tradition, Conversi (2007: 377) also postulates that 'the official choice of a *single dominant* language has been an essential tool of nation-building (top-down nationalisation) during the formation of most modern states' (emphasis added).

Without going much deeper into discussing the role of language for nationalism, it can be concluded that even though different authors emphasise different aspects of the connection between language and nationalism, the common denominator is clear: besides being an expression of social and cultural identity, language plays an important role in forging a national identity if it is standardised across the respective society. As acknowledged by Jacquin-Berdal (2002: 28), the 'standardisation of common languages [...] [is] an essential ingredient for the development of nationalism'. In other words, language turns into a 'core value of nationhood' (Conversi 2007: 377), because standardising such an important social characteristic as language across a certain territory fosters the sharing of a common identity. Thus, nationalism apparently grows to the degree that language – as well as other social elements – is standardised among a politically (and thus generally geographically) defined population.

Although the importance of language for (national) identity creation has frequently been emphasised, there have also been critical voices. Cases such as Somalia or Switzerland cast some doubt regarding the value of the argument. While the former country broke up despite the existence of a single language throughout its territory, the latter case remains a strong nation state even though it hosts four different languages within its small society. Thus, Renan's note of caution that '[l]anguage invites unity; it does not force it' (cited in Conversi

2007: 384) and Weber's qualification that language is not always sufficient to build national solidarity (Marx 2003: 15) ring true. However, this does not undermine the discovery made in the great majority of other cases, namely that in cases in which language has contributed to nation building, this contribution lies less in, and of, the tongue as such, than with its effect of social standardisation. Rather than undermining the argument, the cases of Switzerland and Somalia give proof to the 'chameleon nature' of the nation – nationalism does not rely on a mono-causal pattern, but can substitute one 'colour' with another.

The 'Colour' of Communication

As suggested by the neo-institutionalists 'no two individuals have exactly the same experiences and accordingly each individual has to some degree unique perceptions of the world', so that 'their mental models would tend to diverge for this reason if there were not ongoing communication with other individuals' (Denzau and North 1994: 14ff.). This insight figures prominently in the literature on nationalism, which hosts different arguments emphasising the role of communication for nation building. Generally speaking, Deutsch and Foltz (1963) found evidence that 'nations could be constructed by political elites with adequate means of communication to mobilise the mass' (Jacquin-Berdal 2002: 12). More specifically, Anderson (1983) makes a strong case for the importance of the newspaper, and Hobsbawm (1977) highlights the significance of education.

Anderson postulates that it is not 'a particular language per se', but the establishment of a common 'print-language' introduced by way of (print-)capitalism and the invention of the newspaper that constitutes the decisive step towards nation building (Anderson 1983: 134). One reason why media in general and the newspaper more particularly is considered important is that such communication has the ability to erect temporal simultaneity (Anderson 1983: 22ff.). As a newspaper dated 'October 4, 2008' will nearly exclusively be read on this very day, while generally being discarded as sandwich paper less than twenty-four hours later, Anderson argues that this assured the reader of a certain degree of simultaneity that contributed to a feeling of nationalism. Thereby, this simultaneity does not have to be absolute – relative and perceived simultaneity do just as well. Furthermore, the newspaper (and other media) serves the purpose of nationalism, by way of a standardised literary language, as this fosters the imagination of a socio-culturally homogeneous community. Last, but not least, the topics of such widely spread communication matter, since the imagining of community is supported by sharing common 'points of concern' (Metzger 1977: 14). As Touval (1963: 25) noted:

'A nation is not merely a group of people who possess certain characteristics in common. In addition, it is a group of people who constitute a society and communicate with one another on *matters of common interest*' (emphasis added).

In other words, the newspaper, the media, or, even more generally, nation-wide communication matter for nationalism and nation building due to their ability to standardise social, cognitive and temporal aspects. Temporal standardisation is achieved due to simultaneity, social standardisation is spread through a consistent 'print language', and cognitive standardisation is created by reference to common 'points of concern', threats and visions. Instead of attributing media 'merely' the task of transporting nationalist ideas, scholars like Anderson (1983) and Gellner (2006) have thus good reason to argue that the key element of media lies rather in its ability to produce nationalism. Time, language and content

matter in themselves and even more so in combination with each other, due to the socio-cognitive standardisation they propagate among their audience.

With regard to education and its link to nationalism, a very similar argument is made by another group of scholars. Touval (1963: 73) postulates that '[a] nationalist movement could not develop in the territory in the absence of an educated class', Gellner (1983) suggests that '[t]he size of the education system [is] directly related to the scale of nations' (see Smith 1998: 27), and similarly, Hobsbawm (1977: 166) states that 'the progress of schools and universities measures that of nationalism, just as schools and especially universities became its most conscious champions'. Not only for Europe, but also for the development of nationalism in the Third World has education been assigned a central role:

'Education was, to a great extent, colonialism's most direct contribution to the emergence of nationalism in Africa, for with education came literacy and it was thus that European ideas were diffused to Africa' (Jacquin-Berdal 2002: 48).

Although this statement is to be critically questioned for its Eurocentric stand, it clearly underscores the importance of education for nationalism.

Not only does education produce a knowledgeable and literate population, thus enabling it to participate in the 'imagined community' by way of consuming 'print capitalism' and other media, but centralised education systems also impact on nation building more directly. Anderson (1983) points out that a state's (higher) education system brings together different individuals of the 'imagined community' from different places within the 'imagined territory'. This circumstance and the assurance that 'they knew that from wherever they had come they still had read the same books and done the same sums' (Anderson 1983: 122) added substance to the 'imagined community'. Anderson's point is well taken and is in line with Evans' (1992) description of the *chaebol* in Korea's late development, to which he assigns a central role for creating a feeling of communality and loyalty, based on their common training, education and specialisation.

Even though the signs are reversed – it is not any more the newspaper that travels to the reader, but the pupils who visit central institutions of education – the underlying process remains the same: education creates socio-cognitive standardisation. All pupils from St. Petersburg to Vladivostok are subject to the same curricula; they learn the same, standardised interpretation of history, are shown the same, standardised map of their 'imagined territory' and learn the same, standardised facts about their 'imagined community'. And for those who climb up the ladder of education and centralisation, this socio-cognitive standardisation further increases.

As has been true for the 'colour' of language, the 'colour' of communication (here presented in its 'tinges' of 'media' and 'education') is important for nationalism in as far as it carries through socio-cognitive standardisation. However, communication should not be considered as either a necessary or sufficient variable, let alone a constant of nationalism. Certainly, print capitalism has not played a central role in every nation building process, as Guerra (2003) demonstrates using the example of South America. Similarly, Smith (1998: 138) states that 'we can point to many cases in Africa and Asia where literacy, and hence the power of the printed word, was confined to a very small stratum of the designated population'. However, this argument might be much harder to sustain in the face of other forms of communication, such as the radio, which also contribute to socio-cognitive standardisation. In any case, the point is that all of these elements are to be perceived as different 'colours' of the 'national

chameleon’; ‘colours’ that change and ‘shimmer’ depending on specific (historic, cultural, etcetera) circumstances. Thus, one cannot but agree with Smith that print capitalism – as well as other ‘colours’ – is ‘just one among many contributory causes’ (Smith 1998: 140).

The ‘Colour’ of Industrialisation

Besides the arguments above, which build on social phenomena, another ‘contributory cause’ has been identified as being (one of) the characteristic features of the ‘national chameleon’: industrialisation, and, related to this, migration and urbanisation. The most prominent advocate of this position was Gellner. Although identifying industrialisation as the key driver of nationalism, he starts building his argument partly on the ‘colours’ specified previously, insisting that ‘industrialization required or entailed cultural homogenization based on literacy in a standardized vernacular language conveyed by means of state-supported mass education’ (Breuilly 2006: xxxiv).

Gellner (2006), Hechter (1975) and Guibernau (1996) place economic imperatives at the centre of their explanations for national solidarity (see Marx 2003: 17). Thus Gellner (2006) argues that nations are ‘functional for industrial society’ as they are ‘indispensable in the modern world because industrial growth requires both widespread fluidity and patterned homogeneity, individual mobility combined with cultural standardization’ (cited in Smith 1998: 35). With regard to ‘education’ and ‘cultural standardisation’, Gellner (2006: 26) points out that:

‘the major part of training in industrial society is *generic* training, not specifically connected with the highly specialized professional activity of the person in question, and *preceding* it. Industrial society may by most criteria be the most highly specialized society ever; but its educational system is unquestionably the *least* specialized, the most universally *standardized*, that has ever existed.’ (emphasis added)

This account – as well as the nature of industrialisation, which turns individual farmers A, B, and C into interchangeable labourers L_A , L_B , and L_C , accommodates them in uniform, urban flats, and, overall, squeezes them into one common template – clarifies that we are, once again, preoccupied with the phenomena of socio-cognitive standardisation. Furthermore, it has to be concluded that although ‘[t]here can be no doubt [...] that economic development did contribute to the consolidation of nationalism’ (Marx 2003: 17), industrialisation is neither a sufficient nor necessary ‘colour’ of nationalism, since numerous nationalist movements in the Third World, for example, have largely had to manage without it.

Nation-Building – A Process of Socio-Cognitive Standardisation

The above analysis results in the fairly obvious finding that the diverse colours of the ‘national chameleon’ are taken from the same sample board – whether appearing in the form of language and linguistic unification (Anderson 1983; Laitin 2007), media and education (Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm 1977), industrialisation (Gellner 2006), or other ‘colours’ such as urbanisation (Szilagyi-Gal 2001) or warfare (Tilly 1992, 1995), the common denominator and identifying characteristic of nationalism is socio-cognitive standardisation. This argument is in line with what Connor (1994: 92) tries to capture by defining a nation as a ‘social group that shares [...] a sense of homogeneity’, and what Conversi (2007: 372) hints at by arguing that ‘homogenisation’ has played a central role in nation-building.

The objective of the socio-cognitive standardisation thesis is far from denying the influence of social, political and economic, as well as cultural and religious, phenomena on the development of nationalism. Indeed, it opposes the position that advocates ‘expunging the hidden remnants of modernization theory from the theory of nationalism’ (Gorski 2000: 1459, as cited in Marx 2003: 17). The socio-cognitive standardisation thesis is, rather, shifting attention from the single ‘colours’ to the common underlying ‘sample board’, thus stressing a causal chain that has received insufficient attention in studies of nationalism. It is only in this constructive regard that the socio-cognitive standardisation thesis raises challenges to the causal role of modernising social developments, particularly if they are postulated in an isolated and insular way.

Besides underscoring that nationalism is a process of socio-cognitive standardisation, the three further conclusions can be made. Firstly, nationalisms are not alike. Different societies have, at different points in time divergent means and priorities for achieving the socio-cognitive standardisation needed for instigating a common feeling of identity. Thereby, this divergence partly traces back to the circumstance that all ‘colours’ have the same denominator – socio-cognitive standardisation – which makes them interchangeable, at least to a certain degree. The second conclusion that can be drawn is that the socio-cognitive standardisation thesis not only talks to modernists, but has the potential of taking other scholarly traditions on board too. The perennialists’ argument that nations derive from ethnic groups is in fact not so far removed from the viewpoint of the socio-cognitive standardisation thesis, given the fact that ethnic groups are themselves a result of socio-cognitive-cum-cultural standardisation. In this sense, it appears reasonable to argue that ‘ethnicities’ (in the same way as common ‘myths’ or ‘symbols’) could be added as another ‘colour’ to nationalism’s ‘sample board’. Thirdly, even though socio-cognitive standardisation is the underlying phenomenon, it cannot be the sole defining element of nationalism. Socio-cognitive standardisation may explain how communal identities are being created, but it does not help answer the question of how this process assists in distinguishing between cultural, religious or political identity groups – i.e. ethnicities, churches and nations. Put differently: if it is socio-cognitive standardisation that is the underlying process of group-identity formation, what distinguishes national from, say, ethnic and religious socio-cognitive standardisation?

Getting Underneath the Skin – Going Beyond Socio-Cognitive Standardisation

Having established the first main proposition, it has to be realised that the socio-cognitive standardisation thesis is *per se* insufficient as an explanation of nationalism. Even though the thesis is valuable for disclosing the underlying pattern of the modernist arguments, it also has the drawback of inheriting very similar, questionable assumptions. The problem is that the socio-cognitive standardisation thesis assumes, along the lines of the modernist as well as liberal tradition, that nationalism and the creation of national identity did not require any sort of institutional framework. This is, however, a fallacy that needs to be addressed, as otherwise one gets caught in the same problem as, for example, the ‘imagined community’ did: Anderson’s (1983) account ‘may be generally relevant for explaining cohesion but is not adequate for explaining the more particular form of cohesion as a *nation*’ (Marx 2003: 16, emphasis added). The general problem is that agency or action, whether political, cultural or economic, is not taken into account (Breuilly 2006: xliii).

Yet nationalism and its explanation do need to take political institutions into account. Modernists themselves have rightly diagnosed that ‘[n]ationalism is primarily a political principle’ (Gellner 2006: 1), which was dependent on ‘the modern state as a new kind of

power container' (Breuilly 2006: xxxii); and in fact, talking about a national identity only makes sense in connection with political units of analysis. Marx (2003: 7) gets to the point by stating that:

If nationalism is not defined with reference to the state, then it would remain too vague a subject of analysis. As a category it might then refer to any mass political sentiment or solidarity, ranging from ethnicity or class to culture or regionalism.

In this context, this paper works with the following, simple definition of the nation:

The nation is an imagined community sharing a collective identity brought about by common politically defined, and generally geographically confined institutions.

This definition shifts the focus from the frequently applied cultural explanation, towards an institutional explanation of nationalism, uniting those who argue that the state has been instrumental in the formation of nations (Anderson 1983; Mann 1986; Breuilly 1993; Gellner 2006). I would suggest that (political) identities are formed and shaped by way of political organisation – i.e. that, generally speaking, socio-cognitive standardisation is contingent upon institutional structures. This is along the lines of other scholars who have argued that subjective collective sentiments or identity claims coincide or refer to existing or emergent institutionalised state power (Marx 2003: 6; Hass 1997: 23; Hobsbawm 1990: 5ff.; Calhoun 1997: 4). It is this connection between mass identity creation and political institutions that the socio-cognitive standardisation thesis fails to uncover and which makes it necessary to perform another step.

The 'National Chameleon's' Skeleton – The Central Administration Thesis

The need for 'bringing the state back in' (Evans et al. 1985) is fairly obvious, if a specification from *any* identity formation to a *national* identity formation is to be attempted. Taking political institutions on board comes with several points of contention. One of them concerns the disputed question of sequence: do nations create states or vice versa? While, for example, Smith (1998: 74) claims a nation-to-state sequence, Mann (1986: 44) postulates that 'nations and nationalism have primarily developed in response to the development of the modern state'.

The central administration thesis put forward here favours the latter position. Arguing that the creation of (new) nations is primarily an act of institutional change that allows for the socio-cognitive standardisation of the population residing in the (projected) state territory, the central administration thesis shifts the main focus away from historical elements, cultural aspects and political sentiments to ways of political organisation in general, and modern state institutions more specifically. Socio-cognitive standardisation is, to a great extent, a function of institutional organisation: a function carried through by central administration in the case of the nation-state.

In what follows, I firstly postulate that it is institutions that create and shape identities; secondly, I argue that nation building is a process of establishing political identity hegemony and replacing a situation of identity multiplicity with identity uniformity; and thirdly, I advance the hypothesis that the nature of nation building (i.e. nation-wide socio-cognitive standardisation) is a function of central state administration. However, it should be noted that while continuing to focus on the concepts of nationalism and nation building, the subsequent discussion should be seen in the broader context of state formation, a process that is argued to

combine (institutional) state building,² and (socio-cognitive) nation building. Even though the two processes are distinct and should not be conflated, they surely are connected (Marx 2003: 6).

Institutions – Fountain of Political Identity

Institutions shape identities by way of organising a society. Whether defined in cultural, political or other terms, the ‘rules of the game’ (North 1990) that are being shared among its members foster the establishment of a distinct identity. This observation is anything but new and has often been made in connection with ethnic communities. While it has long been general knowledge that ethnicities are defined by their cultural threads, Barth (1969) suggests a different view. He argues that the sharing of a common culture is less the primary and definitional characteristic of an ethnic group, but rather an ‘implication of result’ of its organisation. This goes in tandem with Weber’s finding that ‘[i]t is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organised, that inspires the belief in common ethnicity’ (cited in Jaquin-Berdal 2002: 35); and according to Denzau and North (1994: 15) it is the cultural heritage and the organisation thereof that ‘provides a means of reducing the divergence in the mental models that people in a society have’. In summary, it can thus be argued that it is the organisational structure – and the boundaries thereof – that defines an ethnic group. This position is supported by scholars such as Jacquin-Berdal (2002: 69), showing that ethnic groups (e.g. in the Horn of Africa) ‘had crystallised on the basis of a colonial administrative unit’.

Even though Jacquin-Berdal’s view may be disputed for her characterisation of ethnic groups (as it opens the door for the conflation of cultural and political identities), these observations are instrumental for the analysis of national (id)entities. From the finding that cultural identities (i.e. ethnicities) are defined by institutional design, it can be inferred that other identities (e.g. nations) are also born on the basis of their (shared) set of ‘rules of the game’. Thus, in a given society institutions do not merely specify their members’ room for manoeuvre, but also delineate their identity. In this context the previously outlined classic position that nations evolve on the basis of ethnic groups and that ‘ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones’ (Gellner 1983: 1) can and should be challenged.³ While some scholars dispute the position of the primordialists and perennialists altogether (e.g. Jacquin-Berdal 2002: 3), I would argue that both positions fail – due to their categorical nature – to unveil the procedures underlying nationalism and nation building.

In light of the institutional argument, I take the position that nations may form on an ethnic basis, but do not necessarily need to. The clue is that nationalism builds on organisational structures, whereby culture can be understood as one possible mode of organisation, and political institutions as another. Where these structures of organisation, and with them the ruling institutions, cease to exercise effective control, lack credibility and persuasiveness, and elude enforcement mechanisms, group borders emerge. Consequently, the size of social groups is determined by their means and capacity of organisation and the implementation of the respective ‘rules of the game’. This article therefore bolsters Laitin (2007: 61) who states that ‘nations are merely the result of coordination dynamics’; and this task of coordination

² Understood as a process whereby a single set of ‘rules of the game’ gains dominance within a given territory – a condition in which all major role relationships are regularised and their hierarchical organisation is dominated by a preponderant organisation.

³ Gellner is patently wrong: (1) because ethnicities are not immemorial, but created; (2) as they can and do change over time; and (3) since they are not a prerequisite *per se* for the establishment of a nation as is shown in this paper.

and enforcement of the ‘rules of the game’ is, in the sphere of the state, accomplished by central (state) administration.

Nation-State and State-Nation

This disquisition on the role of institutions in identity formation provides solid background for solving one of the long-existing hen-or-egg questions of nationalism: has the nation given birth to the state or was the existence of the state a precondition for nationalism to emerge? While primordialists postulate – along Weber’s (1912) definition of the nation (Gerth and Mills 1948:176) – that nations have always existed and that they have an ethnic core, ‘the inventors and imaginers of nationhood have largely won the intellectual argument’ (Centeno 2002: 168). Numerous scholars claim, more or less directly, that ‘states created nations’ (Holsti 1996: 51; see also Englebert 2000: 84ff.; Emerson 1960: 114ff.; Roeder 2007: 24), that ‘nations and nationalism have primarily developed in response to the development of the modern state’ (Mann 1995: 44; see also Tilly 1992: 116; Breuilly 2006: xxv; Chasteen 2003: xx; Goldsmith 2007: 27), and that successful nation building required ‘high standards’ of governance (Jenkins and Plowden 2006: 1) and ‘a state structure of its own in order to thrive’ (Posen 1995: 136). Along the same lines, Roeder (2007: 26) finds that:

[t]he state coordinates identities by serving as a unique focal point, but it reinforces this natural psychological tendency by rewarding supporters, suppressing proponents of alternative nation-state projects, and propagating the official project through public education, public ceremonies, and the many other tools a state uses to celebrate itself.

Although this paper takes the stand that most nation states have seen the establishment of a state before the emergence of a nation, this is not inevitably the case. With reference to Asia, Smith (1998: 74) and others have discovered a ‘nation-to-state’ sequence. However, while acknowledging these findings, I do not take the same dogmatic line as Gellner, who claims that:

[t]he circumstances in which nationalism has generally arisen have not normally been those in which the state itself, as such, was lacking, or when its reality was *in any serious doubt*. The state was only too conspicuously present. (Gellner 2006: 4, emphasis added)

As the examples of Eritrea, Somaliland or East Timor reveal, Gellner’s argument does not stand the test of history. In these and other cases, the state has been ‘in serious doubt’ – either in a situation of failure or even non-existence – but that did not prevent the respective populations from organising around nationalism.

In some cases, a *de facto* state might have been missing, a circumstance that casts the modernist’s state-to-nation argument somewhat into doubt. What has in all cases been present, however, is some form of in-group organisation. In the cases of Eritrea, Somaliland and East Timor, this internal structure organising society and enforcing certain ‘rules of the game’ was provided by military structures. Thus, what appears to be necessary for nationalism to evolve is less a full-blown, modern state, but some form of central political administration. Modernists are right in so far as this central political administration is most clearly developed by the state and that the latter might be the most frequent stimulator of nationalism. However, it is probably more correct, insightful and undeniable not to depict the state as such, but rather the more specific aspect of central (political) administration as a point

of departure. This argument is even more convincing in light of the fact that feelings of national identity may ‘travel’ beyond the geographic boundaries of a state (Ong 1999; Bernal 2004: 20).

In summary, two conclusions can be reached. Firstly, it can be stated that nationalism may arise prior to the state, but that it is very unlikely, if not outright impossible, to arise prior to some kind of central administration that paves the way for socio-cognitive standardisation. Secondly, it should be noted that the central state administration and nationalism are closely interlinked. Rather than ‘turning into conflicting forces’, as argued by Ottaway (1999: 83), state building and nation building have tended to go hand in hand.

Solving the Dilemma of Identity Multiplicity

Weber’s definition of the state emphasises the monopoly over the means of violence. Just as for the social contract theorists (Hobbes 1651; Locke 1694; Rousseau 1763), Weber’s point of departure is not an institutional *tabula rasa* on which the nation state is being built. In accordance with the social contract theorists he departs from the idea of what can be labelled a *tabula pluralis* – or, in the words of Hobbes (1651), a situation of *homo homini lupus* in which no actor can enforce and control a single set of ‘rules of the game’ – arguing that this needs to be changed into a *tabula singuli* – or a situation of *primus inter pares* in which a Leviathan is endowed with the means to prioritise and enforce certain ‘rules of the game’ – if a state is to be formed.

Establishing a preponderant power position is, however, not only relevant for power politics, but also for identity politics. Realising this, Weber stresses in his definition of the (nation) state not only the need for a monopoly over the means of violence, but also the legitimacy thereof. A nation state does not function by its institutions alone, but it requires an adherence to these institutions by its members. From previously undertaken theoretical considerations and the insight that different sets of institutions create different sets of identities, it follows that state-building projects do not only depart from a situation of institutional but also socio-cognitive *tabula pluralis*. Thus, just as an ‘institutional Leviathan’ is needed to build a state, a ‘socio-cognitive Leviathan’ is required to form a nation.

In order to further investigate this argument, I employ the concept of ‘institutional multiplicity’, borrowed from the state-building literature, as it is a valuable framework promising additional insights. Even though the concept was designed to better understand institutional (mal-) performance within states, it lends itself well to the study of socio-cognitive concepts. ‘Institutional multiplicity’ describes a situation in which ‘individuals and organisations appear to operate often simultaneously in multiple institutional systems, governed by very different sets of incentives’ (CSRC 2005: 8). The argument goes that institutional multiplicity needs to be replaced by one common institutional framework in order to prevent a situation of *homo homini lupus*. While agreeing that socio-cognitive diversity is, like institutional diversity (North 2005: 42), desirable for a multitude of reasons, I would argue that nation building can only come about through a process of socio-cognitive standardisation, which replaces socio-cognitive multiplicity by socio-cognitive consistency.

Prior to the emergence of a national identity there exist other identities with shared socio-cognitive frameworks, such as cultural and/or religious ones. Analogous to the state – which is not born into an institutional *tabula rasa* – the nation is not thrown into a socio-cognitive vacuum either. Thus, ‘states are often not faced with a dyadic issue of imposing their rule

over an already unified society but instead face more complex challenges, with ‘the sovereign’ facing competing or antagonistic groups’ (Marx 2003: 22; see also Kymlicka 1995: 10; Connor 1994: 22). Just as is the case for an ethnic group or church, a state needs to develop and maintain a shared socio-cognitive framework: namely ‘a means of reducing the divergent mental models that people in a society possess and constitute the means for [...] unifying perceptions’ (North 2005: 27). This socio-cognitive framework of the nation is generally territorially bound to the state and provides the population with an additional, overarching identity. It can be said that the idea of the nation is born into a situation of socio-cognitive multiplicity and that nation building ultimately strives for ‘reducing the divergent mental models’ and creating a situation dominated by one (national) ‘mental model’ allowing for socio-cognitive consistency. Just as ‘[t]he powerful influence of myths, superstitions, and religions in shaping early societies came from their role in establishing order and *conformity*’, so is also nationalism to this day ‘a major force in reducing the costs of maintaining order’ (North 2005: 42, emphasis added). In this sense, nation building can be conceived of as a competitive process of different political identities, in which the national identity has to achieve a preponderant position of ‘political identity hegemony’. As Centeno (2002: 169) states, ‘[n]ationalism, much like culture, is situationally grounded’ and dependent upon the institutional organisation of a community. Consequently, this paper hypothesises that nation building is a process in which multiple identities are overridden by one national identity.

The Bureaucrat: National Hero Par Excellence

Previous sections exemplified how language, communication and industrialisation have contributed to creating a single national identity by way of fostering socio-cognitive standardisation. Thus, the linguist, journalist and teacher have not without reason been depicted as the most shiny ‘colours’ of the ‘national chameleon’. However, in light of the discussion on the importance of political institutions, it seems as if their ‘colours’ were fading in comparison to the luminescent ‘colour’ of the bureaucrat. For once, the bureaucrat pulls the strings regarding the geographical distribution of schools with a standardised curriculum, the collection of taxes, or the recruitment of soldiers. As Gellner (2006: 8) states, ‘[t]he written word seems to enter history with the accountant and the tax collector: the earliest uses of the written signs seem often to be occasioned by the keeping of records’. Secondly, the bureaucrat establishes the link between general identity formation and the state. It is he who bridges the socio-cognitive standardisation and the central state administrative theses.

The central role of the bureaucrat has already been realised by other scholars, arguing that centralised bureaucracy and political penetration have been instrumental in forming nations (Bendix 1964: 18; Smith 1983: 38; Mann 1986: 44; Tilly 1992: 116; Smith 1998: 70; Jacquin-Berdal 2002: 35; Breuille 2006: xxv; Jenkins and Plowden 2006: 1). While Anderson (1983: 53) advises the scholarly community to ‘look at the ways in which administrative organisations create meaning’, Mann (1995: 50) postulates that ‘the presence or absence of regional administration offers a much better indicator’ for nationalism than any other element. Giddens (1985: 116) attributes ‘unitary administration’ with such significance that he turns it into a central element of his definition of a nation, and Mamdani (2001: 20-2) concludes that ‘the process of state formation generates political identities that are distinct not only from market-based identities but also from cultural identities’ and are ‘the consequence of how power is organized’.

Throughout history, the Alsace has been administered in turns by France and Germany. After periods of administration by Germany, Alsatians tended to feel like Germans, while their

national sentiments and cultural orientation turned more towards Paris once they had been under French control for a substantial period of time. This example clearly shows that social groups like ethnicities and nations are highly likely to be not only situationally grounded, but first and foremost shaped by forms and structures of organisation. Therefore Laitin (2007: 78) is right when postulating that state administration led to a situation in which 'Bretons, Catalans, Alsatians, and other nationalities living within today's hexagon became French'. This is also due to the fact that borders of social organisation and administration are much firmer than the rather fluid borders of, say, language or culture. Formal (state) administration being to date the most effective form of socio-political organisation is therefore to be regarded as the foundation of nations.

Even beyond Europe, socio-cognitive consistency in the form of nationalism has been generated by administration, which has usually been a legacy of colonialism. Mayall (2006: 553) states that it was the bureaucratic, colonial state in Africa that 'pulverised traditional society and laid the foundations for an imagined modern community'. Similarly, Smith (1983: 56) argues that:

[...] African nationalisms formed themselves on the basis and within the framework of the very territorial and bureaucratic state they so deplored. It was this colonial state that became the mould as well as the target of African nationalism, and on them it stamped its special character and aims.

Analogous arguments are made for Latin America, where '[t]he wars of independence broke the colonial viceroyalties apart, [...] *always along existing administrative lines*, into fragments that had been, themselves, units of colonial governance' (Chasteen 2003: xx, emphasis added). Concluding, Smith (1991: 59) states that 'activities of taxation, conscription and administration endowed the population within its jurisdiction with a sense of their corporate identity and civic loyalty'; and that it is this central administration that brings about socio-cognitive standardisation is also argued by Tilly (1995: 197):

Central control emphatically included cultural control, the singling out or creation of a single linguistic, historical, artistic, and practical tradition from all those present within the national territory. States began as never before to create national educational systems, to impose standard national languages, to organize expositions, museums, artistic subventions, and other means of displaying cultural production or heritage, to construct communications networks, to invent national flags, symbols, anthems, holidays, rituals, and traditions. As a result, national populations did finally become less heterogeneous, even though few of them ever approximated the homogeneity of the ideal nation-state; the homogenizing effect extended to such profound matters as demographic behaviour.

The modern state and its administrative apparatus are to be considered the 'force that shapes the attachment to and identification with a territory' (Anderson 1983, cited in Smith 1998: 92). Censuses, maps and plebiscites as well as all the paraphernalia of centralised bureaucracy and political penetration have therefore been instructive in forming nations. The reason is found in the fact that an administration is in one key way towards standardisation. The census turns individuals into abstract numbers; the map creates a standardised imagination of the territory's shape; and the museum crafts a uniform history. As far as people are (ac)countable, the map is accepted and historical interpretation is shared – i.e. as far as the administration stretches, the nation exists.

Interim Summary

The central administration thesis thus argues that it is institutions and the way they are organised and enforced that are decisive for nation building. Thus, the central administration thesis follows scholars like Bendix (1964: 18), who postulates that nation building's central characteristic 'is the orderly exercise of nation-wide, public authority'; and endorses Anderson's proposition that '[t]o see how administrative units could, over time, come to be conceived as fatherlands [...] one has to look at the ways in which administrative organizations create meaning' (Anderson 1983: 53).

Socio-cognitive standardisation with regards to nationalism is mainly driven by central administration. This argument is not only supported by the sources cited so far, but is backed by a very similar argument advanced by Roeder (2007), who presents the 'segment state thesis', by which he ascribes the success and failure of nation-state projects to the existence or absence of segment states. Roeder also identifies forms of institutional organisation as key to understanding state and nation building. However, the central administration thesis goes one step further in that it does not require the prior existence of ready-made segment states, but argues that the existence of some kind of central (political) administration was sufficient to produce an institutional organisation that allows for socio-cognitive standardisation.

On Brains and Muscles – The Roles of Elites and War(fare) in Nation Building

Elite Instrumentalisation: Turning Heroes into Chessmen

Also with regard to the question of nationalism's origin, the literature has been quite divided. While some scholars have argued that nationalism was a 'phenomenon of the masses' (Gellner 2006; Motyl 1999), others have postulated that nationalism was a process driven by the intellectual elite (Nairn 1977; Posen 1995). In what follows I argue that although the linguist, journalist, teacher and bureaucrat exercise a decisive role in implementing socio-cognitive standardisation: these 'national heroes' are turned into 'chessmen' by a deliberate or unconscious instrumentalising elite.

Anderson (1983: 116) takes a clear stand on the elite-question by stating that 'the intelligentsias were central to the rise of nationalism'; and also Hobsbawm (1977, 1983) takes the view that nations were foremost created from above (see Smith 1998: 122). In their arguments they are supported by Kedourie (1971), who argues that nationalisation develops during the socio-economic transition from agricultural to industrial societies, a time of great turmoil and growing gap between man's lifestyle and his hitherto social system. Believing that the elite departs furthest from the former socio-economic system and therefore bears the brunt of the alienation, Kedourie concludes that it was in the elites' foremost interest to drive nationalisation in order to close that gap (see Smith 1998: 93). More recently, Conversi (2007) and Posen (1995) have supported this elitist view on nationalism, arguing that '[p]olitical elites [...] often indulge in cultural engineering' (Conversi 2007: 372). How right are these scholars in stressing the importance of elite agency?

The intelligentsia and political elite has always been of importance in influencing socio-political processes; and in the case of state and nation building the elite has played a crucial role, even if it may not have necessarily sparked nationalism in all circumstances. Marx (2003: 6) is quite right when qualifying that:

Nationalism often inspires support for elites ruling a state, though its basis is not necessarily an elite ideology but rather a more widespread sentiment that may or may not be inspired by an elite or coincide with the interests of a particular elite.

Elites have usually not passively watched how nationalism has driven the masses, but have generally taken a front seat in ‘steering’ this process, in Europe as well as beyond:

It is generally recognized that the intelligentsias were central to the rise of nationalism in the colonial territories, not least because colonialism ensured that native agrarian magnates, big merchants, industrial entrepreneurs, and even a large professional class were relative rarities. [...] It is no less generally recognized that the intelligentsias’ vanguard role derived from their bilingual literacy, or rather literacy and bilingualism. (Anderson 1983: 116)

However, this elitist view does have its limitations, too. Consequently, Breuilly (1993) warns that it would be ‘a mistake to see nationalism as the politics of professionals [...and] intellectuals, who are often held to be the central proponents and adherents of nationalism’ (cited in Smith 1998: 86). He rightly argues that the intelligentsia is, just like other members of the ‘imagined community’, subject to all kinds of social constraints and can only operate within pre-existing socio-political networks. Thus, figuratively speaking, this means that the ‘national chameleon’s’ brain can move its body only within the realm of its body’s configuration.

At the same time it should be born in mind that society in general – i.e. the broad mass of the ‘imagined community’ – is not just a reactive element, but has considerable influence on the outcome of social processes itself. Thus, I reject Nairn’s (1977) position in which he argues that nationalism ‘is forced mass-mobilisation in a position of relative helplessness (or under-development)’ (cited in Smith 1983: 37). ‘The masses’ are neither that inactive nor that innocent with regards to nation-building projects. Nationalism cannot be effectively carried through without taking the significant behaviour of the ‘mass’ into account, since society itself codetermines the ‘rules of the game’ to a great extent. As Smith (1998: 95) has it:

A ‘top-down’ governmental and elite approach needs to be complemented by a popular perspective ‘from below’. If nationalist elites appeal to ‘the people’, strata within the latter can and do reshape the nationalist ideology in their own image.

Thus, this paper takes the position that although the elite is highly likely to be the driving force behind nationalism, the nationalist elites must in some way ‘capture’ the imagination of a significant part of the population in order to bring about nation building.

War(fare): Boon or Bane for Nation-Building?

Nationalist movements are generally credited to times of turmoil and transition. The emergence of French nationalism is associated with the violent storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789, and it was supposedly the nationalist movements in Germany that contributed to the outbreak of two devastating world wars. Consequently, studies of nationalism and war have generally presupposed that nationalism was the independent variable, with war being the dependent one (Van Evera 1994; Coker 1998: 93). However, sociologists, historians and the bellicist school of nationalism postulate the inverse relationship – rather than hypothesising that ‘nations make war’ these scholars argue that ‘war makes nations’ (Johnson 1993; Hilton 1989; Posen 1995: 168).

According to Smith (1998: 78), '[n]ationalists themselves are divided about the role of war'. While 'liberal' nationalists hope for peace and an elimination of the scourge of war, 'historicist' nationalists generally follow the early philosophers of the nation-state – Georg Hegel, Johann Fichte, Johann Herder – in regarding warfare as 'the necessary dialectic in the evolution of nations' (Howard 1991, cited in Centeno 2002: 182). The importance of war(fare) for nationalism also flares up in the literature on colonialism and post-colonial independence, in which scholars suggest that 'the most important factor in the formation of national consciousness in colonised societies is the resistance to foreign domination' (Bereketeab 2000: 181; Hodgkin 1956; Emerson 1960; Smith 1983; Anderson 1983). 'Historians, sociologists and political scientists of various affiliations have described in a variety of ways the role of the army and conscription as leading factors in the nationalisation of societies' (Conversi 2007: 373). The question ensues as to why it should be 'very difficult to create national self-consciousness without war' (Howard 1979: 108, cited in Jacquin-Berdal 2002: 36; Mann 1993, cited in Smith 1998: 80).

That it is not the presence or magnitude of war, but rather its structure and form (i.e. warfare), which is decisive for its impact on state and nation building has already been stated by Bates et al. (2002: 599), Kalyvas (2005: 92) and Cramer (2006: 45). However, as the Gordian knot has not yet been cut, this paper further investigates under what conditions and how warfare may contribute to the socio-cognitive standardisation resulting in the formation of a national identity. In answering these questions, I want to go beyond the explanations given by Ferguson (1984), postulating that external conflict reinforced the internal solidarity, and Turton and Fukui (1979), arguing that warfare served a function in defining and maintaining group boundaries.

In line with the socio-cognitive standardisation thesis above, I first of all argue that war(fare) disposes of the capacity to contribute to socio-cognitive standardisation and thus nation building. The army as an agent, and war as a (recurrent) event does not leave much room for peculiarities, differences and individualists. War fosters community (Centeno 2002: 218) and brings about standardisation. Conversi supports the argument of social standardisation, postulating that: 'the demand for linguistic homogeneity [...] was first and foremost cogently felt by emerging modern armies [...] which] became the very forge where *homogenisation* was first envisioned' (Conversi 2007: 380, emphasis added) and that 'wars simultaneously provided the most common vehicles for *cultural homogenisation*' (Conversi 2007: 388, emphasis added). He is supported by O'Leary (1998: 66) who advocates that 'the education and cultural standardisation of troops in the European ancien régime preceded that of the general citizenry'.

Similar arguments can be made for the cognitive standardisation inherent in war(fare). Not only does the army create an 'imagined community' by bringing together conscripts from different parts of the country, but it also exposes them to a unitary play-back of ideologies. Thus Conversi is probably quite right in stating that '[i]n the age of industrialisation, there was nothing as standardised and uniform as a conscript army' (Conversi 2007: 381). Agricultural farmers A, B, C and their industrialised colleagues L_D, L_E and L_F are all stripped of their personal shape and 'indices' and turned into highly standardised soldiers S₀₀₁, S₀₀₂, S₀₀₃, etcetera; and with every individual turned into a soldier, the 'imagined community' becomes more standardised and, therefore, more 'imaginable'. In the words of Jacquin-Berdal (2002: 41):

While conflict may not be the determining factor in the emergence of the nation, the role that war plays in spreading national identity among individuals who until

then had only a vague understanding of the meaning and implications of their national belonging, cannot be overlooked.

But war(fare) did not specifically contribute to the formation of a national identity if it simply fostered socio-cognitive standardisation without an apparent link to the state. Additionally it has to be shown that war(fare) fostered central state administration.

The argument that socio-cognitive standardisation chiefly results from central administration applies even more to groups at war, in which the ‘state-matrix’s’ characteristics are intensified. Not least, this can be taken from a simple comparison between an army and civil society, in which the distinct hierarchically organised and centrally administered army (generally) trumps the much looser structured civil society in terms of institutional and socio-cognitive standardisation. Warfare impacts central administration as it leads to ‘the formation of an organ of the strictest efficiency’ (Simmel 1964: 87), in which everything appears to be intensified: central administration as well as socio-cognitive homogeneity. According to Simmel (1964: 92), ‘[a] state of conflict [...] pulls the members so tightly together and subjects them to such a *uniform impulse* that they either must completely get along with, or completely repel, one another’ (emphasis added). Furthermore, history has it that ‘improvements in state administrative capacity are associated with warfare’ (Goldsmith 2007: 34); and it is also argued that:

..military homogenisation became the prototype for the wider organisation of society and government–society relations. Obedience and conformism needed to be turned into supreme values for the whole society. (Conversi 2007: 382)

As Tilly (1995: 197) states:

With the growth of massive national armed forces and the attendant growth of state budgets, almost all states erected wider, deeper, more direct systems of control. Central control extended, obviously, to property, production, and political activity; rulers stopped relying on highly autonomous magnates and pressed toward direct rule, toward the creation of administrations extending directly from the central power down to individual communities and households.

Tilly is not the only one to emphasise the beneficial role of war(fare) on developing central state administration that could contribute to a society-wide socio-cognitive standardisation. Mouzelis (1998: 159) also states that ‘it is military rather than economic technologies that primarily explain the spectacular development of state bureaucracies and their unprecedented penetration of the societal periphery’. Last, but not least, one can refer to Smith (1981: 390) who notes that

[o]n a number of occasions, we saw that incessant warfare encouraged the growth of state power, and this is one of the most commonly accepted notions. In turn, territorial and bureaucratic centralisation help to weld and homogenise quite diverse populations over several generations, turning them into a culturally distinct ‘nation’.

Thus, it can be argued that ‘the armed forces do much more than make war’ (Pereira 2003: 394; Davis 2003: 18) and that army and war(fare) are probably the greatest manufacturer of standardisation. Centeno (2002: 101) even goes as far as stating that ‘war is rejuvenating’ and that ‘[w]ars might arguably be worth their high costs in human destruction if they supported the promotion of such social bodies’ (Centeno 2002: 218). Although this paper does not

execute this last step, it has argued that the broader relationship between homogenisation and war(fare) should be reconsidered as a key feature in the historical development of nationalism. In conclusion, one can refer to Jacquin-Berdal (2002: 35), who points out that '[a]lthough by no means a sufficient or even necessary condition, war, it would seem, can be an important catalyst in this process'.

Nation(al) Failure

While the perennialist position has received fierce criticism for its argument that nations are immemorial and immortal, very little has been written about a nation's decay. As mentioned in the introduction, there is a body of literature on the general dawn of the 'postnational era' (Hannerz 1996; Appadurai 1999; Bernal 2004: 4), and there is also some work on the end of nationalism in a globalising world. However, in contrast to 'state failure' no such term has asserted itself in the context of nationalism. In this final section I explore the question of what happens when specific national projects cease to exist, or in other words, what are the harbingers of 'nation failure' and under what circumstances does the 'imagined' community turn into an 'unimaginable' one?

The debate and theoretical findings outlined in previous sections allows one to hypothesise on the failure of nations. Along the lines of the socio-cognitive standardisation and central administration theses, it can be argued that the dissolution of institutions and institutional unity will, inescapably, be followed by the disintegration of socio-cognitive consistency. As common feelings of identity can only be created and sustained under some kind of common administration (in its wider sense including, for example, the organisation and administration of ethnic groups along cultural lines or denominations along religious lines), the withering away of such structures goes hand in hand with pulling the plug on communal identity formation. In the framework of the nation state this leads to the hypothesis that, over time, failing central (state) administrations not only result in the evolution of sub-state structures compensating for the lack of state institutions, but, accordingly, also results in the spread of socio-cognitive multiplicity that undermines nationalist feelings and fosters alternative sub-national identities. Concretely, such 'state failure' leads to the evolution of alternative structures of organisation (such as ethnic or religious groups), through which come their respective identity bonds.

This argument is, however, not solely the outcome of the previous theoretical considerations, but can be inferred from other accounts. Migdal (1988), for example, postulates that states, which are unable to provide central services, will be challenged by alternative forces within society that are capable of doing so. In this light, Englebert (2000) – supported by Holsti (1996), Azam (2001: 430) and Khan and Gray (2006: 67) – rightly states that '[e]thnicity provides a level of institutional identification to fall back on in times of contestation of the state'; and Jacquin-Berdal (2002: 71) advocates that the failure of numerous nation-state projects in Africa can be attributed to the parallel existence of diverse institutional and socio-cognitive frameworks within their territories. She states that:

[i]t may well be that one of the reasons why nation-building was doomed to failure lies in the simultaneous formation of competing identities within the same territory. And, it could thus be argued that the state needs not only to control the monopoly of coercive violence, but also the monopoly of education (language and history) if it is to achieve domestic sovereignty.

However, it would be wrong to assume that nationalist feelings wither away as soon as the institutional state structures nourishing them are no longer in place. Although this appears to be the case in the long run, the short and potentially even medium run look different. I would argue that the nation provides the failing state with a longer half-life period upon failure. Under conditions of institutional change – either in the form of ‘upgrading’ from lower to higher institutions (e.g. from an ethnic to a state-institutional setting in the process of state-formation), or ‘downgrading’ (e.g. from a state- to an ethnic institutional setting in the framework of ‘state failure’) – socio-cognitive alterations drag behind and continue to function in the legacy of the prior institutional set-up. Tilly (1995: 201) can be interpreted in this way when he states that ‘the weakening of state capacities [...] work[s] to diminish nationalism, at least in the long run’; and Roeder (2007: 11ff.) makes a similar argument, postulating that the formation of new nations was the consequence of the failure of the superior set of segment-state institutions to issue socio-cognitive standardisation. He literally states that ‘[t]he independence of a new nation-state is the consequence of the failure of one set of state institutions to keep people and territory within their jurisdiction’.

This reasoning feeds into the following conclusions: firstly, political units weak in central administration are likely to be challenged by competing sub-units that are more effective in providing diverse services by issuing institutional and socio-cognitive standardisation; secondly, it is precisely these sub-units that bring about ‘state failure’, which ensure the ‘post-state’ regularisation of the ‘rules of the game’ (Brons 2001: 3); thirdly, it is hard to draw the dividing line between the continued existence of nationalist feelings versus simple irredentist claims that are based on ethnic and/or historic structures, in the face of state failure; and fourthly, it can be concluded that nation-states and their failure have less to do with legacies of prior institutional and socio-cognitive frameworks, but rather depend on the state’s and its elite’s ability to set up a functioning structure of central state administration that allows for institutional and socio-cognitive standardisation. As Laiting (2007: 88) remarks: ‘The question about the postcolonial states is not whether they were ill formed, but rather whether they (like their predecessors) will create unique national cultures within their boundaries’.

Conclusion

Since the assumed links between ‘state building’ and ‘nation building’ were broken in the 1980s (Eriksen 2006: 1), there has, unfortunately, been an astonishing lack of exchange between these strands of literature. Although the two processes of state and nation building are inextricably interlinked, the literature has paid only scant attention to learning from each other. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of approaches to state formation and post-conflict reconstruction have been informed by the state-building literature that highlights ‘institution building’ and ‘structural reform’.

However, ‘simply putting in place the formal rules is a recipe for disappointment, not to say disaster’ (North 2005: 161). More specifically, but in the same line of thought, Centeno (2002: 215) articulates that ‘[w]ithout the ideological glue of nationalism, the state developed with severe limits to its authority’. This highlights once more the need for ‘bringing the nation back in’. Only on condition that issues of (political) identity are considered and given similar weight to aspects of institutions do processes of nation-state formation have a reasonable chance for success. This has to be acknowledged in face of the fact that many states in the developing world are still largely in a process of formation (Carothers 2002).

The paper has argued that projects of nation building can best be understood as processes of socio-cognitive standardisation among a politically organised group within a specific territory. Therefore, it is of secondary importance how this socio-cognitive standardisation is brought about – be it through language, education, industrialisation or war(fare). However, as the socio-cognitive standardisation thesis merely explains how and why a community becomes ‘imaginable’, it lacks the political perspective and the link to the state necessary to distinguish any ‘imagined community’ from a ‘national community’. This paper has advanced the central administration thesis, postulating that it is primarily central state institutions that allow for the process of socio-cognitive standardisation. It has taken the stance that nationalism did not pre-exist, but ‘had to be built’ (Marx 2003: 191) and that war(fare) could be considered as the catalytic element that is constitutive of central administration and socio-cognitive standardisation – although it does not always do so as a matter of course. The paper endorses Laitin’s (2007: 137) proposal that ‘[t]he time has come to think about nation-building in a fresh fashion’ and modestly hopes that it constitutes a contribution towards this end.

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