

## **John Breuilly Interview for H-Nationalism**

### **March 2006**

During the annual conference of ASEN (Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism) we asked John Breuilly, the chair of Nationalism and Ethnicity Studies at the London School of Economics, to talk with us about the study of nationalism, where it has been and where it is going. Don H. Doyle, University of South Carolina, and Susan-Mary Grant, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, both founding members of ARENA (Association for Research on Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Americas) met with Professor Breuilly over lunch at Coopers near the LSE on March 29, 2006.

DD: This interview is going to be included in H-Nationalism, which we're launching on April 3rd. We want to do interviews beginning with you and some other leading scholars in the field of Nationalism Studies. Why don't you begin by telling us a little bit about your background in terms of how you got into Nationalism Studies, the relationship between your interest in German history, your book (*Nationalism and the State*), and Nationalism Studies at LSE.

JB: I did a PhD on German labor history in the nineteenth Century. I was appointed to a lectureship in Manchester before I got my PhD. That happened in those days. I then had various onerous teaching responsibilities because a lot of the senior people had left, we were a fairly young department with lots of ideals about teaching courses in new ways, and we decided to teach a course called "Themes in Modern History" and I chose--this would be in the early 1970s--to take the themes of "states" and "nations" focused at first on Europe from about 1500. So for a number of years I gave lectures on how and why the nation-state came to be the political norm in modern Europe. I didn't have any intention of writing anything much, I still regarded my field as German history but as I was giving these lectures, you know, I kept looking for a book that would investigate what I was increasingly becoming interested in, which was a comparison of the relationship between nationalism and the state in a range of different situations. And eventually I came to the conclusion that the only way there was going to be such a book was if I wrote it. So I wrote this book and it was published in 1982. And I hadn't really anticipated it was going to be as successful as it has been. And not just amongst historians, but even more, if anything, in other disciplines like political science. And so, I've tended to run my historical interests, which have shifted from German labor history into German urban history and aspects of comparative Anglo-German history as well as more broadly western European history, to run these in parallel with doing more general things on nationalism. The main intersection has been trying to understand German nationalism in terms of broader theories and comparisons. I revised *Nationalism and the State* for a second edition because the collapse of the Soviet Union seemed to me to change the whole situation and I needed to take account of that. And then out of the blue came the possibility of taking this chair at LSE, where I stressed that really I wasn't single-mindedly into nationalism, I didn't have a theory of nationalism, I wasn't working on a book on nationalism, and they still appointed me, so here I am, and now getting much more involved with nationalism because I have to teach courses called "Nationalism" which I have never done before.

DD: That's at the graduate level.

JB: There is a course both at undergraduate and graduate level, the latter being the core course in an MSc on Nationalism and Ethnicity. There is also a research workshop on problems in nationalism. These were all first developed by Anthony Smith, my predecessor, and I run all these jointly with my colleague John Hutchinson.

DD: Now, your book came out in 1982, just before Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, all coming out the next year, 1983. So where did you get your ideas about nations and nationalism for the book that you published in 1982? What did you read and what influenced the way that you wrote your book?

JB: That's a good question really. I mean I mainly read historical material. I knew Gellner's chapter in *Thought and Change*, which he published in 1964. That already outlined the main ideas of his theory. There weren't many social science treatments. I suppose the main one I knew was Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication* and Anthony Smith's early work, above all *Theories of Nationalism*. Most social science work was in political science and concerned with nation-building with a mainly contemporary rather than historical focus. But most of the literature was historical and it was just through that and the comparisons I could then make on the basis of that historical literature that I worked. Some of the history was general, such as work by Carlton Hayes, Hans Kohn, and Hugh Seton-Watson--usually in a narrative form. Some was focused on ideas, like Hayes and Elie Kedourie. But most of it was on particular cases. I was influenced, almost subconsciously, I think, by one or two earlier German scholars. There's an historian called Theodor Schieder whose work should be translated into English. Schieder, for example, developed a typology, which is effectively the same as my distinctions between reform, unification and separatist nationalism and which also is like Gellner's "Time Zones in Europe." So I think probably some of the German work, such as a virtually unknown and pathbreaking work by Eugen Lemberg, and also some of the older things that we tend to have forgotten. I've mentioned Karl Deutsch and he can be linked to the Austro-Marxists such as Otto Bauer. But I did not see myself as trying to produce an overall theory or explanation. Rather I was simply trying to think of nationalism as essentially a political story--nationalism as a form of politics seeking or exercising power -and to connect this story, through a series of comparative analyses, to the modern territorial state as the most important locus of power in modern times. How did nationalism relate to that, and how could I develop a typology through which to organise comparative history? Theoretical literature did not help me much in the task of doing that, and in any case the most influential stuff was published at almost exactly the same time.

DD: Yes, but a little bit after you. When you read Hobsbawm, Anderson, in the next year or two, what was your reaction?

JB: Well, I wrote a review in 1983 of Gellner and Anderson and tried to relate them to my own approach. Because they made me aware that I *had* been operating with a general approach and understanding. That I had been the modest historian, saying, you know, "I don't claim to understand very much but just to describe things a bit more precisely than hitherto" Now I saw

Anderson had a culturalist approach towards the subject, and, Gellner represented a societal or sociological approach and I clearly represented a political approach. What we all had in common, however, as also Kedourie in the field of ideas and Hobsbawm and Ranger in another type of cultural history, was that we took nations and nationalism to be constructed and modern rather than natural and long-standing. So I began to place myself on that wider intellectual map.

Actually Hobsbawm is a bit different and *\_'Invention of Tradition\_'* should not so easily be put together with Gellner and Anderson. In that book nationalism doesn't actually figure that centrally. People tend to forget this, and I think it's interesting that they forget it.

Hobsbawm only wanted to deal with nationalism at length after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and in a way I've always found that interesting. I think Hobsbawm's own Marxism makes him constitutionally incapable of really engaging with nationalism in a positive way. The triumph of nationalism over socialism is the negative theme underlying his *\_'Age of Extremes\_'*, on the "short twentieth century" in marked contrast to the progressive movement of history that is the subject of his three volumes on the "long nineteenth century." Nationalism becomes an ever more negative and reactionary movement as we move beyond 1918. So I wasn't really aware of Hobsbawm and Ranger's stuff because I didn't see it as having to do with nationalism. Also at that point issues of identity and custom and tradition weren't really at the centre of attention. Again that's a rather later development. I think there is something distinctive about that wave of books, including mine, in the first half of the 1980s which should not be confused with rather different post-1990 concerns. *\_'Invention of Tradition\_'* is less important for its direct treatment of nationalism as for its implications for how the claims of nationalists to a history and tradition should be treated.

DD: John, one of the things that strikes me as curious is that there is this flurry of nationalism studies and kind of reinvigoration of a debate, and of course Anthony Smith comes in and defines the debate in terms of these primordial versus civic origins of nationalism or you get constructed origins of nationalism, that I guess becomes more defined as a debate later in the decade. This is before the end of the Soviet Union and it seems to anticipate what would be a very timely interest, obviously, with the explosion of nationalist movements.

JB: When I was writing the introduction to the second edition of Gellner's *\_'Nations and Nationalism\_'*, I did list those books that were published in the first half of the 1980s and continue to have an influence. And it's not just myself, Gellner, Anderson, Hobsbawm and Ranger. Anthony Giddens published *\_'Nation-State and Violence\_'*, Charles Tilly was publishing, so was Paul Brass and also John Armstrong's *\_'Nations before Nationalism\_'*--so there was a lot of it. And I think there were a number of reasons for this. I tend to look for these reasons above all in politics. First, this was the era of Reagan and Thatcher. And I think a lot of the talk about the end of ideology, consensual politics, was swept away in the late 70s and early 80s with sharper political conflict. The Iranian revolution in 1979 perhaps was the key international event. And I think a lot of people started moving back towards much more general and big ideas to try to understand change in a quite sweeping way. That didn't just apply to studies of nationalism. Perry Anderson has written two wonderful essays on components of the national culture in Britain. The first deals with that consensual phase, and the second where he analyses the re-emergence of general theory and more polarised debate.

Second, in Europe there was a re-emergence of nationalism. Tom Nairn, a close collaborator with Perry Anderson (who is also Benedict Anderson's brother) published *The Breakup of Britain* in the late 70s and went on to develop a general view about nationalism in terms of uneven development. Michael Hechter also published his book on internal colonialism. These were responses to the resurgence of nationalism in Ulster, Scotland and Wales. (The devolution issue was the event which brought down the Labour government in 1979, followed by Thatcher's election victory.) Elsewhere there were the Catalan and Basque movements in Spain, regionalist movement elsewhere, Flemings in Belgium, Bretons in France. Further afield was the French Canadian movement in Quebec. So I think, specifically in Western Europe--slightly preceding and then accompanying the world-wide sharpening of conflict--there was a sense of a nationalism being on the march again, and therefore, that existing nations or nation-states couldn't be taken for granted in the way they had been until then. More generally the optimism of the "nation-building" ideas of the 1960s gives way to pessimism, and economic crisis in poor countries, for example in Africa, helps stimulate ethno-political disputes. In the communist world the Vietnam war, the collapse of order in Cambodia, tension and even war between China and the USSR, also make people more aware of the power of nationalism. So I think the two key points are: resurgence of nationalist and ethnic conflict and a shift back to ideological and polarised politics.

Another phase clearly comes with the collapse of the Soviet Union, because in a way that generalizes nationalist conflict from western Europe into eastern Europe. And the Iranian Revolution expands into much more widespread Islamic fundamentalism and the Israel/Palestine issue gets worse and continued economic decline as well as the AIDS epidemic is linked to growing ethno-politics in Africa.. Suddenly nationalism is at the centre of things, everybody wants to get a piece of the action. Marxists who didn't write much about nationalism much before 1990, suddenly start writing about it afterwards. At the same time, both Marxists and others who do not want to accept that nationalism is based on "real" nations, take up postmodern ideas about discourse, narrative, invention of tradition etc., nationalism as constructed identity. Even if that means giving up on other "realities" like class or race or gender as well (they all become discursive construct in interminable flux).

DD: You may have answered another question I had. Why the British are so involved, why they're so important. It's not only the British, but people who come to Britain like Gellner and Hobsbawm, they often immigrate, sometimes victims of nationalism, but what else is it that's going on in Britain and at British universities. Is it Cambridge or Oxford or any particular intellectual center that becomes the fount of nationalism studies?

JB: On the last point, if there is a centre it is LSE. If you just look at the personal histories of those people. Hobsbawm was at Cambridge but in his autobiography says he felt much more at home at LSE (more European, cosmopolitan) and most of his academic career was spent at Birkbeck College London as well as around the world, both non-communist and communist. But then Hobsbawm until 1990 focused his attention on class and social history (bandits, rebels, standards of living) and was associated with British Marxist historians like Edward Thompson and Christopher Hill, though I think one can see something more "European" about his work compared to those two. Gellner was at Oxford but attacked it savagely in his first book, *Words*

and Things\_, at least its philosophers, and then was at LSE, although he spent some of the 1980s at Cambridge before finishing in post-communist Prague at the new Central European University. (Itself funded by George Soros who had studied at LSE.) Many others were LSE people like Kedourie, whose 1960 book on nationalism provoked Gellner to think seriously about the subject.

As for the émigré point, Perry Anderson argues that in that consensual phase--the era of Butskellism (named after leading Tory and Labour politicians of the 1950s, Rab Butler and Hugh Gaitskell)--English empiricism was a construct of émigrés. Because English empiricists were too empirical to ever construct and defend empiricism as a general principle itself. So émigrés who fell in love with England and turned against the absolutist philosophies and politics of the continent which they held responsible for their very exile, idealised, almost sanctified, what they took to be English empiricism. So you find Wittgenstein, certainly the later Wittgenstein (whom Gellner so vehemently criticises) and Karl Popper in philosophy (which Popper extends to social theory in *The Open Society and its Enemies*), Hans Eysenck in psychology, Isaiah Berlin in political philosophy, Geoffrey Elton and Louis Namier in history, and many more such figures. These men do not just practice a piecemeal, empirical approach, they reflect upon this as a virtue particularly associated with Britain. But in a quite unBritish way! Nevertheless, one can see what might be called a "mainstream/establishment" émigré stream which is positive about English empiricism, piecemeal politics, suspicion of "big" ideas as dangerous ones, and a minority element reacting against that but very much as individuals like Hobsbawm, Gellner, Norbert Elias. The latter group really become prominent, I think, in the later phase when general theory re-emerges.

However, I don't think that later phase of general theorising is dominated by émigrés in the same way as the earlier phase. Partly there is not the same level of supply of people fleeing fascist or communist regimes. But many British figures are involved. For example, Anthony Giddens (another LSE figure). Benedict Anderson, of course, is of Anglo-Irish and has spent his academic career in the USA. Anthony Smith is an LSE figure and British; he pretty much created the nationalism programme at LSE and is still very active in it.. Some of the important work continues to come from central Europe such as that by Miroslav Hroch (though he was publishing pioneering stuff back in the 1960s). Some comes from the USA (such as Rogers Brubaker and Charles Tilly). Some comes from post-colonial regions such as Partha Chatterjee and the Subaltern School in India.

I think perhaps it is certain institutions rather than countries which are prominent, such as the LSE and the Central European University. In the case of LSE I think that is to do with its cosmopolitan character, the prominent role of foreign academics and students in its activity, its highly inter-disciplinary nature and perhaps, dare I say it, because historians did not dominate the study of nationalism as they did in more conventional universities, with the tendency to inhibit general and theoretical work. In the case of the CEU much more recently it is to do with seeing itself as a beacon of liberal thinking in the immediate post-communist era and the appointment of Gellner to run a Centre looking at nationalism.

But that is really of minor and changeable importance, I think. Above all, there has been a process of intellectual globalisation which diminishes the importance of origin or location for the study of nationalism. The subject is being studied under other labels in many places. Academics move around much more and communicate much more easily. This H-Nationalism is just the latest example of such globalisation!

DD: In nationalism, it seems to revive and take some new turns in the early 80s and then of course historical events cast that, in turn, in a new light with the breakup of the Soviet Union. I remember Hobsbawm saying "it's a good thing there is so much interest in nationalism because it's a sure sign that it's about to disappear." And he quotes Hegel saying "Minerva's owl flies at dusk." To which Anthony Smith said "it doesn't look like dusk, it looks like high noon."

JB: Yes, I think Hobsbawm was being a bit optimistic. But of course nationalism keeps changing, so what the owl of Minerva understood perhaps has by now transmuted into something different.

DD: Looking back now from the early twenty-first century, what were the most important debates, in retrospect, about the nature and the historical origins and meaning of nationalism? What seem to have been the most fruitful, the most important debates? What were the most or the least important in your view?

JB: Well for me personally, the most important thing was detaching "nation" from "nationalism." One might not agree with Gellner's famous assertion that nationalism invented nations, but it indicates you have to study the two subjects as analytically independent from one another. And I think, that was one of Kedourie's great services, because earlier historians like Kohn and Hayes, I think, had seen nationalism as conditioned by nation--western nations produced western nationalism, eastern nations produced eastern nationalism. Kedourie with that opening sentence "nationalism is a doctrine invented in Europe in the beginning of the nineteenth century," sets out a clear and new statement of intent. Nationalism has got nothing to do with nations or national histories. And the second, linked step is the modernist approach. If you detach nationalism from nations, even if you don't call into question the longer-term existence of nations, you can argue for the modernity of nationalism. So for me they were the main things. And then, once you've said nationalism is modern, it seems to me, you must perforce reflect on the nature of modernity, in order to figure out what it is about modernity that can account for nationalism. And that's where Gellner has been most important because I think he still proposes the most distinctive non-Marxist theory of modernity which he connects directly to nationalism. Others of us focus more on specific aspects of modernity such as the modernization of political power and the state, or of communications, like Benedict Anderson does. Of course, I would say this, wouldn't I because I remain firmly of the view that the modernist approach is the right way to understand nationalism, even if I have felt the need to qualify and complicate that position in the light of the debates of the last decade or so.

DD: I always think of the 1995 Warwick debates with Gellner and Smith as being the moment it crystallizes, the debate over the primordial or modern origins of nationalism. Is that debate one that has proved fruitful, do you think? Was there more agreement than difference underneath, or was that an essential and important debate to have? [For a text of the Warwick debate, see: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/gellner/Warwick.html> ]

JB: Yes, it does crystallize the issue. However, I think Gellner conceded too much. For me Gellner's greatest weaknesses (and again I would say this, wouldn't I?) was that he was not an historian. So if you put plausibly historical stuff to him--say about the earlier historical instances of national identity and sentiment--he tended to accept it, and then say "but it doesn't matter." He just marginalizes the history by theoretical reasoning. So, I read him as saying to Anthony Smith: "OK, so you've come up with some nations that have got a long history, in other words that have navels But it doesn't matter, because as long as I can find just one that doesn't have a navel, then I can argue that, in principle, the others could have equally well exist without navels and, therefore, navels are not necessary for nations and nationalism. And I have always thought that his surrender to dubious history, even with his theoretical ingenuity, opens him up to two devastating counter punches.

The first is one can argue that if so many nations have this pre-modern national history which is connected to modern nations and nationalism, surely one must concede that this is not just a coincidence of no importance. The second point, and Anthony Smith has argued this vigorously, is that nationalisms without such a history on which to ground themselves are rather weak, fragile, artificial, clearly manipulated constructs. And if you can then substantiate those two points, you can effectively undermine Gellner's key argument that only with a sharp transformation into industrialism is nationalism and nation possible.

So it seems to me therefore that pre-modern history becomes a vital terrain to contest. My way of doing this is to make just two concessions, much less than those made by Gellner. First, the language of nation and nationality is clearly far more present in the pre-modern period than many hard-line modernists have been prepared to concede. Gellner's "agrarian empires" in which the concept of nationality is simply impossible clearly does not work. It's just bad history even if as a concept it points to some important features of certain pre-modern societies. We must then examine this language of nationality carefully and, once one has done that, I think it can be shown that this language works in very different, even strange ways from that of the modern language of nationality. In other words, conceding that the language exists is not to concede that modern nations or even nationalisms have a significant pre-modern history.

The second point is that the existence of precisely just such a language, especially if linked to important institutions, such as territorial monarchy, does provide a valuable resource for the modern language of nationalism which is obsessed with its historical origins and how this legitimises its claims and will do its utmost to ferret out texts and events which apparently establish continuity. I also think aspects of modernity can be traced back to the period of the Reformation which provides conditions for anticipations of modern nationalism, such as early modern commerce and its social formations and the intensified use of print in political conflict, especially amongst elites and the more mobile and urban middling groups. Finally, although I concede one cannot just manipulate a national identity from one day to the next, I would argue

that quite strong national identities can be constructed in just a few decades. We see this again and again in "new" nation-states. So more and better history--combined with rather than marginalised by his particular modernist theory--would have been the best way for Gellner to have argued at Warwick.

DD: Earlier you told us that you're essentially a historian, and that nationalism studies by implication tend toward social science theory, toward grand encompassing overarching theory. But social scientists need history don't they? They need historians for case studies and for testing theories.

JB: As I have just indicated, no theory of nationalism is going to work without good history. But it is not just a question of history being an instrument in the service of theory. The social science itself has to be thoroughly historical and the history has to be informed by the theory. Historians cannot be treated like retriever dogs who just bring back the bird without knowing what a bird is. The answer, of course, easier asserted than practised, is for social science history.

Maybe I'll be a bit controversial here. For me, one negative effect of post-modernism on historical studies, is that people think "I can study this text or painting or piece of music and actually figure out the historical situation on that basis." (Or at least as much of the situation as it is possible to figure out.) In a more mundane way, this enables literary or art historians to think they can write general history on the basis of texts and visual images. That in turn justifies a "scissors and paste" approach to the past whereby you select this use of the term "nation" here, and that one there, project one meaning on them and from them to the broader situation, and connect the bits together to produce an account of "national sentiment in medieval England" or whatever. And that in turn can be used to buttress one "theory" or another. And therefore all the careful and difficult work of looking at political interests and coalitions, the precise social support for particular movements using particular languages, the swift changes from one usage to another, the long periods of silence when languages of nation are not used but instead other languages, of religion or dynastic lineage, figure more strongly--all that goes out of the window. The thing is that, the theory is an essential a kickoff point, but human beings are so smart and complex that we then have to pay careful attention to what they actually do and say. (My cardinal rule as an historian is: I am no smarter than the people I am studying and they have the huge advantage of knowing their situation so much better than I do. The only advantage I have is that I know what came after but, of course, a single-minded attention to texts, meanings and interpretation at the expense of contexts, events and explanations throws away that one single advantage.) .You just have to do the patient work, in the archives, on fragmentary sources, imperfectly trying to figure out things.

For example, in Amsterdam in April for the European Social Science History Conference I was chairing a session in the network 'Nations and Nationalism' of which I am co-chair. There was a paper by a Hungarian historian, Andras Vari. He began by saying "there are bird's eye views of nationalism which can see to the horizon but cannot pick out any detail and then there are those (the worm's eye view?) who break the terrain down into specifics," and for him this was, above all, the work of social historians, even if politics was their principal concern. So his paper, for example, was about the way agrarian conservatives in late nineteenth century Hungary take up really for the first time the cause of nationalism. And then he asks, precisely what idea of

nationalism do they take up? What are the precise conditions that lead them to taking it up? What are the modes by which they take it up, and what is the outcome of this? And no general theory in the world is ever going to provide the answers to those questions. Of course we need to use general ideas and we should also seek valid generalisations on the basis of research, and historians tend to get lost in their particular subjects. In this particular case I think one can see this type of nationalism emerging in quite a few different places (for example, in US populism, in agrarian protectionism in Germany) and one can also see that it can only take shape on the basis of earlier forms of nationalism having entrenched themselves. So one can move to general ideas but only once the important, detailed discriminations have been made.

So I get actually a bit dismayed when all the readers on nationalism which are being published in increasing numbers come out with the "primordial this," "ethn-symbolic that" and "modernist other" supported by no or at best scissor and paste history. And I think that then you can tell whatever story you like. The introductory literature should also guide the student on how one goes about testing one or another approach and that means first, insisting on the clear, precise and logical use of terms and, second, doing history. And not history as "meaning" (e.g. the use of history by nationalists, though that is an important subject) but history as the conditions on which the present arises and which mightily constrain and shape our present choices and meanings.

If you do not do that, the various "approaches" or "theories" look a bit like nationalist history itself. I mean nationalist history is a type of what Michael Oakeshott called "abridged history." You select the bits to fit the story you want. Regime change--bang, change the history; paradigm shift--bang, change the theory.

Let me give another example about the importance of evidence and the need to contextualise it. At the present ASEN conference I was chairing a session on nationalism and history textbooks. It made clear to me how contextualisation is vital to understanding but that our capacity to do this declines as evidence disappears. First, two of the papers were about the nineteenth century, the third on contemporary Ukraine. The first two--really good papers I should stress--could only analyse the textbooks and then infer the attitudes and values of those who had written the books and decided on their use in schools. The Ukraine paper in addition could observe classroom practice and pupil response. That context suddenly made one realise how complex was the act of communication; there is absolutely no way we are permitted just to project meaning from the texts. Teachers had attitudes which conditioned what they emphasised and how. Pupils in turn had attitudes which conditioned what they even heard, let alone accepted. When I asked the third paper giver about how instrumentalist was the history being peddled, he replied that it was not just instrumental but that the books in question were sometimes written by the very same people who, twenty years earlier, were writing marxists texts in support of communist regimes. Not only does this support the need for as much historical context as possible, it also shows how people have no problem in changing their view of the past, partly because present interest is what matters most but also because it was scissoring and pasting history, whether communist or nationalist. One of our jobs is to say "No! You mustn't do that!" OK, we mustn't just get lost in one narrow history after another. But, we've got to show how the specific qualities of this or that particular idea was significant in a particular way, was taken up by these or those interests and got this particular social support in that particular political situation. And then pick the bones out

of that. To just have something vaguely called "nationalism" floating around in history, ready to attach itself to anything it likes, is not good enough. (Unless close analysis shows that is precisely how nationalism works!)

DD: Historians tend to be more comfortable working within the confines of a particular nation, in part because they want to work within a particular context--they want to understand the politics, the culture, and while those aren't--they don't change radically across the political border, that tends to be the way that we historians approach the past. There's a call now, they were talking about it earlier, for kind of transnational history. Is that going to happen, do you think?

JB: I would say two things. It seems to me, one, it's not actually true that historians are very national, when you go back beyond the early modern period. Historians then study dynasties, or the Catholic Church, or agrarian history, for example land tenure systems which have often a completely "non-national" geographical focus. So many pre-modern historians are not particularly national at all, which makes sense if national history is a modern development. Sometimes they'll use the word "Germany" or "Italy" but it's just a framing device to say: I'm looking at some stuff going on here rather than there; Germany is a term that I use but I know there's no such thing as Germany, I know that being German is not very important. Of course, there are nationalist historians who do want to study "Germany" or "France" in the eleventh century, and there are debates about connections and continuity, but I don't think they dominate the academic historiography. So in that sense I would dispute the assumption behind the question. In the modern period many historians who are studying nations, above all when the history is political, are actually studying states, and they call the states "nations." How many historians are really doing national history, in the sense that they are asking questions about what makes England English or what makes America American? I don't know. But certainly such history is increasingly confined to the nation-state frame if not particularly "national."

Of course professional history in part grew up with the formation of modern nation-states and placed itself in their service. Nation-states shape the educational systems which train historians. And many states are overtly nationalist and insist on their historians writing the appropriate history. But I think the main intellectual effect is the idea that there are groups called "nations" and that these have history and that this history is more important than any other history. But my guess is that the most important effect is narrowing historians into national boxes rather than actually making assumptions about the "nation" as an actual force working in our history. That is, however, an important effect.

In terms of transnational, I would say, so long as the world is still divided into national states, some of which dominate other nation states, so long as those states remain the principal loci of power, transnational approaches will not provide an alternative history, it will rather be a new perspective on national history.

I have just reviewed a book entitled Das Kaiserreich Transnational which takes a transnational approach to the German Second Empire. And actually, most of the essays do not break out of the national paradigm, but what they say, for example, is we find the same administrative methods and assumptions being used in Southwest Africa, in occupied Central Europe in 1917-

1918, in occupied Eastern Europe in the early 1940s; or connections between class values in Germany and race values in the colonies. So we must make connections across continents but at the same time these are connections are mediated through German elites and institutions. That kind of transnationalism is really a history of connections between the different national frameworks, recognising that the nation-state acts within a world both of other nation-states but also across national boundaries (as during war) and in non-nation state settings, as in the world of overseas empire. That can cast a fresh light on many things.

For example, another paper at Amsterdam was about the tensions between ethnic and civic nationalist appeals in the USA in the 1850s and during the Civil War. Apart from the fact that I think the theoretical debates about the ethnic/civic nationalist distinction are important for historians of nationalism, I was interested in Carl Schurz, a German immigrant who became a high ranking soldier in the Union army and a US Senator. As a German historian the 1848 revolutions are a particular interest of mine, so I was interested in how Schurz understood this civic/ethnic debate in the USA (with the Republicans trying to woo both nativist support directed against German and Irish immigrants but also that very immigrant support) in the light of his German experience. There Germans were the "ethnic majority" which meant that they tended to ignore ethnicity in the construction of nationality. (There is a presumption that only minorities are "ethnic.") Suddenly here he is in the USA, deemed a member of an ethnic minority. For him the language of civic nationalism is a way of repudiating that ethnic designation, a language he had never had call to use in Germany. So the transnational connection can cast fresh light on the different languages of nationalism and how and why they might switch.

However, the transnational interest is also due the fact that we are enslaved to the present, so when something new comes up, we suddenly project that concern into the past too. Globalization--if you want to deny it is completely new, look for it in the past. Sometimes this produces superb history, like Chris Bayly's wonderful book *\_The Birth of the Modern World\_* which uses creatively the notion of "archaic globalisation." Environmental history is now going to become a really big subject. The present reveals new problems to us, and then we go and hunt them down as historians.

Where I do think globalisation and transnational approaches in history can be useful is to show that nation-state formation in the "era of territoriality" (as Charles Maier has called it) was bound up closely with the projection of modern power across the whole world and that any purely "internal" history of the nation will miss this crucial dimension.

DD: But nationalism seems like an interesting transnational subject too, especially looking at it from an American perspective the influence of European ideas and American models. Anderson explores that in *\_Imagined Communities\_*, it's one of the aspects of his work that seem to have been dropped. Everyone knows about the imagined community and print capitalism, but the American models of the pioneers of nationalism, that's ignored.

JB: I think a lot of Anderson's book is ignored. People quote the title, and readers or introductions to nationalism stress the idea of print capitalism, but then people forget even how it begins, because you know, it begins with war and commemoration. For me the material on Spanish America (on which he has more to say than on North America) was valuable not just

because of the stress on print communication but also on the structure of colonial institutions, in other words drawing attention to the political dimension which is frequently neglected. Having said that, I know that various Latin American historians disagree strongly with his analysis and argue quite strongly that there was no such thing as nationalism in the colonial period.

So I think Anderson is much more quoted than read. (But is that not true of all books that have such influence?) I also think there are some specific reasons for this. First, he just came up with a wonderful title, it's the best title of all the books on nationalism. The second thing is that he--or rather his title--can be taken two ways. I mean, modernists like myself take him as locating this imagining within particular contexts, above all capitalism driven empire. By contrast post-modernists pick up on the way in which imagination works to construct nations, and so they focus on the discourse rather than the context. Building on what Anderson said about newspapers and novels as ways in which people construct, create an identity, they ask: can we then do that for radio, television, film, etc. We have just had the annual Gellner lecture, by Thomas Eriksen which goes on to ask: can we do that for mobile telephones, the internet, web-pages, blogs and chat rooms? So I think Anderson has two different camps feeding off his work. I admire the modernism. I like to think that Anderson himself is really a modernist.

DD: A lot of the approach to nationalism now deals with it as a problem or as a negative. I notice next year's ASEN conference is devoted to the dark side of nationalism, and it has a list of, you know, violence, terrorism, genocide, and so on. It's a bad idea. And that we hope it will go away. And I wonder if that is, you talked about Hobsbawm's wishful thinking earlier, I wonder if that framework for looking at nationalism as a pernicious force as a problem, or something that we think is based on false identities, false constructions, hoping that or expecting that it will go away once deconstructed. Does that limit our understanding of this phenomenon?

JB: If we think of nationalism as bad, yes, it does. I mean if you think every time we use the word "ethno-nationalism" we only think of ethnic cleansing and ethnic conflict, then I think it does limit our understanding. I think, you know, when you watch the news program you only hear very bad news, because who wants to hear good news? And I suspect that particularly the more politically focused studies on nationalism are like the news. So when a study deals with "ethnicity" it tends to be about civil war in Nigeria or violent conflict in Sri Lanka. There are far more pieces on ethnicity in the Congo or Zimbabwe (where there is crisis and conflict) than in Tanzania and Zambia (where there is just as much "ethnicity" but not the same levels of conflict and violence). I recall a discussion in which one person asserted that Indonesia could not possibly survive without a huge amount of coercion because of its multi-ethnic character to which another responded, very tellingly, that this meant accepting the Indonesian army's analysis of the situation and to ignore the point that the sheer amount of diversity made it impossible to explain the continuation of the polity in terms of coercion and in fact should lead to the opposite assumption. Again, the "bad news" approach only focused on the hot zones of conflict, not the cool zones of cooperation.

I recently read a collection of essays on democracy and ethnicity in Africa. It includes a fine essay by John Lonsdale identifying the primary feature of ethnicity as being what he called "moral integrity." It reminded me of Eriksen's wonderful image in the Gellner lecture of

nationalism being like an inverted refrigerator; as the community generates warmth inside, it radiates coldness outside. And you mustn't forget about the warmth aspect of it.

Now sometimes this positive aspect is given another name. For example, what is often called multiculturalism today would once have been called multinationalism. Much of the academic work on this subject focuses, at normative and theoretical as well as policy-oriented levels, on trying to work out either (1) how one can devolve power to national-cultural collectives without breaking up existing states ;or (2) how one can value and recognise nationality as a cultural quality without it taking on a divisive, conflictual and political quality. There is a lot of this work going on but it tends not to use the word "nationalism" or even "ethnicity" which in turn tend to be used more in studies of political conflict and violence.

But this separation is wrong. To go back to the refrigerator image: one cannot have the warmth without the cold. Nationalism should not be used as a moral term, or divided into good and bad types (civic/ethnic, western/eastern), or simply confined to the fields of political conflict and violence, but seen as a type of language, sentiment and politics which intrinsically both includes and excludes and which will take on a "dark" or a "bright" aspect according to situation.

And that takes us I think to the heart of the problem of nationalism. You know, Gellner's question? Imagine a peasant before the mid-nineteenth century complaining to his wife about the new governor the Sultan has appointed to his province of the Ottoman Empire.. His wife could understand if he was bemoaning the guy's taxation or conscription policies, but to condemn the man for the language he speaks, if he did that his wife would doubt her husband's sanity. The central question is why and how does this become a sane concern? Why, as one British Prime Minister around 1900 framed the question, should people prefer their "own" government to good government?

DD: I think Eriksen's image of the inverted refrigerator goes to the question of why is it that nationalism is such a powerful force? Why does it take hold in the modern period? Why does it continue to be so warm. And, of course we're talking about people feeling good about being members of a nation and finding some comfort there, but willing to go to war, willing to fight, to kill, to die, for these things called nations in a way that they're not willing to sacrifice for many other organizations. Though we now find people willing to fight and die for religion, don't we?

JB: Or for class. The Bolsheviks were as fanatical for class or at least a certain vision of socialism and the end of class as many nationalists have been for the nation. I've got no short overall answer to the basic question. However, I sometimes think the question is based on a, not so much false, as exaggerated premise, about "willingness to die." Once you assume that large numbers of people feel like that, then you need a really powerful theory to explain it. So if, like me, you haven't got a really powerful theory, what you might do is question the assumption and then you could actually make do with a less powerful theory.

So, for example, in the developed world now, I could not imagine, could not envisage that any country in Western Europe or the United States of America would tolerate obeying the orders soldiers were given in the first World War. To go over the top in tens and hundreds of thousands and die. I simply think it wouldn't happen. And you've only got to look at the Vietnam war to

see, when casualties reached, by first World War standards, very modest levels, Americans lost interest in continuing the war.

Of course, wars of defense, could be easier to explain. It's very interesting that when Bethmann-Hollweg, the German Chancellor, was manipulating the manner in which the outbreak of the war would become public in 1914, he was concerned to hold off the military to delay mobilization until the Russians had mobilized. The German plans were to strike in the west, moving first against the French, but he knew that the Social Democrats, which was the biggest party with massive support, would be antagonistic to aggressive action against France. If he could present the war in terms of an attack by Russia, then stereotypes of Russian barbarians, against whom we must defend ourselves, could be mobilized.

Enthusiasm for war, even expressed through mass volunteering, is not yet willingness to die. Young men often go off to war with no idea what it will be like, as an adventure from which they expect to return.

At this juncture, authority matters. I think a lot of people fight and die because authority tells them to fight and die. We know that pressed men often fight as well as volunteers. Maybe modern British or American society is just less prepared to defer to authority rather than being less nationalist.

Finally, how you get from civilian life into the trenches, into a regiment, into being ordered to do things, is itself a quite complex process which changes people. I believe army psychologists have figured out the platoon strength as ideal Individuals can bond in a group of twenty-two and be prepared to risk their life for a comrade (who maybe they only met a month earlier), but there are sufficient numbers that one can keep functioning and plug the gaps. Regiments often recruit from a particular place for the same reason; people know one another, their local community is proud of their exploits.

So I suspect that a) some of the factors which produce "willingness to die" no longer exist- at least in modern western societies, and (b) that some of those factors have little to do with the national idea as such. And, as we have indicated, other sentiments, such as those of religion and class, may also be involved. And situations change. Today we are told that Iraq has little substance as an object of political identity or loyalty, other identities such as Sunni, Shia and Kurd matter more. But in the 1980s many thousands of Iraqis, as well as Iranians (whose regime since 1979 has officially distanced itself from state-centred nationalism) died in a war which in many ways resembled the first world war in terms of static fronts and high casualty rates. If it wasn't nationalist zeal, what was it? If it was nationalist zeal, why has it so rapidly disappeared? Clearly coercive power is part of the explanation though I think more than that is involved.

Once again, there is a danger that people start with a "grand fact" which needs explaining with a "grand theory." If you take my arguments seriously, you're down to a much more limited thing to explain, which is why people will identify with something called their "nation," regard it as having value, and some of them, sometimes, will go as far as dying for it, although that is a complicated set of steps in which many other factors are involved. Of course, I am not denying

that the appeal to the nation is important but perhaps it is not quite the absolute value the "willingness to die" idea assumes.

I would also point out that, once achieved, the nation-state, with its massive nationalized public culture, with its national citizenship, with its welfare agencies, with its all-enveloping world, which give people so much of what they regard as important--that it is not difficult to understand why the national ideal would have great power. And I think it has much more power in those situations than as an oppositional movement, although clearly it can motivate minorities to great tasks. Gellner, who saw nationalism as product rather than cause of just such a powerful culture and state, thought nationalism wouldn't die out, he thought it would become very moderate in developed industrial economies that were succeeding, and I think by and large he's right. It's easy of course to be a nationalist when what's happening is your airforce is dropping bombs on enemies, it's much more demanding to be a nationalist when you're asked to actually go over, get in a uniform and fight. After all George Bush and Dick Cheney made sure that didn't happen to them, didn't they?

DD: Where do you see nationalism studies going in the future, at LSE, and in the wider world? Where do you hope it will go? What do you see as the more fruitful lines of inquiry? If I were a young graduate student asking how should I devote my next four years, what would you tell me?

JB: It's a really good question, The first thing is, I would have to say is I don't really know because the future is always taking me by surprise. I did not anticipate the rapid collapse of the Soviet Union which in turn transformed nationalism studies. Now we're being hit by other problems that none of us anticipated. One of the things about studying carefully the past is to just know you haven't really got much idea what's coming up next. So in that sense, anything I would say is a guesswork.

The easiest thing to do is to extrapolate from existing trends. It seems to me, particularly in our societies, multiculturalism and identity as personal choice or construction is a subject of major interest. Quite a few of the students coming to study nationalism at LSE want to work with refugees and asylum seekers, on issues to do with integration. Some of them hope to work with NGOs, to be involved in issues such as ethnic reconciliation. They hope the general course on nationalism will help provide understanding and then relate that to more specific courses (and possible future careers) dealing with these issues. We are fortunate that LSE, which is an amazing social science institution, offers courses both in the Government Department and other departments in many of these fields. So I suspect a lot of focus is going to be on the plurality of identity, elasticity of identity, whether that leads in the end to violence and the dark side, or whether it's more a question of different ways you knit together multicultural and relatively peaceful societies. So I think there's going to be a lot on that. It is good to see the student idealism involved in these interests, as well as to see how smart these students are. More generally I think some students, for example coming from the USA, are just puzzled about the resurgence of nationalism, for example in the USA, where many perhaps thought it was not a strong force, and they want to spend some time trying to understand this.

What I would like to see--which is very different from what I think is going to happen- is more theoretically informed historical studies of nationalism. Historians are always in danger of just telling one story after another, I mean that's what we do well, but it's also our great weakness. Often a student will say, "well, it's interesting, but what has that got to do with anything else?" But the great strength of the historian is you have complex evidence to confront, and theory has to be really powerful and usable to help in that. At the moment I am not getting historians to come do doctoral work with me, the interests are rather in recent past, present and even near future, in subjects like multiculturalism, contemporary migrations and diasporas, and ethnic conflict, and in policy as much as explanation.

But even if oriented to the present, I think there needs to be more the focus I associate with social history. Take, for example, the subject of diasporas and nationalism which I think will be an increasingly important topic which will require transnational approaches. I enjoyed Thomas Eriksen's lecture on nationalism and cyberspace, which considered the relationship between modern technologies of communication, such as the internet, and diaspora communities. I argued with him that surely the starting point is the social character of the diasporas, and the technologies of communication are secondary. It's very important if you've got available a new form of communication that transforms your possibilities. But ultimately in my view, it's the social groups, it's the human beings, and what they want to do with these resources which matters, and you can't know in advance how they're going to use those things, because human beings are so smart, complex and changeable and we can never second-guess others. Therefore a diaspora is not a diaspora is not a diaspora. If you are dealing with single people in their twenties who are well qualified in their own country but are semi-skilled in a country where they can get a job, which applies, for example, to some 20% of the Romanian labor force currently working outside Romania, that's one diaspora. It's very different from say, Poles in Britain who immigrated during and after the second World War and are now into the third generation. And you even see it when you look at the Poles of the third generation diaspora and compare these with the Polish labour immigrants entering Britain since Poland joined the European Union. They look more like those Romanians, and therefore my guess is that the modern Polish diaspora can more fruitfully be compared with the modern Romanian diaspora, than with the older Polish diaspora. In other words: nationality counts less than the demography of diasporas, different groups will use communication facilities in different ways, only the kind of detailed focus on social groups will advance knowledge.

Or take asylum seekers and refugees. We see all these screaming headlines in the mass media which never distinguish the various reasons people come, whether they come as families or single people, whether they come for work or security, what skills and other qualities they bring with them, whether they see the move as permanent or temporary. And therefore I would like to see a lot of the same kind of empirical work the historian does, only now applied to contemporary studies of nationalism, too. And not just take a couple of newspapers and think you can tell a story. Hard work.

DD: You were saying how a lot of nationalism is focused on the hotspots and the problems and so on. America hasn't had as much--or the Americas--generally haven't had as many of the separatist movements with the exception of one rather bloody one in my part of the country, and I just think that's one of the reasons why Americans have been kind of out of the conversation on

nationalism as it developed since the 80s especially. What do you foresee, is there any interest-- John Hutchinson said that he wanted to see the journal *\_Nations and Nationalism\_* open up and improve with more history and more attention to other parts of the world, particularly the Americas. Is that a future direction or is it because it's detached from these ethnonationalist concerns, unlikely to bear fruit?

JB: The journal actually gets a number of contributions from North America, but that is mainly Canada, and of course a lot of the recent theorists of multiculturalism are Canadian such as Will Kymlicka and Charles Taylor. So I think you may be referring to something that's specifically USA rather than American more generally. And in some cases I think it's just plain neglect on our part, I'm sure there's tons of stuff on ethnic conflict and political nationalism in South America. (Actually we are about to publish a special issue entirely on South America.)

I think there may be more specific reasons for the neglect of the Americas, excepting Canada. The independence movements from Spanish and British rule in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century did not really use the language of nationalism. (This is where some Latin Americanists take issue with Benedict Anderson's points about "creole nationalism" which they see as a much later development.) I have been recently scouring British periodicals in the early nineteenth century to see if the American independence movements had much impact on the development of the language of nationality, and this is an interesting case of the dog that did not bark in the night: there does not seem to be much impact, certainly so far as South America is concerned.

Once independence was gained, these independent states were absorbed in their internal affairs. Nationalism tended to be associated with nation-state formation and this was seen above all in terms of the breakup of multinational empire, first in Europe and then in the European overseas empire. That, I think, in part is why the Americas were marginalised in more general nationalism studies. (And I have to plead guilty myself. Apart from Canada, America is the one continent that does not provide case studies in my book on nationalism.)

But I think also it is a certain parochialism on the part of the journal. After all, nationalism studies has always been seen as relevant to Africa, and Asia and the Middle East but we have not paid that much attention to these areas. And clearly issues such as nationalism and war, both between states (such as the bloody ones involving Paraguay in mid-nineteenth century) and the US Civil war, and also nationalism and state-building, are important themes in American history. But our focus has been on Europe.

DD: Yes. That's where the debate really took hold.

JB: Yes but as I indicated earlier, I think the debate now is global. So I do think we've got to change to take account of that. I am to edit *\_The Oxford Handbook on the History of Nationalism\_*. I intend that the whole world is properly included and hope to write a new history of nationalism, building on the contributions to the handbook to ensure I am informed of the state of the game in Asia, Africa, South America, North America as well as Europe.

I agree that many of the theories of nationalism were constructed after the European experience. It's amazing how many of the major writers hail from the Habsburg and Romanov empires or their successor states. But not any longer.. So I think we've got to generalize along with the expansion of interest and contributions. Whether in America there will be that much interest, except in terms of ethnic studies, where after all, theories of ethnicity and ethnic studies were pioneered, but of course in terms of domestic history. I do think events in the USA since 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq have generated quite explicit forms of American nationalism, so there may be a response. I wonder whether the founding of ARENA and H-Nationalism can be seen against that background.

But in addition to extending area coverage, I think we need more history and we also need to take on board the new directions in which nationalism studies are going, for example normative studies (e.g. on multiculturalism, on liberal nationalism), policy-oriented studies (again, multiculturalism, also ethnic conflict resolution, constitutional designs) and transnational concerns (e.g. diasporas but also much more mobile patterns of migration which do not create permanent communities abroad). Also, I would want to stress that despite my criticisms of too much focus on "texts" without "contexts," I would also like to see much more work on subjects like music and nationalism, literature and nationalism, the visual arts and nationalism. I think we will be publishing more in these areas, but work which contextualises such subjects and which is clear about just what aspect of nationalism is involved. There is much to be done.

DD: John Breuilly, thanks very much for taking the time to share with us, and with the subscribers to H-Nationalism, your thoughts about nationalism studies. I'll buy lunch--the check please.

This interview was recorded in London, March 29, 2006, and transcribed by Johanna "Micki" Blakely, a graduate student in public history at the University of South Carolina.

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