Are there good and bad nationalisms?

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ABSTRACT. Writers on nationalism have continued to use the distinction between civic and cultural nationalisms; and to suggest that the former has liberal connotations while the latter is intrinsically illiberal and authoritarian. This rests in part on the argument that the civic bond is rational and voluntaristic while the cultural bond is irrational and ascriptive; in part on the argument that the presence of the middle classes is conducive to liberal politics; and in part on the argument that cultural nationalism is illiberal because of its reactive origins. These arguments are critically examined, and then are reformulated to suggest that the liberalism or illiberalism of nationalism might not be related to its cultural or civic basis, but might depend both upon whether the class articulating the nationalism is marginalised or upwardly mobile; and upon whether the wider society becomes focused upon *ressentiment* in relation to threatening others, or on developing a self-generated identity.

There is widespread agreement that nationalism is a dominant force in contemporary politics. But there is equally widespread disagreement as to whether to applaud or condemn it. This confusion arises because nationalism seems sometimes to manifest itself as an absolutist creed which generates intolerance and violence, and sometimes takes a liberal form, offering individual liberation within a community of equal citizens. But should we understand these as the variable expressions of one core concept; or is there a more fundamental dichotomy? Is nationalism a Janus who 'wears almost everywhere two faces; and you have scarce begun to admire the one, ere you despise the other' (Dryden)?

Most writers on nationalism concur in recognising two ideal-type forms of nationalism which are analytically distinct and antithetical in nature. But it is important to note that they differ as to the terminology which should be employed, with these differences in terminology reflecting, in part, disagreements as to which attributes lie at the core of the distinction. The terms 'cultural nationalism' and 'civic nationalism' will be used in this

article which seeks to explain their conceptual cores, and also to examine the suggestion that the former is intrinsically illiberal, while the latter is intrinsically (or for some, predominantly) liberal.

The suggestion of a link between cultural nationalism and authoritarianism is sometimes asserted rather than argued, by the use of terms such as integral, organic, ascriptive, exclusive or radical.[1] Similarly, the suggestion that civic nationalism is necessarily more liberal is sometimes asserted in its denotation, by some authors, as 'liberal' nationalism, but also by the use of terms like political, social or voluntarist.[2] Although the two variously denoted forms of nationalism are analytically distinct, in practice they intertwine in particular nation-states and nationalist movements so that one form is usually dominant, and this has engendered the use of the two analytical models as explanatory categories for distinguishing between those nationalisms which promote individual liberty, and those which suppress it.

The purpose of the article is first to explain how the distinction between civic and cultural nationalisms has been employed in the literature. Second, to unpack this distinction so as to indicate problems with the way in which it has been linked to the liberal–illiberal dichotomy. Third, to derive from these discussions an approach which recognises that both cultural and civic nationalisms have the capacity to emerge in liberal or illiberal forms. It might be true that some nationalisms which are predominantly cultural are less liberal than other predominantly civic nationalisms. But it is not always or intrinsically so, and we need to look carefully at the nature of the argument, in order to assess why.

The distinction between cultural and civic nationalisms

'Cultural nationalism' refers, at core, to a sense of community which focuses on belief in myths of common ancestry; and on the perception that these myths are validated by contemporary similarities of physiognomy, language or religion. The myth of common ancestry, the related myths of homeland origin and migration, and pride in the contemporary linguistic, cultural or physical evidence of common kinship, provide the basis for claims to authenticity, and thence to claims to the right of collective national self-determination. Cultural nationalism thus employs the same type of myths of common kinship and ancestry which are frequently denoted by the term 'ethnicity'.[3] The term 'cultural nationalism' is however preferred here to the term 'ethnic nationalism', simply because the term 'ethnicity' is hotly contested between those who use it to refer to such myths, and those who use it to refer to the biological *fact* of genetically fixed primordial racial attributes. The use of the term 'ethnic' to refer to cultural nationalism might thus be interpreted by some to indicate precisely the definitional assumption which this article seeks to critically examine; that cultural nationalism is *necessarily* ascriptively closed, and thence illiberal. The term 'cultural

nationalism' denotes no such assumption, and therefore facilitates the examination of whether those nationalisms which are illiberal are or are not so because of their belief in common kinship.

The term 'civic nationalism' refers also to a sense of community, but in this case one focused upon the belief that residence in a common territorial homeland, and involvement in the state and civil society institutions of that homeland, generate a distinctive national character and civic culture, such that all citizens, irrespective of their diverse ancestry, comprise a community in progress, with a common destiny. This commitment to a common destiny, tied into the idea of common loyalty to the territorial homeland and its institutions, means that civic nationalism implies the acquisition of ethical obligations, and should not be regarded simply as a voluntary association lacking emotive power. Indeed, the common public culture of civic nationalism serves to raise the people from a rabble to a nation, so that 'every member of the "people" ... partakes of its elite quality' (Greenfeld 1992: 7). It offers, no less than cultural nationalism, 'an escape from triviality, gives a sense of immortality, and 'dignif[ies] a man's suffering and gives him a hopeful direction in which to work' (Minogue 1967: 32).

Civic nationalism is thus sometimes depicted as 'forward-looking' in the sense that the vision is of a community in the process of formation, while cultural nationalism is seen as backward-looking, in that the vision of the community is located in myths of the past. But this should not be interpreted to imply that the former is in some *moral* sense 'progressive' and the latter 'regressive', since morality is clearly not dependent on chronology. Moreover, such a definition does not completely resolve the difficulty in distinguishing the two forms of nationalism, since it is evident that cultural nationalisms built upon myths of common ancestry will seek to establish the authentic continuity of their community by proclaiming visions of common destiny located in the future; and, by the same token, civic nationalisms which see the national community as one always in process of becoming might seek to promote a sense of evolutionary development by appealing to a common institutional past.

Thus part of the reason why the distinction between the two is so difficult to apply to actual cases of nationalism, is not simply that the two ideal-types combine in all particular cases, but more fundamentally because both forms of nationalism employ, in their mythology and symbolism, the language of the family. The family of civic nationalism is primarily the marriage family, whereby entry into the family and its territorial/institutional home from diverse sources indicates commitment to a common loyalty and destiny; whereas the family of cultural nationalism is primarily that of parenthood, with the commitment of (genetic or adopted) children to the family deriving from the belief in common ancestry. Civic nationalism is just as likely as cultural nationalism to use the language of motherland and homeland, but uses it to refer to the home of arrival, rather than to the

home of origin (the analogy again, is that of the marriage home, rather than the birth home).

The ideas of civic and cultural nationalisms are clarified, and interwoven, in the work of classical theorists such as Johann Herder, Johann Fichte and Max Weber.[4] But the suggestion that this distinction might explain the difference between the 'good-liberal' and 'bad-authoritarian' forms of nationalism, probably originates with Karl Marx. Marx distinguished different conceptualisations of the nation in terms of the type of class interests they promoted. A liberal and democratic conception of the nation was therefore one which promoted the interests of the oppressed classes. By contrast, the ethnic and enthnocentric conception of the nation (symbolised in the German case in the language of *Volk* and *Vaterland*) was seen by him as a romantic myth of uniqueness and superiority which comprised an alienative reaction by insecure middle classes, and which could be 'readily … harnessed to the conservative purposes of absolutist and authoritarian states' (Benner: 91). The connections between alienation, and the promotion by the state of a nationalist myth of common ethnic attributes and common ancestry, is indicated in the following passage:

Out of [the] very contraction between the interest of the individual and that of the community, the latter takes an independent form as the state, divorced from the real interests of individual and community, and at the same time as an illusory communal life, always based, however, on the real ties existing in every family and tribal conglomeration (such as flesh and blood, language, division of labour on a larger scale, and other interests) (Marx, *The German Ideology*, in Feuer 1969: 295)

Marx's negative evaluation of cultural nationalism was subsequently echoed by the early twentieth-century German historian Friedrich Meinecke, although they differed in their understanding of the role of the state. Meinecke distinguished between the *staatsnation* which 'centres on the idea of individual and collective self-determination and derives from the individual's free will and subjective commitment to the nation', and the *kulturnation* which:

is founded upon seemingly objective criteria such as common heritage and language, a distinct area of settlement, religion, custom and history, and does not need to be mediated by a national state or other political form. Consciousness of unity, the sense of belonging together, develop independent of the state … It leaves individuals little scope to choose to which nation they belong. (Alter 1989: 14)

In this formulation, as Peter Alter notes, 'The voluntarist, liberal-democratic concept of nation is contrasted by a deterministic one that is frequently deemed undemocratic and irrational' (1989: 15).

Meinecke's distinction was subsequently reformulated by Hans Kohn (1944, 1962), who distinguished between a Western (particularly North Atlantic) nationalism and an East-Central European nationalism. Western nationalism was 'a predominantly political occurrence' (1944: 329) following from the formation of the state. It 'was connected with the concepts of

individual liberty and rational cosmopolitanism' (1944: 330) which flour-
ished in 'a new society' arising from the Reformation and characterised by
the growth of 'middle classes and secular learning' (1944: 331). By contrast,
'Eastern' nationalism (which included German, Russian and Indian nation-
alisms) originated in 'ethnographic demands', and developed in societies
which were 'at a more backward stage of political and social and
development' (1944: 329). This Eastern nationalism was 'excessive and
militant' (1962: 24), took a cultural rather than a political form, and relied
on 'myths of the past and dreams of the future, an ideal fatherland, closely
linked with the past, devoid of any immediate connection with the present'.
The model for this was German nationalism:

held together, not by the will of its members nor by any obligations of contract, but
by traditional ties of kinship and status ... [and by] the infinitely vaguer concept of
'folk' which ... lent itself more easily to the embroideries of imagination and the
excitations of emotion. Its roots seemed to reach into the dark soil of primitive times
and to have grown through thousands of hidden channels of unconscious develop-
ment, not in the bright light of rational political ends, but in the mysterious womb of
the people, deemed to be so much nearer to the forces of nature. (Kohn 1944: 331)

This argument as to the irrational and ascriptive basis of cultural
nationalism, contrasted with the rational and voluntaristic basis of civic
nationalism, has been employed, with varying degrees of modification, by
several modern theorists of nationalism; and it constitutes one of the most
resilient themes in the literature. Thus, for example, Anthony Smith, after
noting some criticisms of Kohn's distinction, concludes that it nevertheless
'remains valid and useful' (Smith 1991: 81). He then refers to the 'Western
or civic model of the nation' as involving claims to 'historic territory, legal-
political community, legal-political equality of members, and common civic
culture and ideology'. In this model, 'an individual had to belong to some
nation, but could choose to which he or she belonged' (Smith 1991: 11). He
contrasts this with a 'non-western or ethnic' concept whereby 'whether you
stayed in your community or emigrated to another, you remained
ineluctably, organically, a member of the community of your birth and were
for ever stamped by it'. This latter nationalism is characterised by
'genealogy and presumed descent ties, popular mobilisation, vernacular
languages, customs and traditions' (1991: 11–12).[5] Smith employs this
distinction to discuss differences between the contemporary nationalisms in
the West and those in the ex-Soviet sphere, and explains these partly in
terms of differences in social structure; in particular the presence or absence
of a bourgeoisie which could mediate the mobilising activities of intellectuals
(Smith 1995: 76–83).[6]
   Liah Greenfeld offers a related distinction between 'individualistic-
libertarian' and 'collectivist-authoritarian' models of nationalism. For her,
the character of nationalism is related to the character of the particular
class and status groups who were its architects, though she sees the

responses of these architects, rather than the structure of the society, as the determining factor in the character of nationalism. But her schema makes the general tendencies clear. Individualistic-libertarian nationalism, which interprets popular sovereignty as intrinsically linked with democratic ideas of equal individual status and liberty, 'is predicated on a transformation in the character of the relevant population' (Greenfeld 1992: 10), in that it can emerge only in 'civic' communities where membership is open and voluntaristic. By contrast, the collectivist and authoritarian form of nationalism 'result[s] from the application of the original idea to conditions which did not necessarily undergo such transformation' (*ibid.*), and is most likely to emerge where membership is on an ethnic basis, since such membership is 'inherent ... [I]t has nothing to do with individual will, but constitutes a genetic characteristic'. In the cultural nation, therefore, the idea of popular sovereignty is interpreted in unitary and inegalitarian terms: 'it tends to assume the character of a collective individual possessed of a single will, and someone is bound to be its interpreter' (1992: 11). Michael Keating similarly distinguishes between ethnic and civic national-isms; 'One presents membership of the national community as given, or ascriptive; the other sees individuals voluntarily constituting themselves as a collectivity' (Keating 1996: 3); though he does note that 'civic nationalism can be violent and ... civic values may be narrow and intolerantly applied' (1996: 7). James Kellas builds more directly on Kohn's typology in distinguishing between 'western' nationalism which was social and inclusive in form, was 'more liberal democratic, and did not engage in genocide, transfers of population etc.'; and eastern European nationalism which was ethnically exclusive, 'intolerant and often led to authoritarianism' (Kellas 1991: 73–4).

   David Miller has recently been critical of attempts to distinguish 'a desirable 'Western' form of nationalism from an undesirable 'Eastern' form' (Miller 1995). Nevertheless, he achieves something similar to this by contrasting what he calls 'nationality' which is liberal and tolerant, with 'nationalism' which refers to 'organic wholes' and is an 'illiberal and belligerent doctrine' (1995: 8). For Miller, this distinction is closely connected to the differences between ethnicity and nationality, with the former referring to 'a community formed by common descent and sharing cultural features' (1995: 19), and the latter referring to a community constituted by belief rather than by common attributes, and by 'a shared wish to continue their life in common' (1995: 23). Montserrat Guibernau repeats the argument that the civic nationalism of popular consent, associated with the rise of the bourgeoisie and the spread of Enlightenment ideas, has taken a liberal direction; while the cultural nationalism of 'common language, blood and soil', reacting against the Enlightenment, has tended to an 'exclusivist, xenophobic, expansionist and oppressive character' (Guibernau 1996: 51–7). Tom Nairn sees civic nationalism as developing out of the institutions of an inherently liberal civil society; while ethnic

nationalism is 'perceived as inherently ... divisive, inward- and backward-looking, atavistic, aggressive and probably not too good for business either' (Nairn 1997: 86).

The contributions of such theorists have done much to revive and refine the study of contemporary nationalism, and their variously formulated arguments undoubtedly have an intuitive appeal and a contemporary resonance, especially when one employs the imagery of the civic nationalisms of the USA or Britain on the one hand, and of Tamil, Kurdish or Serb cultural nationalisms on the other. But correlation does not always indicate cause. Moreover, it would not need too much thought to generate apparent exceptions. Certainly, civic nationalism frequently takes an authoritarian form, as articulated by Suharto in Indonesia, or earlier by Jacobin nationalism in France (Hayes 1949: ch. 3). Cultural nationalism not only sometimes seems to take rather benign forms, as with the Welsh or Slovene cases, but is also often regarded as the carrier of minority rights and social justice, most noticeably in its manifestation as contemporary claims by indigenous or minority ethnic communities for enhanced political autonomy and special rights. In this latter version, the moral evaluation of cultural nationalism is often reversed, so that instead of being seen as intrinsically irrational and illiberal, it appears as intrinsic to individual development and true liberty. This is also suggested by Tzvetan Todorov in his discussion of French theorists such as Antonin Artaud and Montesquieu:

Cultural nationalism (that is, attachment to one's own culture) is a path towards universalism – by deepening the specificity of the particular within which one dwells. Civic nationalism ... is a preferential choice in favor of one's own country over the others – thus, it is an antiuniversalist choice. (Todorov 1993: 172)

Perhaps the main contemporary significance of the distinction between cultural and civic nationalisms, and of this ambiguity regarding their moral evaluation, is in the debate as to the meaning and implications of 'multiculturalism'. Does this term refer simply to a civic nationalism whose public civic culture can accommodate the diversity of private ethnic cultures; or to a cultural nationalist challenge to civic nationalism which threatens to divide the state into competing sovereignties? Is it to be applauded for challenging an existing cultural nationalism which favours ethnic majorities, with new formulas which favour hitherto marginalised minorities; or condemned for prioritising ascriptive and illiberal group rights over liberal individual rights?[7]

The distinction needs examining for other reasons also. As has already been noted, most nationalisms contain ingredients of both the civic and cultural forms, so that there is disagreement, for example amongst observers of Catalan nationalism in Spain, or East Timorese nationalism in Indonesia, or Scottish nationalism in the UK, as to how to characterise them – should they be seen as minority cultural nationalist movements, or as regionalist civic nationalisms? There is clearly the danger that we characterise a

nationalism as cultural or civic in form, depending upon whether we wish to support or oppose it. Moreover, if we seek to explain the form which nationalism takes by reference to the fundamental character of the society, as is sometimes indicated by the civic-cultural distinction, then how can this help to explain cases such as French, Quebec or Irish nationalisms, which seem to shift between authoritarian and liberal manifestations and to have both liberal and illiberal proponents?[8] Clarification as to the theoretical basis of the arguments is needed.

It has been suggested that discussions of nationalism frequently exhibit a 'stultifying aura of conceptual ambiguity' (Geertz 1963: 107). Such ambiguity is likely when concepts offered as 'ideal-type' analytical models, turn out to contain clusters of arguments which might only be contingently connected. Thus, while the above distinctions between civic and cultural nationalisms have facilitated some subtle discussions of particular cases, they have not really clarified the causes of their differences, because three distinct arguments have been interwoven, and need disentangling. First, there is the argument that the two nationalisms differ in that one is based on irrational primordial attachments, and the other on rational civil sentiments. Second, there is the argument that the differences depend upon whether or not there has been a social transformation which has resulted in a strong middle class able to exert liberalising influences. Thirdly, there is a suggestion that the character of nationalism might be related to the issue of whether or not it develops as a reactive protest movement. Each of these arguments need examining. It will be argued that none of them are satisfactory, but that there are aspects of the middle-class argument, and of the reactivity argument, which can be reformulated so as to provide a useful starting point for explaining the liberalism or illiberalism of nationalism, once they have been disconnected from the civic–cultural distinction.

The primordial–civil distinction

The dominant explanation for the authoritarian nature of cultural nationalism, offered in the above works, refers to the 'primordial' character of the community. In Clifford Geertz's formulation, primordial bonds are 'the "givens" – or, more precisely, as culture is inevitably involved in such matters, the assumed "givens" of social existence ... These congruities of blood, speech, custom, and so on are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves' (Geertz 1963: 109). The resultant cultural community is seen as illiberal in three respects, first, in the claim that membership of such a community is ascribed by birth and cannot be changed by individual free will; second, in the claim that such cultural nationalism is inherently collectivist, so as to inhibit expressions of individual liberty; and third, in the claim that this cultural nationalism constitutes an irrational and dominant attachment, from which individuals

must free themselves before they can attain the status of rational beings. Further, such cultural nationalism is frequently depicted as 'excessive' so as to signify claims to the superiority of one's own particular nation, rather than the acceptance of equal nationalisms.

These characterisations of cultural nationalism as illiberal, derive from the idea that the belief in common ancestry (whether or not factually true), generates a particular type of emotional bond between the individual and the community of common kinship. The mechanism of this bond has been variously formulated – as a Jungian 'archetype of the collective unconscious', as an evolutionarily functional biological or psychological device, or as the unchangeable outcome of primary socialisation. But, in all formulations, this ethnic bond is depicted as emotionally powerful and immutable, and in most though not all cases, as involving an ethnocentric belief in the superiority of one's own community. From this perspective, it seems clear that a cultural nationalism based upon a belief that certain linguistic, racial or religious attributes derived from common ancestry, will necessarily be illiberal; both in being closed to those lacking the attributes which display common ancestry, and in subjugating individual will to that of the collectivity.

Such a depiction of ethnicity, and thence of cultural nationalism, has however come under increasing attack in recent years (Eller and Coughlan 1993). Even proponents of primordialism agree that in all actual ethnic communities, the claims to common kinship are not based solely on the objective cultural traits and the real facts of common ancestry, but rather on the power of the myths and symbols of kinship articulated by the modern poets, historians and politicians who seek to mobilise the people around the nationalist ideology. Some cultural nationalisms claiming ethnic roots are more invented than others, but all refer to the belief, rather than the fact, of common kinship.

This means that membership of an ethnically defined cultural community is never completely ascriptive and immutable. Thus Yael Tamir, arguing that cultural nationalism can be liberal, has recently suggested (using Sonia Ghandi as one of her examples) that, 'in reality individuals do assimilate, break cultural ties, and move from one national community to another' (Tamir 1993: 25–32). The extent to which such assimilation into a cultural nation is available to individuals, and the cost which it entails, clearly varies enormously from case to case, but religious conversion, migration, language change, in-marriage and cultural adoption are all possible entry routes, and may be accompanied by acquisition of the appropriate myths of common origin, ancestry, history and destiny.[9] It is frequently suggested, however, that cultural nations which define themselves in terms of race, will be more closed to entry than will those which see language as the primary marker of common ancestry. This may be so in some cases, but it is instructive to remember that claims to distinct biological genealogy, and to clear population boundaries based on such genealogy, are always necessarily

'dubious', so that 'it is an irony of our modern interpretation that such ['biosocial'] groups ... readily appear more autochthonous, more embedded, and so more biologically integral, less mixed up with politics, movement, and modernity. The appearance is largely illusory, vanishing as it is grasped' (Chapman 1993: 24, 29). Instead of postulating that it is racially based nationalisms which might be exclusivist and illiberal, it seems more likely to be those nationalisms which are confronted by threatening others whom they seek to exclude, which might redefine their own nationality (and that of their enemies) in racial terms, on the initiative of their political or intellectual elites. Thus, for example, Chinese cultural nationalism shifted from being one which was open to cultural assimilation, towards being defined in more closed terms based on racial Han identity, in response to contact with distrusted Westerners (Dikotter 1990). Similarly, German cultural nationalism, whose *Volk*-centred identity had been open to cultural assimilation, became closed and illiberal in response to perceived external threats, and accordingly had its identity redefined by political elites as a closed (but politically malleable) identity, based on myths of Aryan race, depicting its greatest enemies also in racial terms.[10]

The suggestion that cultural nationalism is illiberal because of the particularly strong emotional power of cultural identities based on common ancestry, is also open to doubt. There seems to be no *a priori* reason why the myth of common ethnic descent, which lies at the heart of cultural nationalism, should constitute a bond which is any more emotionally powerful or hegemonic, than might be the bonds either to the family at one end of the scale, or to the state and its civic nation at the other. This is because the emotional power of the cultural or ethnic bond has a situational or rational choice basis, and may vary between weak and strong, between being taken for granted or being conscious, depending in part on its utility for the pursuit of situational goals or for defence against situational threats (Ronen 1979). But also, any claim that the bond of cultural nationalism is stronger than that to the civic nation because the former can employ for itself the power of the 'family resemblance' (Horowitz 1985), must recognise that the civic nation similarly clothes itself in the myths and symbols of family.

Perhaps the strongest argument, that cultural nationalism is inherently illiberal, derives from the claim that the ethnic bond is necessarily collectivist. Liah Greenfeld explains this by saying that whereas civic nationalism may refer simply to the idea of a sovereign people (those occupying a denoted territory) without any connotations of collective uniqueness, cultural nationalism necessarily refers to the uniqueness of each community, since it defines them in terms of their particular cultural attributes, and of descent. She argues then that it is this shift of nationalism, from the idea of sovereignty to the idea of uniqueness, which prioritises the collectivity over the individual, and thus facilitates authoritarian assertions of a collective will (Greenfeld 1992).

This contention has been rebutted by recent communitarian and liberal arguments which see individual self-fulfillment as necessarily dependent upon membership of the cultural community; arguments popularised in the language of minority rights and multiculturalism. Such arguments can be traced back to Herder and Fichte who both saw the political autonomy of the cultural nation as the necessary engine for individual freedom. Thus, 'in Fichte's hands ... full self-determination for the individual came to require national self-determination' (Kedourie 1993: 137).[11] In contemporary theories, the argument that individual well-being and dignity depend upon the respect given to the cultural nation, has generated both communitarian claims to group rights of cultural self-preservation, and liberal claims to individual rights of access to cultural resources. But the link between the well-being of the individual and that of the cultural community needs to be treated carefully, since it cannot simply be assumed that individual self-determination and national self-determination are equivalent, parallel or analogous concepts. The work of Will Kymlicka is important here (1989, 1995a). Kymlicka argues that individual liberty can only be attained by individuals who have access to full membership of a vibrant cultural community; and thence that cultural communities which find themselves under threat have the right to national self-determination so as to protect their cultural resources. Kymlicka does however seek to recognise the problem that some cultures are more oppressive of individual liberty than others, and that some group rights might suppress some individual rights. But it is clear from the communitarian–liberal debate on multiculturalism, that cultural nationalism should not be seen as inherently inimical to individual liberty, and might in some cases and in some respects be conducive and indeed essential for it.[12]

Ethnicity derives its power from the belief on the part of individuals that they can fulfil themselves through identification with the mythical kinship community, so that cultural nationalism always portrays itself as the engine of individual liberation and self-determination, and may at least in some cases actually function in this way. Thus cultural nationalism does not in any sense support the idea of an ethnic majority suppressing an ethnic minority. Indeed, the cultural nationalist vision is specifically one which envisions each cultural community as having its own political autonomy. Where suppression of ethnic minorities within a cultural nation does occur, then, we might wish to blame it on the failure to implement the tenets of cultural nationalism, rather than on those tenets themselves. This is not to say that some cultural nationalisms may not portray other cultural nations or ethnic communities as their enemies, and act illiberally towards them. But in this respect they are perhaps no different from some civic nationalisms.

The aspect of civic nationalism which is stressed in the formulations of the civic-cultural dichotomy, is that of a 'rational' and voluntaristic community of equal sovereign citizens. In Alter's words, 'the existence or

otherwise of the nation depend[s] on the will of the individual ... [and comprises] a community of politically aware citizens equal before the law irrespective of their social and economic status, ethnic origin and political beliefs' (1989: 14–15). Such a civic community is, then, depicted as intrinsically liberal in that it derives from, and exists to promote, the will of its individual citizens.

Nevertheless, it is evident to all the proponents of this view that not all civic nations are in fact either liberal or democratic. As noted above, Liah Greenfeld explains that liberal nationalism gives way to illiberal nationalism when the idea of popular sovereignty is distorted by political elites, so that instead of referring to the actual sovereignty of individuals, it becomes reinterpreted to refer only to the theoretical sovereignty of a collective will, so that 'the select few dictate to the masses who must obey'. Both civic and cultural nationalisms may thus be collectivist in this way (Greenfeld 1992: 11).[13] Moreover, the fragility of this particular civic–cultural distinction is reinforced once it is recognised that for the large majority of citizens of the civic nation, there is no choice as to national identity. They are born into their nation, rather than choosing it; and the extent to which they can choose entry into another civic nation may be just as limited by legal citizenship restrictions (even for entry into liberal UK, USA, Australia etc.), as it might be by variable barriers to (and costs of) cultural assimilation in the case of cultural nations.

Civic nationalisms are indeed voluntaristic in that they comprise 'the conscious creations of bodies of people who have elaborated and revised them in order to make sense of their social and political surroundings' (Miller 1995: 6). But civic nations are communities of obligation which demand allegiance, and which must therefore resist voluntaristic renunciations by present members. The present generation can only be tied into the 'voluntaristic' nation if the nation depicts itself as 'a community that ... stretches back and forward across the generations' (1995: 24). Thus voluntaristic civic nationalisms embed their citizens within myths of historical continuity, and thereby become less voluntaristic.

It is indeed intrinsic to civic nationalism that it projects itself forward, since it is, in Greenfeld's words, an 'emergent phenomenon' (1992: 7) defined in terms of the possibilities of its development, which relate to pride in the public culture denoted by territorial statehood and citizenship, and to visions of common destiny. Backward projection is not intrinsic, and the emergent nationalism may reject tradition and make a break with the past (as with the classic US model, and with some versions of contemporary multicultural Australian nationalism, which seek to make a break with a past of shameful racism). But, more usually, 'various stories are concocted [such that] personal characteristics presently seen as constitutive of national identity are projected back on to ... distant forbears', and 'the nation is conceived as a community extended in history and with a distinct character that is natural to its members' (Miller 1995: 34–5).

But it is at this point, when civic nations begin to employ the language of common ancestry and nature ('distant forebears' and 'natural' character) to refer to their pasts, and not just to their futures, that the ideal-type civic nationalism begins to intertwine with the ideal-type cultural nationalism. It is intrinsic to civic nationalism that 'there is no myth of common ancestry' (Keating 1996: 6). So long as the historical myths of the nation celebrate the diversity of the 'concocted stories' and the distinctiveness of their multiple 'forebears' who came together in the nationalist enterprise, then civic nationalism is maintained; but once the stories begin to employ the language of *common* descent – to refer to the national community, albeit colloquially, as a national 'race' descended from founding 'fathers, 'inheriting' common attributes – then the civil culture of civic nationalism is being intertwined with the ethnic culture of cultural nationalism. Miller's attempt to see a clear analytical distinction between a civic nationalism which refers to a historical community comprising 'our forebears [who] have toiled and spilled their blood ... [W]e who are born into it inherit an obligation [to] a community that stretches back and forth across the generations' (Miller 1995: 23), and a cultural nationalism which claims that our fellow nationals must be our 'kith and kin', a view that leads directly to racism' (25), seems, as Andrew Vincent notes, 'highly dubious' (Vincent 1995: 23). All such claims to common ancestry denote cultural nationalism, not civic nationalism; and when predominantly or avowedly civic nationalisms make such claims, we need to recognise that civic nationalism is once again eliding with cultural nationalism. Max Weber suggested that this merging is likely, since 'the concept of "nationality" shares with that of "the people" (*Volk*) – in the ethnic sense – the vague connotation that whatever is felt to be distinctively common must derive from common descent' (Weber in Guibernau 1996: 32). This is the significance of much of Anthony Smith's work. He accepts the distinction between civic and cultural nationalisms, but then shows how the two intertwine in modern nationalisms which seek legitimacy through 'ethnic historicism': the process whereby intellectuals seek to reconcile the need for both legal-rational and religious legitimation, by promoting cultural regeneration movements. Smith shows that the outcome – the character of modern nationalism including its liberalism or illiberalism – may vary enormously, depending upon whether the intellectuals are secular or traditional; whether they are allied with or opposed to the state; whether the assimilationists, reformers or neo-traditionalists are dominant; and how the myths and symbols of community are employed. But these variations do not accord with the civic–cultural distinction, and indeed cut across it.

It has been suggested, thus far, that the distinction between civic and cultural nationalism cannot adequately be explained in terms of any difference between two types of society, the primordial organic community and the voluntaristic civil association. Actual modern nationalisms intertwine the two. But predominantly civic nationalisms which stress common destiny rather than common past (Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore, Nkrumah's

Ghana, Lenin's Russia) can be in various respects illiberal or morally
regressive, just as predominantly cultural nationalisms stressing common
kinship roots might be progressive 'moral innovators', as John Hutchinson
has stressed (Hutchinson 1994).

The middle-class argument

Kohn related the distinction between civic and cultural nationalisms to the
issue of whether social transformation had engendered a strong middle-class
and civil society which could articulate nationalism: or whether these were
absent or weak, in which case nationalism could be articulated only by
'scholars and poets, unsupported by public opinion – which did not exist'
(Kohn 1944: 330–1). The presence of a such a strong middle class has
frequently been seen as the key factor in the development of liberalism and
democracy (as by Lipset, Almond and Verba, and Barrington Moore). But
the anti-liberal potentialities of the middle classes have also been recognised
(by, amongst others, J. S. Mill and Alexis De Tocqueville), and this
potentiality is manifested, for example, in the rise of 'illiberal democracy' in
contemporary Asia (Bell *et al.* 1995: ch. 4). If, as Anthony Smith recognises,
'the commitment of the bourgeoisie to rational versions of nationalism is a
dubious assumption' and if, as both he and John Hutchinson point out,
cultural nationalism seems to occur in countries with significant bourgeoisies
as well as those without (Smith 1991: 81; Hutchinson 1987: 7, note 1), then
the argument begins to look distinctly fragile.

   The ambiguities are particularly evident in the case of German nation-
alism, which plays a pivotal role in the development of the models under
consideration, both as the home of the major theorists,[14] and as their classic
case of central European cultural nationalism. The problem is that this key
case does not conform to the argument that cultural nationalism is most
likely to arise in communities with a weak civil society and a weak middle
class. Meinecke recognised that German nationalism had begun as a liberal
movement of the educated middle class, but had then taken a new
authoritarian direction because of a 'sinister development in the German
bourgeoisie' (Meinecke 1963: 2), which 'closed its mind more and more
against the democratic idea' (p. 31), and thus became vulnerable to statist
manipulation of romantic ideas of a German folk-community (73–4). Erica
Benner, in her recent elucidation of Karl Marx's analysis of German
nationalism, shows that Marx also rejected the view that it was the weakness
of the German middle classes which explained the rise of illiberal
nationalism:

It is important to stress that Marx and Engels regarded the bourgeoisie's prudential
interests *vis-à-vis* the lower classes – and not bourgeois weakness in the face of intra-
class divisions, international conflicts, and traditional ruling authorities – as the

decisive factor explaining the collapse of the liberal-nationalist movement'. (Benner 1995: 112)

Max Weber blamed a German national decline on the 'immaturity' of the bourgeoisie, but by this he meant not their size or economic power, but rather their 'political philistinism' (Weber, in Dahbour and Ishay 1995: 121). Liah Greenfeld's work similarly challenges the theory that it is the middle classes who are the architects of a liberal civic nationalism. Indeed, as she notes, it is only the German case, amongst her European cases, which 'lends support to the view that nationalism is a middle-class phenomenon'.[15] But it is also the German case which is most illiberal. Greenfeld seeks to explain this as an exception in that the architects of German nationalism were middle-class intellectuals who were 'a group apart' (Greenfeld 1992: 293), suspended between the wider middle class and the nobility, so that their commitment to enlightenment rationality was transformed into a Romantic longing for collectivism by their 'dissatisfaction with their personal situation' (351) of 'isolation and exclusion' (p. 346), as 'unsuccessful intellectuals' (345) imbued with an 'oppressive sense of status-inconsistency' (277). But her analysis does not support any claim that it is the weakness of the middle classes or of civil society which were the primary influences on the character of nationalism. The hypothesis which emerges, rather, is perhaps that nationalism will tend to take a liberal form where its major interpeters and articulators are from upwardly mobile class or status groups which no longer feel under threat, but which seek to 'preserv[e] and guarantee … their newly acquired status, human dignity and unhindered ability to be and do what they believed they were entitled to' (56). By the same token, where nationalism is articulated by class or status groups which feel marginalised and insecure, it might take a more collectivist and illiberal form. But such a hypothesis does not quite work, since it leaves unexplained why the nationalist ideologies of one particular class, whether imbued with self-confidence or an inferiority-complex, should resonate with the wider populace, so as to influence the complexion of the national identity. This seems to need further examination.

The reactivity argument

Kohn noted that his 'Central and Eastern European' cultural nationalism 'grew in protest against and in conflict with the existing state pattern', with the aim 'to redraw the political boundaries'. This contrasted with Western civic nationalisms which were 'preceded by the formation of the future national state, or as in the case of the United States, coincided with it' (Kohn 1944: 329). He was not suggesting that nationalism would change its character, from cultural to civic, the moment that autonomous territorial statehood was achieved; but rather that the difference between English and

French nationalisms on the one hand, which he regarded as having had a liberal history, and German nationalism on the other, which he saw as having generated authoritarianism, arose from the latter's 'dependence on the West [which] often wounded the pride of the native educated class, as soon as it began to develop its own nationalism, and ended in an opposition to the "alien" example, and its liberal and rational outlook' (Kohn 1944: 330).

The suggestion seems to be, then, that cultural nationalisms might be illiberal because they develop as reactions against threatening others, and seek to change the existing structure of states. In Kohn's words, cultural nationalism

looked for its justification and its differentiation to the heritage of its own past, and extolled the primitive and ancient depth and peculiarities of its traditions in contrast to Western rationalism and to universal standards ... [It was] dependent upon, and opposed to, influences from without ... [It] lacked self-assurance; its inferiority complex was often compensated by overemphasis and overconfidence' (1994: 330)

Civic nationalisms, on the other hand, are depicted as liberal in that they are not reactive, but emerge rather out of an internally generated process, and function so as to legitimate, rather than to change, existing state structures. In the case of the English model ('God's firstborn'), 'national consciousness was first and foremost the consciousness of one's dignity as an individual ... Thus English nationalism had time to gestate ... and became a powerful force which no longer needed buttresses to exist. It acquired its own momentum. It existed in its own right' (Greenfeld 1992: 87). In the American model, nationalism grew out of, rather than reacted against, its European 'other', 'not a movement of romantic protest against the Western equalitarian and rational attitude ... but the consummation of this western attitude' (Kohn 1944: 291–2). 'Americans could unite men of different pasts, because on the basis of rationalism and individualism they rejected the foundations of the past ... [relying instead on] the suggestions of their own good sense, the knowledge of their own situation, and the lessons of their own experience (324).

But this argument immediately faces the problem that there is a sense in which all nationalisms, whether civic or cultural, are necessarily reactive in that their origin is in assertions of an identity demarcating 'us' from 'them'; the 'them' being either the authoritarian ruler suppressing civil society, or the external enemy threatening societal unity. This applies just as much to nationalisms which are both predominantly civic and predominantly liberal, such as American nationalism which grew out of reactive rebellion against British rule, as it does to predominantly cultural and predominantly illiberal nationalisms, as with the German case.

Perhaps there is a useful insight here, nevertheless, in that the greater the perception of a threatening other, the more likely it is that the society will need to mobilise itself as a collective entity against that threat, and thence to suppress individual liberties so as to promote that mobilisation. Greenfeld

makes the point. She uses the term *ressentiment* primarily to refer to feelings of inferiority, and thence of envy and hatred, in reaction to other nationalisms, and explains that '*Ressentiment* not only makes a nation more aggressive, but represents an unusually powerful stimulant of national sentiment and collective action' (Greenfeld 1992: 488).

But granting this for the moment, it remains unclear as to whether cultural nationalism is necessarily any more reactive in origin than is civic nationalism. It is also not clear that the reactive origin of nationalism necessarily determines its subsequent development, which may become either internally generated or may remain focused on *ressentiment.* In the case of cultural nationalism, there does not seem to be anything intrinsically reactive about the process of building a modern nation on the basis of strong ethnic myths of common origin. Illiberalism might indeed be implied when the reaction to other nationalisms takes the form of ethnocentric assertions of superiority, in that a collectivist closure may be needed so as to maintain the demarcation. But cultural nationalisms with reactive origins might well, as in Herder's vision, recognise the equal right of all cultural communities to similar political autonomy in a brotherhood of nations. Such polycentric nationalisms are likely to develop, as Yael Tamir argues, in liberal directions (Tamir 1993: ch. 4).

The suggestion that civic nationalism will be non-reactive and therefore liberal similarly seems problematical. Indeed, since civic nationalism is portrayed as following from the achievement of statehood, rather than preceding it, it seems vulnerable to illiberalism, in that the period between the acquisition of territorial statehood, and the subsequent mature develop-ment of national consciousness might well be conducive to the type of 'authoritarian-collectivist' shortcut to nationalism noted by Greenfeld, in which the sense of 'us' is generated by political elites, precisely against 'them'. In this way, many of the anti-colonial nationalisms directed against European colonialism have been predominantly civic in character, reactive in origin and illiberal in politics.

A reformulation

It might be possible to explain more effectively the difference between the liberal and illiberal versions of nationalism if we make a connection between Kohn's distinction between nationalisms which arise out of an 'inferiority complex' in relation to an 'alien' other (Kohn 1944: 330) and those which arise out of optimistic 'faith ... in the virtues of life and liberty in the new and unfettered world' (p. 293), and Greenfeld's distinction between those nationalisms which are articulated by classes or status groups feeling marginalised, and those articulated by an upwardly mobile class or status group imbued with self confidence and pride. Such a connection is sometimes implied by Greenfeld,[16] but is more clearly indicated by Peter

Alter in his distinction between what he termed 'Risorgimento' nationalism, and 'Integral' nationalism. Alter explains the rise of Fascist (integral) nationalism in Germany as being based both on the insecurities of the 'old and the new middle classes ... [who] felt their material existence and social status to be under threat. (Alter 1989: 46); and also on the 'crisis of national self-confidence, the putative looming of extraordinary perils from outside, real or perceived threats to the continued existence of the nation' (46). Liberal (Risorgimento) nationalism similarly began as a 'protest movement' (p. 29) but developed in a liberal direction first because it 'accompanie[d] the liberation ... of new social strata' (p. 28), and second, because it articulated an intrinsically self-confident mood of awakening and resurrection which saw a process of emancipation from oppression as already underway or imminent.

Thus instead of arguing as hitherto that cultural nationalisms are intrinsically illiberal, it may be useful to reformulate the argument. Perhaps it is those nationalisms, whether civic or cultural, which are articulated by insecure elites and which constitute *ressentiment*-based reactions against others who are perceived as threatening, which consequently become illiberal. By the same token, perhaps civic and cultural nationalisms which begin as protest movements but do not develop their identity primarily in relation to threatening others, and which are articulated by self-confident elites, are most likely to take a liberal form. Feelings of insecurity on the part both of the articulators of nationalist ideologies, and of their mass audiences, have the potentiality to transform all nationalisms in collectivist and illiberal directions, irrespective of their civic and cultural mix, depending upon how 'the other' and thence 'the self' are depicted.

This reformulation of the argument builds upon the insights of Kohn and Meinecke, but involves a shift of focus. Instead of looking to the character of the community or the incidence of middle classes for the explanation of whether nationalism is liberal or authoritarian, we are led to look both at the ways in which political elites depict the nationalist goals, and the insecurities, threats or enemies which inhibit their attainment; and also at the receptivity of the wider populace to these nationalist visions and threats.

Illiberal nationalism is thus most likely when it is articulated by an insecure class or stratum, and where the wider populace is also experiencing insecurities which make it receptive to the collectivist solutions offered by propagators of nationalism. Political leaders may, in differing circumstances, portray contemporary threats as coming from oppositionist activists or from class unrest, and may thereby be led, as in the case of Singapore, in the direction of depicting ideas of individual rights and liberties as the primary threat to the nationalist vision. They can then assert that the survival and development of the predominantly civic nation depends upon ensuring that the national 'general will' is not weakened or subverted by the partial vested interests of dissident individuals. In those cases where opposition is clustered in particular regions of the country, or amongst

particular cultural groups, then political elites may choose to demonise such opposition, as in contemporary Kenya, by depicting it as ethnic in origin, and denigrating it as sectarianism, communalism or racism. Elsewhere, it may be that political leaders can convince the populace that the threat comes from outside – from other nation-states whose territorial, economic or political claims can be shown to impinge on the national destiny – so that such nationalisms will be 'illiberal' in the sense that they assert the superiority of the national 'us' over the alien 'other', either in xenophobic attacks on specific nation-states, or in more generalised denigrations of foreign influences as communist, western values, Asian menace, etc. Political elites who wish to close off their society against external influences or employ scapegoat strategies against minorities might, as previously noted, find it useful to depict the threats in racial terms, and to popularise their own myths of common history in racial terms. The influence of such depictions upon national consciousness partly depends, no doubt, both on the culture of the society, and on the actual situational challenges, and thence the types of insecurities facing the society; but political elites do have flexibility in the portrayal of enemies, and this gives a fluidity to the character of nationalism, and in particular to the liberalism or illiberalism of nationalist politics.

Thus civic nationalism may develop in either liberal or illiberal directions depending upon how effectively its visions of civic community are employed by the mobilising elites to resolve societal aspirations or fears. And cultural nationalism should be seen as neither intrinsically the 'progressive' engine of minority and indigenous ethnic rights, nor intrinsically 'regressive' and oppressive of the individual, as its recent manifestations in the Balkans might seem to indicate. As John Hutchinson showed in his study of cultural nationalism, the character of Irish nationalism changed remarkably in three different 'revivals', from Anglo-Irish and liberal to Gaelic and populist, depending upon which intellectuals were mobilising it; which threats and dangers they stressed; and which symbols – religious or secular – they employed (Hutchinson 1987).

Conclusions

The distinction between the two ideal-type models of nationalism, civic and cultural, is indeed a significant one, distinguishing visions of community which are rooted in perceptions of common ancestry, from those which focus on perceptions of the continuous integration of individuals of diverse backgrounds into one new family home, with its distinctive institutions and common destiny. This distinction is central to an understanding of the political tensions and dynamics of modern nationalisms, and, in particular, to the debate as to how states should be managing their ethnic minorities. But the focus here has been upon unpacking the sets of assumptions which

have been associated with the two terms in relation to their allegedly intrinsic liberalism or illiberalism. The view that civic nationalism is liberal because it refers to a voluntaristic society, while cultural nationalism is illiberal because it refers to an ascriptive community, has been criticised, since both forms of nationalism seek to tie the component individuals into communities of obligation which are depicted as persisting through time, and both have the capacity to prioritise either the collectivity or the individual. The view that civic nationalism is liberal because of the presence of a strong middle class was also criticised, on the ground that illiberal middle classes are not unusual. Finally, the view that cultural nationalism tends to be illiberal because its origins are reactive, was criticised on the grounds that the link between cultural nationalism and reactive nationalism seems more likely to be a contingent one. It was then argued, however, that nationalisms which are both articulated by a marginalised or insecure class or status group, and which appeal to a widespread *ressentiment*-based reaction to a threatening other, are indeed more likely to be illiberal than are nationalisms which are internally generated and articulated by secure elites. But the nature and extent of this illiberalism should be seen as a political variable. The conclusion is that the difference between liberal and illiberal manifestations of nationalism cannot be explained by reference to the distinction between its civic and cultural forms. Nationalism does have two ideological faces, civic and cultural; but its political character is surely protean rather than Janus-faced.

Notes

1 See, for example, Alter (1989: 37): 'integral nationalism ... is encountered under various titles. Radical; extreme; militant; aggressive-expansionist; derivative; right-wing; reactionary; excessive.' Guibernau refers to cultural nationalism as 'Romantic nationalism' (Guibernau 1996: 55–7).

2 The term 'political' is used for example by John Hutchinson, and 'social', by James Kellas. 'State' is the term used by Meinecke.

3 The term 'ethnicity' is used here to refer to a sense of identity based on myths of common ancestry. The term 'cultural nationalism' refers to the belief that a community claiming common ancestry should constitute a sovereign people, or at least a people with significant political autonomy. It is possible for a cultural nation to include within itself several ethnic communities, with the latter being portrayed as 'sub-families' within the former, as with the sub-groups of the Han Chinese.

4 On Herder (1744–1803), see Meinecke (1972: ch. 9). On Fichte (1762–1814), see Kedourie (1993) and Greenfeld (1992). On Weber, see Guibernau (1996).

5 Smith first suggested this distinction in 1971: 'All nationalist movements, then, can be placed along a continuum. At one end, we have the "*Ethnic*" movements with a high degree of cultural distinctiveness; at the other, the "*Territorial*" movements bound only by aspirations and a common territorial-cum-political base' (Smith 1971: 218).

6 Though it is in fact this aspect of Kohn's argument which he had criticised (Smith 1991: 81).

7 The development of these issues is outside the focus of this article, but they are more fully discussed in a forthcoming book on *Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Nation-State*.

8 This is not to suggest that the theorists previously referred to do not examine these issues, merely that these are not elucidated by this particular aspect of their conceptualisations of nationalism. Thus Greenfeld, for example, does seek to explain the complexities of French nationalism by showing how the two models of nationalism have interwoven, but it is indicative that her study actually shows the interweaving of three stages of French nationalism, none of which correspond with the models.

9 During research amongst the Ewe community in Ghana, conducted in the 1970s, it was interesting to hear elders who accepted that they were factually of Akan origin recite the Ewe myths of ancestry and migration as their own. They had assimilated into the language and culture of their new home, and it was only polite (and politic) to also take on their myths of origin.

10 This suggested argument is pursued in the discussion of the reactivity argument below, and thereafter.

11 It must be said however, that Fichte's conception of individual freedom involved a Rousseauean vision in which the will of the individual is fused with the will of the nation. Fichte's notions of German superiority ('only the German ... is capable of real and rational love for his nation') has similarly illiberal connotations (Kedourie 1993: 61, 77–8).

12 The major issues of this debate are examined in Kymlicka (1995b).

13 Greenfeld relates the character of nationalism to variations in the type of tensions which emerged in hierarchical societies, and the type of 'images of social order' imagined by emergent elites (1992: 490). She thus recognises the element of elite choice, but sees their interpretations of nationalism, whether liberal or collectivist, primarily as the articulations of particular cultural traditions.

14 Including Herder, Fichte, Meinecke, Kohn (German Czech) and Alter.

15 She argues that the architects of the classic case of a liberal civic nationalism, that of England, were the new aristocracy. The growing middle classes played a role subsequently, as its main propagators (Greenfeld 1992: ch. 1).

16 She uses the term consistently to refer to reaction to other nationalisms, but locates that reaction primarily in the groups who articulate the national consciousness. She never uses the term to refer to the frustrated status expectations of elite groups in the absence of any externally directed resentments (Greenfeld 1992).

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