

2) Literature review: Theories of Nationalist Development

If we are to talk of the growth of national consciousness then we must take a quick *tour d'horizon* of the major theories used to explain this phenomenon. There are three major approaches, primordialism and perennialism, modernism and ethno-symbolism.

2.1) Primordialism and Perennialism

Primordialism is the idea that nationality is a natural part of human beings and that nationality has existed since time immemorial. This view makes little difference between “nations” and ethnic groups. Nations are, according to the theory, primordial entities that are identifiable through history through their distinctive way of life, attachment to a particular territorial homeland and their striving for political autonomy.

Umut Ozkirimli identifies a number of recurrent themes in nationalist narratives. These are¹⁰:

- The antiquity of the nation—the nation has existed for thousands of years, often being dated back to some mythical founder.
- The theme of the golden age—the nation has had a previous cultural peak, usually to be compared with the primitive development or political and economic chaos of its neighbors/rivals.
- The superiority of the national culture—the culture and civilization of the nations are superior to any other. This often goes with the idea that the people of the nation are an elect, chosen by some divine power for some great task;
- Periods of recess—the nation has been through a period of decay, perhaps economic and moral bankruptcy during which its people have been acting out Goff character;
- The coming of the national hero—a messianic figure which brings this age of decadence to an end, revivifies the culture with a new moral—and usually military—force and restores it to its rightful position as the envy and moral exemplar of other nations.

¹⁰ Ozkirimli, Umut (2000) *Theories of Nationalism*, New York: St Martin's Press, p67-68

Not all these themes are present in every case, and in some cases one theme might occur more than once. For example, English nationalist narratives provide

- The antiquity of Britain, its founding around 1000BC by the mythical Brutus, a grandson or great grandson of the Trojan hero Aeneas, as recoded by the 9th century monk Nennius in his *History of Britain* and Geoffrey of Monmouth in his 12th century work, *History of the Kings of Britain*;
- A golden age, in the pre-modern era often seen as the reign of King Arthur—a semi-mythical figure thought to flourish around 550AD, or the Saxon period (circa 700-1066), seen as the origin of representative politics and the common law; in the modern era, the reign of Elizabeth the First (1558-1603), incorporating the establishment of the Church of England and the defeat of counter-reformation challenges to English sovereignty;
- The superiority of the national culture: “Confidence in British superiority over non-European peoples was deeply entrenched. Superiority was not, however seen as based immutably on immutable racial difference. A Christian view of the world’s history which assumed a common origin for all humanity in God’s creation was not widely challenged. Differences in the attainments of human societies were attributed to a whole series of environmental and historical causes. Some continued to progress while others had made little progress or stagnated. In the right hands these circumstances could be alleviated. It was increasingly seen as the duty of the specially favored British to create such circumstances.”¹¹
- Periods of recess: in the pre-modern era, the early Norman period (1066 to circa 1200), the reign of King John (1199-1216), the Wars of the Roses (1455-87). In the modern era, the reign of James II, which culminated in the revolution of 1688.
- While Britain has mythical heroes—King Arthur—it has few messianic figures of renewal. Partly this is simply because of its history or being unconquered by foreign armies since 1066. It does however, have military figures who are accorded a form of “savior of the nation” status, Sir Francis Drake and Admiral Horatio Nelson in particular.

¹¹ Louis, William Roger, Marshall, P. J., Low, Elaine M., & Canny, Nicholas P. (2001) *The Eighteenth Century* (Vol. 2), Oxford: Oxford University Press, p593.

The same kind of list could be provided for many nations; Ozkirimli himself provides one for Turkey. And looking at a Hroch-style analysis of the way European national movements have been articulated, the recurrence of these elements is clear.

Primordialism suffers from a number of, I think, insurmountable weaknesses. One of these is that if ethnic ties, resulting from language, religion, kinship and the like, are “given,” there is no real explanation of how these come about, why some groups of affinity should form a “nation” and others not, and, most importantly for this study, no room for the modification of ethnicities or the creation of new ones.

And yet primordialism is useful, not because it tells us much about how national consciousness comes about, but because it does, in fact, represent the way national consciousness is presented in most nationalist movements.

2.2) Modernism

Modernist accounts of nationalism suggest that it is, in fact, an intellectual construct of comparatively recent origin. Modernists claim that until around 1800, almost no-one had more than local loyalties. Ernest Gellner, looking mainly at Western Europe, argues that nations are a by-product of industrialization. Elie Kedourie connects nationalism with ideas of the Enlightenment, with the French revolution and the birth of the centralized French state. Benedict Anderson places the roots of the notion of “nation” at the end of the 18th century, and evolved out of the reduction of privileged access to particular script languages (e.g. Latin), the movement to abolish the ideas of divine rule and monarchy, as well as the emergence of the printing press under a system of capitalism. Anderson contends that the European nation-state came into being as the response to nationalism in the European Diaspora beyond the ocean, in colonies, namely in both Americas. Anderson believes that it was discrimination against Creoles on the part of the metropolitan entity in these territories that created separatist sentiment when political rights were challenged.

The weaknesses of modernism is that it quite simply fails to take into account historical facts. It is hard to see the Flemings’ struggle against the French in the 14th century, or the Dutch fight against the Spanish in the 16th century as anything other than wars of national liberation. While the phrase might have been lacking, the concept appears not to have been. Englishmen had a quite sharply defined identity frequently displayed in reference to themselves during the 100 Years’ War (1337-1453) and the plays

of Shakespeare are full of nationalist sentiment.

If modernist accounts, by confining themselves to a narrow modern period and relying on social and economic developments specific to that time to account for the growth of nationalism, are therefore inadequate, just as with the weaknesses of primordialism, it does not mean that nothing of value might be gleaned from their study. A number of elements of such theories are extremely useful in explaining, if not the origin of national consciousness, at least the mechanism by which it spreads.

For example, modernists are often criticized for stressing the role of elite manipulation of mass consciousness, while paying insufficient attention to the hopes, needs, interests and longings of ordinary people. While this might be true it does draw out attention to the role that elite play in consciousness raising.

Similarly modernism tend to concentrate on the “manufactured “ nature of nationalism, claiming that such manufacture only became possible in a favorable conjunction of technological, social and economic conditions. Once again this fails to explain displays of national sentiment before this conjunction—how, for example, the largely illiterate English could develop a national consciousness in the 14th century before the invention of Anderson’s “print capitalism.” Yet some of the elements of national consciousness *are* manufactured, as Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger’s extraordinarily interesting collection *The Invention of Tradition*¹² shows. In particular, Hugh Trevor Roper’s contribution, “The Invention of tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland”¹³ details how almost all of the symbols with which Scottish nationalism adorns itself today—the wearing of the kilt, the use of clan tartans, the bagpipes as Scotland’s signature musical instrument—were developed after the union with England in 1707, many of them considerably later. The version of the Scottish past, grounded in “Highland” culture adopted by modern Scottish nationalism, is interesting in two ways. First, it is an invention of the period 1750-1850, much of it as the result of the intervention of English cultural and political influences (the kilt for example was invented by an English iron-producer and popularized through the Scots regiments in the British—which at the time meant overwhelmingly English—army). Secondly, this invented

¹² Hobsbawm and Ranger *op. cit.* See note 9.

¹³ *Ibid.* p15-41.

tradition has been projected backwards, as representative of the way Highland culture was in the pre-modern period. Take, for example the 1995 Mel Gibson film *Braveheart*, which had a significant influence on the contemporary rise of Scottish nationalism. This movie, whatever the weaknesses of its plot, is fascinating in its use of anachronism.

The film fails to portray accurately either the period or its people. The historical inaccuracies draw on the worst myths of “tartanism,” a disease against which Scottish historians wage an unceasing battle. The Lowland Scots who made up the majority of Wallace’s followers did not wear kilts; woad was last used by the Picts at least five hundred years before Wallace lived, *Braveheart* portrays the thirteenth-century Scots as “noble savages,” an image more appropriate to eighteenth and nineteenth-century views of the Highlanders than to thirteenth-century Lowland peasants. Wallace himself, who was far more than just a warrior, is portrayed in almost exclusively military terms.¹⁴

As a “patriotic” film about Scotland, it uses to the full elements of the invented tradition, such as the kilt, tartans and the bagpipes, in a historical drama set at a time when these elements simply did not exist¹⁵. While those involved in making the movie gave the usual dubious interviews about their attempts to be historically accurate, that fact is that, without inclusion of the elements of the invented tradition, the film’s uplifting patriotic message would probably have been lost to the majority of its audience.

It should never be thought that an invented tradition lacks force because of the lack of some form of authenticity, as Hobsbawm’s book shows.

Of the main kinds of explanation of the evolution of nationalist sentiment, primordialism errs because it fails to explain adequately the evolution of new nations and changes in their identity over time. It does however present a picture of what most non-specialists understand national consciousness to be and how it comes about.

Modernism, on the other hand, presenting national consciousness as a complete construct, the grip of which on our imaginations is mostly as a result of educational

¹⁴ Ewan, Elizabeth (1995) “‘Braveheart’,” *American Historical Review*, 100, (4): p1219–21.

¹⁵ Incidentally, it also depicts “Scots” warriors as painting their faces with woad. This practice might have been common 1,000 years before the period in which *Braveheart* is set, but was not used at that time. Face-painting is, however, used by contemporary football fans as a form of identity display.

processes, is good at explaining how national consciousness can be manipulated—especially in the sense of a “cultural rebirth” and the popularizing of an elite interest in a neglected, or moribund cultural heritage, but poor at explaining why such projects can so easily obtain mass support.

Benedict Anderson for example, talks of the importance of print capitalism and the growth of vernacular usage among elites, but makes the mistake of calling these necessary conditions for national consciousness formation, where in fact they seem only to be contingent facilitators. Print capitalism cannot, for example, explain the growth of English national consciousness during the pre-print era. Yet to deny that there was a distinctively English national consciousness displayed during the 100 Year’s War—as Anderson would be obliged to do—is to put the integrity of a theory before recoded historical record.

2.3) Ethno-symbolism

Ethno-symbolism attempts to find a compromise between these two positions, stressing both the ethnic origins of national consciousness but also the way this can be developed or manipulated. Anthony D. Smith, one of the principle theorists of ethno-symbolism, claims, surely uncontroversially, that national identities are collective identities. He then goes on to argue that:

Certain varieties of these multiple identities have always exerted a special power. These are the specifically cultural types of collective identity. Examples of such collective cultural identities include castes, ethnic communities, religious denominations and nations.

These basis cultural elements—symbols, values, memories, myths and traditions—embody certain recurrent dimensions of cultural community and identity. The most important of these are:

- A sense of stability and rootedness of the particular cultural unit of a population;
- A sense of difference, of distinctiveness and separateness of that cultural unit;
- A sense of continuity with previous generations of the cultural unit through memories myths and traditions;

- A sense of destiny and mission, of shared hopes, and aspirations of that cultural community.

These dimensions of community and identity are embodied in various cultural elements—the symbols, values, myths, memories and traditions of the community and the artifacts that express them. Memories of past sacrifices, of victories and defeats, of ancient deeds of heroism—as Renan suggested—express our sense of continuity with previous generations. Traditions—including customs, law codes, genealogies and rituals, impart a sense of stability and rootedness to the community. Symbols such as flags, emblems, anthems, costume, special foods and sacred objects give expression to our sense of difference and distinctiveness of the community. Values of collective courage honor, wisdom, compassion and justice confer a sense of wisdom and mission on the community; while myths of origins liberation, the golden age and chosenness link the sacred past to a sense of collective destiny.¹⁶

The broadest kind of collective cultural identity Smith calls an *ethnie*, or “ethnic community.” He seeks to distinguish this from the more usual “ethnic group” because there are some ethnic groups which lack a sense of community or kinship. An *ethnie* is a “definite historic culture community”. The main features are:

- A collective name, which symbolizes the uniqueness of the community and demarcates it from others;
- A myth of common origins, which relates all the members to a common ancestor, birthplace and foundation;
- A shared ethno-history—that is the shared memories of successive generations of a culture-community;
- One or more cultural characteristic which can serve to demarcate members from non members, such as color, language, customs and institutions;
- An association with a historic homeland or territory;

¹⁶ Smith, Anthony D. (1995) “The Formations of National Identity,” in Henry Harris (Ed.), *Identity*, (pp. 129-153). Oxford: Oxford University Press: p131-132.

- A sense of solidarity on the part of at least a significant segment of the cultural community.¹⁷

The ethnic, says Smith is a named cultural community whose members have a myth of common origins, shared memories and cultural characteristics, a link with a homeland and a measure of solidarity.

Smith claims that there three kind so ethnic community, ethno-linguistic, with a common vernacular tongue which sets the community off from its neighbors and where language becomes the most salient element in the definition of ethnicity, ethno-religious, where communities define themselves primarily in religious terms—the classic exemplars of this being the Jews and the Sikhs, but such definitions have also been used by the Serbs and the Irish in the modern era, and ethno-political communities, communities that have been defined largely be historical memories and political traditions—the most obvious modern example of the Swiss Confederation, although history yields a number of others such as republican Rome or Pharonic Egypt.

Smith goes on to say that the world is full of ethnic communities, many of which lay claim to being nations and seek statehood. Can we, he asks admit their claim. If we admit there is a Basque or Kurdish ethnic identity, should we see this as a national identity? What indeed is the difference?

Smith regards nations as a specific subset of ethnic communities. While they must display the six characteristics mentioned above, they must also show:

- A definite historical territory or homeland (and not just an association with it)
- A common economy, with territorial mobility throughout,
- a shared public mass education-based culture
- Common legal rights and duties for all members

Smith defines the nation as a “named community, occupying a recognized homeland and possessing shared myths and memories, a mass public culture, a common economy and uniform legal rights and duties.”¹⁸

Smith says the emergence of a national identity is the result of a number of

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p133.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p135.

different processes that develop at different speeds. These include growing territorialization, the growth a mass public culture, economic centralization, and legal standardization, as well as the cultivation of historical myths and memories drawn from earlier ethnies. National Identity, he warns, “has no fixed quantity of elements, no static essence, but an often fluid set of processes and dimensions which over time create the sense of a national community or nation.” Smith also points out that the nations is not the same as the state—the latter referring to a “set of public autonomous institutions with a legitimate monopoly of coercion and extraction in a given territory.”

There are therefore three elements in play, here. The ethnie, the nation, and the state. And it is worth adding that these elements might not develop, necessarily, or at all.

England once again provides an interesting example. From the 5th century AD the Anglo-Saxon invaders of Britain slowly formed an ethnie. Certainly by the time the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was written sometime in the 9th century, the writers clearly thought of them as an ethnic group distinct from the Celts that the invaders had pushed back into Wales and from the Vikings who were then ravaging the English coast. Yet the ethnie remained divided into seven kingdoms until the 10th century. In the 10th and 11th century, the unification of these kingdoms under Anglo-Saxon and Danish rulers, brought territorial unification and some legal standardization, thus the beginning of an English state. The Norman conquest in 1066 put England in the hands of a new, foreign, political and cultural elite. This elite, for the next two hundred years or so spoke a dialect of French among themselves, and the center of their political interests were often their territories in France, rather than English affairs. Yet the Normans imposed a far greater territorial, legal and economic unification than the Saxons had ever done. What would prevent us from talking about the English state in Norman England is the lack of any sense of a common ethnic community between the Norman rulers and their Saxon subjects, given the degree to which this sense of community grows out of myth and aspiration we might say it was a case of “same bed, different dreams.” The Normans were a transplanted elite who ran England very much like a colony, a colony in which they themselves were resident and which, as endless wars in France diminished their territorial holdings across the English channel, became more important to them than their “home” country—in some ways like the Kuomintang’s relationship with Taiwan.

Wars with Scotland, Wars with France, the comparative peace of life in England—which ensured that however extensive a baron’s possessions might be in France, his

children were likely to be raised in England—created perhaps in the late 13th century a spark of an English national consciousness among the elite, an identification with England rather than France, the hybrid Saxon-Norman culture that had evolved in the previous 200 years, and this was spread downwards as a way of motivating English armies in pursuit of the goals of that elite.

The Saxons had an ethnē, a prototype state, but no nation. The Normans had a state, but they had no single cohesive ethnic community. Only when the Normans began to identify with England, did an English nation start to evolve.¹⁹

Finally, after talking of the conditions necessary for nation formation, Smith produces another five-item list he call stages in the formation of nations. This, he says, “while no evolutionary law, holds, with certain variations, for the great majority of nations.” These stages are:

1. Ethnic origins, the coalescence of clans and tribes, settlements and villages into wider cultural and political networks. Out of this period comes myths of ancestry, migration and liberation and, above all, foundation myths.
2. This is succeeded by a period of ethnic consolidation associated with the flowering of ethnic culture, the performance of military exploits and the presence of sages and saints and heroes.
3. There follows a third period of development and divisions, often seen as a decline. The old order ossifies around the upper class, the community ossifies and decays and is sometimes conquered or exiled.
4. This is where nationalism, the desire to reawaken or regenerate the community finds fertile soil. Nationalist revolutions reconstruct the past as that of a pre-existent nation to be roused from its long sleep and cleansed of alien disfigurements. But nationalist myth represents a break with the past even as it recasts it. Tied to a vision of the future, it seeks to impart a sense of destiny and mission to the people. Its use of

¹⁹ It is probably not accidental that the beginning of this identification should coincide with the evolution of English into a literary language—the oldest poem in a recognizable form of English, “Middle English” as it is known, is “Summer is icummin in” written around 1260.

the past is therefore selective, singling out foundation myths and golden ages and omitting unworthy episodes and embarrassing interpretations. In some case nationalists will reconstruct a sketchy past or even invent episodes.

5. Finally, there is the period of the modern nation. Here the emphasis falls on the provision of a national constitution and the institution of a regular political system the development of a modern economy and legal order and the emancipation and provision of welfare for all classes and for women.²⁰

Smith says nations are primarily built on ethnies, but these can be “lateral” or “vertical.” In a lateral ethnie, the ethnic culture is largely confined to an upper class and the boundaries of the community are ragged, in the “vertical” type different classes share the ethnic culture and the common fund of myths, traditions and memories and boundaries tend to be more clearly demarcated. There is however a third type of ethnie, the emigrant colonist ethnie—examples of which include the early U.S., British Canada, Australia, South Africa, and Argentina.

Here a part of an old ethnic community emigrates overseas to form a new ethnie, and then admits or is deluged with new immigrants of older ethnies. The result is a political community, one based initially on a core and still strategic ethnic group but now composed of many migrant part ethnies as well.

At last we begin to see something of relevance to Taiwan. Smith says the emigrant colonist approach is actually a variant of the vertical ethnie, but the main agency of transformation is utopian settlers who identify with their new environment and preach fulfillment in a promised land fashioned by their labors, often at the expense of indigenous peoples. The new environment encourages in the immigrant colonizers a sense of separate culture and destiny. In a footnote, Smith acknowledges that, while this is largely true of Anglo-Saxon settlement abroad, Latin America, for example, shows a somewhat different situation. The emigrants were not fleeing or being expelled from Europe, and intermarried extensively with indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, the Creole elites became too distanced from their “home” countries, and eventually sought a new

²⁰ Smith, *op. cit.* p141-2.

collective destiny based on a *mestizo* culture.

2.4) Theoretical Consistency

None of these theories of national formation is entirely adequate. Primordialism lacks the ability to explain the emergence of new nations. Modernism fails to explain the emergence of nationalism at times earlier than the industrial revolution. And ethno-symbolism, which I personally find generally the most plausible theory, does not really explain the development of nationalism in multi-ethnic states such as Switzerland, or the evolution among the German cultural community of two nations.

I do not think that the inadequacy of these theoretical underpinnings is a problem for this thesis. National consciousness formation is so diverse that it is perhaps unrealistic to think that any one theory can explain all cases. Different elements of different theories have great explanatory power, and if I appear to draw on both ethno-symbolist and modernist elements in what follows, my justification is that that explanatory power justifies the element's use, as long as it doesn't plainly contradict any other element of the explanation.

To a certain degree, I think the major differences between modernism and ethno-symbolism are questions about timelines that can be easily redressed, and the degree to which the symbols of national identity evolve out of historical experience that is resonant among a certain population—the ethno-symbolist approach—or are consciously selected by an elite as material from which to weave a national consciousness-building narrative. It is an argument over the degree to which, as Hobsbawm might put it, traditions are “invented.” Given the importance that Renan puts on the role of history, this does not mean, of course that the historical events are themselves invented, although in some cases this certainly does happen. Rather it is to do with the interpretation of that event. Take, for example, the English folk hero Robin Hood. A bandit, he is traditionally seen an agent of redistributive justice (“took from the rich to give to the poor”). Whether this interpretation evolved from some ancient historical fact or was a deliberate creation we can probably never know. A modernist might say that someone, somewhere, for reasons now lost to us, cast the narrative in this fashion. An ethno-symbolist might argue that the evolution of the legend was the result of historical fragments merging with the hopes and aspirations of the society in which the story developed (“champion of the downtrodden” legends evolving out of the hopes for social justice of an oppressed class or people).

Basically this comes down to a question of the degree to which one thinks a narrative evolves and the degree to which it is authored. The distinction is useful, in as much as it awakens us to the different possibilities latent in a narrative's creation. But I am not sure that that it is important, indeed it might be detrimental, to insist, in general, on one view over another.

That does not mean that in individual cases the question can be overlooked. And here I will state that for settler nations a modernist stance toward their identity formation is hard to avoid. This is simply because the kind of heritage that ethno-symbolism depends on, is lacking for settler nations. All traditions must be "invented." In the case, for example, of the United States, there is a very clear paper trail we can examine to discover the origin of a "received interpretation" of iconic events in that country's past, indeed we can follow in close detail how these incidents became iconic in the first place.²¹

Looking at both Australia and Taiwan from a modernist position, it will be my contention that neither country has ever evolved an adequate narrative of its history and culture to act as a foundation for a national consciousness construction.

My position is similar to that of Duncan S.A. Bell:

Despite their wildly different interpretations of the genesis of nationalism, the three main approaches can be seen to interweave questions of narrativity and representation. The construction of stories about identity, origins, history and community is crucial in all of them. Representational practices are thus inherently bound up in the process of national identity formation: to mould a national identity—a sense of unity with others belonging to the same nation—it is necessary to have an understanding of oneself as located in a temporally extended narrative, and in order to be able to locate one as such, nationalist discourse must be able to represent the unfolding of time in such a way that the nation assumes a privileged

²¹ For example, while the legend of George Washington being unable to tell a lie and admitting to his father the chopped down a cherry tree is even famous beyond American shores, and is taken for a true story of the virtue of America's founding father, historians also know that Washington never told this tale himself and the only evidence for it is from an ex-parson turned bookseller, Mason Locke Weems. The tale is, in fact, most likely Weem's invention. Yet, that we know this quite clearly, has *not* stopped the story being used as a moral example for and by generations of Americans.

and valorized role.²²

2.5) The Need for Roots

One thing that all theories stress is the importance for national consciousness of cultural background—the symbolism in ethno-symbolism. That it can be manipulated as modernists claim is not in dispute. But not even modernists claim it can be invented out of nothing. Elias Lönnrot's composition of the Kalevala, the Finnish national epic (published in 1836) was a milestone in the raising of Finnish national consciousness—between 1809 and 1917 Finland was a Grand Duchy of Russia—but it is significant here partly because:

- Lönnrot *did not* invent it—the legends out of which he composed it were traditional and the stories in the poem known to most of his audience; but
- Lönnrot *did* invent it—the Kalevala as we know it today has not been handed down through time like the Homeric poems, but was written by a Finnish doctor in the 1830s. Only about a third comes word for word from the folk poems that Lönnrot collected while about 20 percent is entirely his own composition. The order of the elements of the epic and the editing are all entirely his work. It is a fascinating example of the “invention of tradition,” but an example that reminds us that the more successful invention needs to have genuine cultural roots.

It is interesting to speculate on whether the Ossian poems would have had more weight on Scottish nationalism, the weight their author James Macpherson certainly intended them to have, had Macpherson admitted to their authorship and not tried to pass them off as lost ancient masterpieces. The forgery fatally tainted their cultural power, not a mistake made by Lady Augusta Gregory, whose retelling of the Cuchulain myths played an important role in making Irish nationalism intellectually respectable—the Celtic revival—in the late 19th century.

In all theories of nationalism, the importance of a shared history and shared culture plays a central role. Smith, quoted above talks about the centrality of “the symbols, values, myths, memories and traditions of the community ... Memories of past sacrifices,

²² Bell, Duncan S. A. (2003) “Mythsapes: Memory, Mythology, and National Identity,” *British Journal of Sociology* 54, (1): p69.

of victories and defeats, of ancient deeds of heroism ... law codes, genealogies and rituals ... flags, emblems, anthems, costume, special foods and sacred objects ... myths of origins, liberation, the golden age and chosenness” which “link the sacred past to a sense of collective destiny.” This echoes Ernst Renan in his seminal “What is a Nation” where he says:

A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form ... The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavors, sacrifice, and devotion. Of all cults, that of the ancestors is the most legitimate, for the ancestors have made us what we are. A heroic past, great men, glory (by which I understand genuine glory), this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea... More valuable by far than common customs posts and frontiers conforming to strategic ideas is the fact of sharing, in the past, a glorious heritage and regrets.²³

2.6) The Problem for Settler Nations

Renan says, “a heroic past, great men, glory ... this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea.” And now we come to one of the problems for a settler society with a limited history. Where are these elements to be found? Not “lost in the mists of history” since history is short and often quite well recorded.

They could perhaps be found in myths of foundation. Certainly this is the way the American “Pilgrim Fathers” story works—little attention ever being paid to the fact that most of those who sailed with the *Mayflower* were not religious exiles, while those who were, were exiled because their intolerant proselytizing Puritanism was too extreme for the English. The *Mayflower* myth was useful to the emergent United States. As Smith says: “For all their divisions, a sense of providential destiny in America sustained the settlers in a new environment.” What it clearly also does is mask the fact that ancestry of

²³ Renan, *op. cit.*, p7.

the majority of the white population of the 13 colonies in 1776 lay not among persecuted religious zealots but among the convicts shipped from England and Ireland during the hundred year long history of penal transportation to the New World²⁴, a role that devolved upon Australia as a direct result of the American revolution. As Renan points out: “Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation.”²⁵

But what about places such as Australia, where the first settlers were the first convicts? What is one to make of a history such as that? Or Taiwan, where the large influx of settlers arrived at the behest of alien commercial interests, and who left little record of their experiences to valorize?

The United States are also fortunate in that the revolution of 1776 has also provided a great “liberation myth” as Smith would put it, or one of Renan’s heroic tales which provide social capital.

That the version of the revolution taught in American schools owes more to its centrality in American creation myth than historical detail is, not only not surprising, but is, perhaps a testament not only to that centrality but also to the way that myths work, the way historical facts are sifted and edited and embroidered, rather as Lönnrot assembled his Finnish folk poems, into a sacred narrative belonging to the “nation” and central to its understanding of itself.

It is useful to look at the discrepancy between the American experience and those of Taiwan and Australia, though we will look at these two in greater depth later. But it’s also interesting to look at the discrepancy between what we might call the “received myth,” i.e. the narrative as commonly understood by non-expert Americans, and the

²⁴ Convicts were transported to the American colonies from 1615-1776. This grew out of the barbarity of England criminal code whereby the death penalty was assigned to all felonies. This was too brutal even for those times and the principle of benefit of clergy began to be misused. Originally the idea was that a person in holy orders could not be tried by the civil courts, but by religious courts. By the 14th century this benefit was often extended to anyone who could read and by the 16th century was often used for those who could not as a way of saving those who didn’t deserve such a harsh punishment from the gallows. Since the religious courts usually refused to prosecute, in effect this meant that felons could go unpunished, unless their crimes were reduced to a misdemeanour for which they could be whipped. This was obviously unsatisfactory so from 1615 began the practice of sentencing felons to death and then pardoning them if they agreed to go to the American colonies. The practice was more vigorously used after 1660 and the length of transportation was fixed at 14 years. The eponymous heroine of *Moll Flanders*, one of the first novels in English, published in 1722, suffers this fate.

²⁵ Renan, *op.cit.* p2.

historical reality. The received version involves a community of sanctified by its origins as a haven from religious persecution, valorized for the moral basis of its society (in comparison with a decadent and cynical metropolis) which defended its “natural rights” against the arbitrary exactions of a foreign monarch.²⁶ As Niall Ferguson writes: The [revolutionary] war is at the very heart of American’s conception of themselves; the idea of a struggle for liberty against an evil empire is the country’s creation myth.²⁷

The truth behind the myth is more complex and more interesting but, as narrative to forge a national identity, more inconvenient. The rebels of 1775—the rebellion really started with the colonies refusal to accept the power of the House of Commons in London to legislate for them, a year earlier than the declaration of independence—had, many of them, fought vigorously on the British side during the French and Indian War (1754-1763), the very first shot of which was fired by a young major in the Virginia Regiment, one George Washington. While there was friction between the governments of the colonies and London, and between the colonial militias and the British army, these were generally about the demarcation of authority and the length of service of the militiamen. There was no indication at the end of the war that only 12 years later the colonists would see themselves as the founders of a new nation, as Fred Anderson’s authoritative history of the period makes clear.

Practically speaking the Anglo-American colonists understood the imperial relationship as a combination of trade partnership and military alliance superintended by a protector-king.²⁸

It was not British power that could preserve the empire to which [George] Washington and those like him were devoted. In truth the security of the empire depended on intangible qualities that the vigorous exercise of power could only destroy; faith in the justice and protection of the Crown, hope for a better future, and love of English liberty.²⁹

²⁶ Once again the films of Mel Gibson provide an interesting exposition, in this case *The Patriot* (2000).

²⁷ Ferguson, Niall (2003) *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*, London: Allen Lane, p89.

²⁸ Anderson, Fred (2000) *The Crucible of War*, London: Faber and Faber, p743.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p741.

George Washington himself was “a man so Anglophile that he ordered his suits from London and left it up to the tailor to choose the fabric color and cut according to the latest fashion.”³⁰

In the 1760 Benjamin Franklin wrote anonymous pamphlet in which he speculated that by 1860 there would be more British subjects in the colonies than there were in Britain itself. These are not the thoughts of a man itching to cast off the yoke of a tyranny.

So what changed? Anderson says that way to keep the empire was to leave the Americans alone. But the British government, in dire fiscal trouble, after the end of the Seven Years War in 1763, could not do this. The empire cost it money and it thought those that benefited from it should pay. And those benefitting were, primarily, the American colonists. Fergusson points out:

There is good reason to think that by the 1770s New Englanders were about the wealthiest people in the world. Per capita income in New England was at least equal to that in the United Kingdom and was more evenly distributed. The New Englanders had bigger farms, bigger families, and better education than the Old Englanders. And crucially, they paid far less tax. In 1763, the average Briton paid 26 shillings a year in taxes. The equivalent figure for a Massachusetts taxpayer was one shilling.

Basically, the British government tried to tax the colonies, both for the upkeep of their own defense and to pay for the war out of which they had done so well. But the colonists deeply resented this because they had no representation in the English parliament. These days American school children might be led to believe that the principle of “no taxation without representation” was an invention of the “American” colonists, but, while this is true of the slogan (invented by the Reverend Jonathan Mayhew in a sermon in Boston in 1750), this is not true of the principle itself. In fact the principle of parliamentary assent being needed for the executive branch (originally the king) king to levy new taxes goes back at least to the “Model Parliament” of 1295. The imposition of taxes without the consent of Parliament was at the heart of the issues which led to the English civil wars 1642-49, and the Bill of Rights of 1689, regarded since its passing as one of the foundation stones of British liberty, specifically outlawed the levying of taxes without the

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p740.

approval of parliament.

There was nothing illegal about the taxes that Britain sought to impose of the colonies. They were after all, passed by the parliament at Westminster. The problem was that “Parliament” as named in the Bill of Rights meant more than the Westminster institution, it meant the whole apparatus of government by consent of the governed that had been laid out by the philosopher John Locke, and was seen as the very inspiration of the 1688 “Glorious Revolution” the seal on the success of which the Bill of Right was supposed to be.

To most Englishmen, on both sides of the Atlantic, the approval of parliament meant more than the approval of Westminster, it means the approval of an institution in which people such as themselves, who had the right to select their representatives to this body, had a stake.³¹

In this sense, Westminster’s attempt to tax the American colonists was seen in London as reasonable—as the beneficiaries of the war and defense spending in the colonies they should help share the burden of the expenditure—and legal—Westminster has the power which it exercised according to the Constitution, including the Bill of Rights.

In the colonies, London’s attempt to impose taxes was seen as an intolerable affront to an Englishman’s fundamental right to have a say in how he is governed and especially how he is taxed, and the colonists looked to the Bill of Rights to support them.

Thus London looked to the letter of the Bill of Rights, while the colonies looked to its spirit, distilled as that was from the political chaos and wars between the king and parliament in the 17th century on the very subject of levying taxes without the consent of the taxed.

The point about this for our study is that the origin of the American Revolution lay not in a burgeoning American national consciousness. The American Revolution was formed by very British, in fact English, sensibilities. While it might have been *the* formative event for the formation of an American national identity, the fact remains that the building blocks of that identity were very much imported from England. It was

³¹ It should of course be noted that Britain at this time was far from being a democracy in the modern sense of the word. Parliament represented the interests of the merchant class, the lower classes not qualifying for votes.

essentially English principles, English liberties, for which the colonists were fighting.

The cleavage that led to separation was based on shared ideas, ideas formed in the mother country by centuries of turbulence which passed on to the colonists were held to be, in way, sacred, sacred to the degree that those who would violate them in London were not just seen as political deficient, but morally unfit.³²

What this shows is that, whereas a traumatic event might be quick to produce a national consciousness, the roots of that consciousness must come from somewhere and for immigrant communities with little assimilation with locals—such as the Americans were—that tends to be the country, and the culture from which those immigrants come. I think this point is important, being in a new place does not make a new people. A new people can be forged though trauma, as happened in the United States. But they can still remain beholden to their origins for their ideas and their culture.

In the case of the American colonies, the trauma of the war partly involved a struggle of identity, self-identity, in which the colonists had to see themselves as Americans, which meant jettisoning loyalties—to the Crown and to Britain—that many of them had been taught were sacred obligations. Many, in fact, could not make this spiritual journey, and moved to Canada to preserve their Britishness. After the war, those who remained mythologized events, constructing a new narrative projecting the idea of “Americans” that came out of the war backwards to account for the roots of the war.

But what happens when there is no trauma with which to effect this identity change? How does the process of national consciousness formation work when the trauma is not present and how does the inevitable influence of “old country attachments” come into play?

³² An opinion shared by a large proportion of the British themselves.