FORGING THE SWISS NATION, 1760-1939:

POPULAR MEMORY,

PATRIOTIC INVENTION,

AND COMPETING CONCEPTIONS OF NATIONHOOD

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the reproduction and transformation of Swiss national identity in the period from the late eighteenth century to the beginning of World War II. To this end, the major part of the thesis focuses on four relatively short time frames, all of which were characterised by heightened concern with questions of national identity: a) the period 1760-1798, which witnessed the rise of an early, elite-centred Swiss national movement, b) the civil war of 1847 and the subsequent founding of the modern Swiss nation-state in 1848, c) the late nineteenth century (1880-1900), when Swiss nationalism entered its mass phase, and d) the 1930s (1933-1939), when authoritarian volkish nationalism from Germany challenged Switzerland's poly-ethnic conception of nationhood.

Two questions guide my analysis in the substantive part. First, to what extent can nationhood be invented or fabricated? And second, how are 'civic' and 'organic' conceptions of nationhood related to each other in this process of national reconstruction, and what causes shifts in the balance between the two?

A final part (part III) addresses these question by way of comparison. The first comparative chapter contrasts Switzerland with Germany, arguing that there was more scope for inventing nationhood in the German than in the Swiss case during the last third of the nineteenth century. I attribute this difference to the fact that in Switzerland a popular ethno-symbolic memory posed cultural constraints on the activities of national ideologues, unlike in Germany, where pre-modern national myths and symbols never developed a constraining capacity.

The second comparative chapter examines the role of landscape symbolism in the construction of national identity in Switzerland, the United States and Canada during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. I attribute the prominence of geographical determinism in the national discourse of these three societies to the divergence between the nationalist ideal of ethno-cultural homogeneity and their polyethnic composition.

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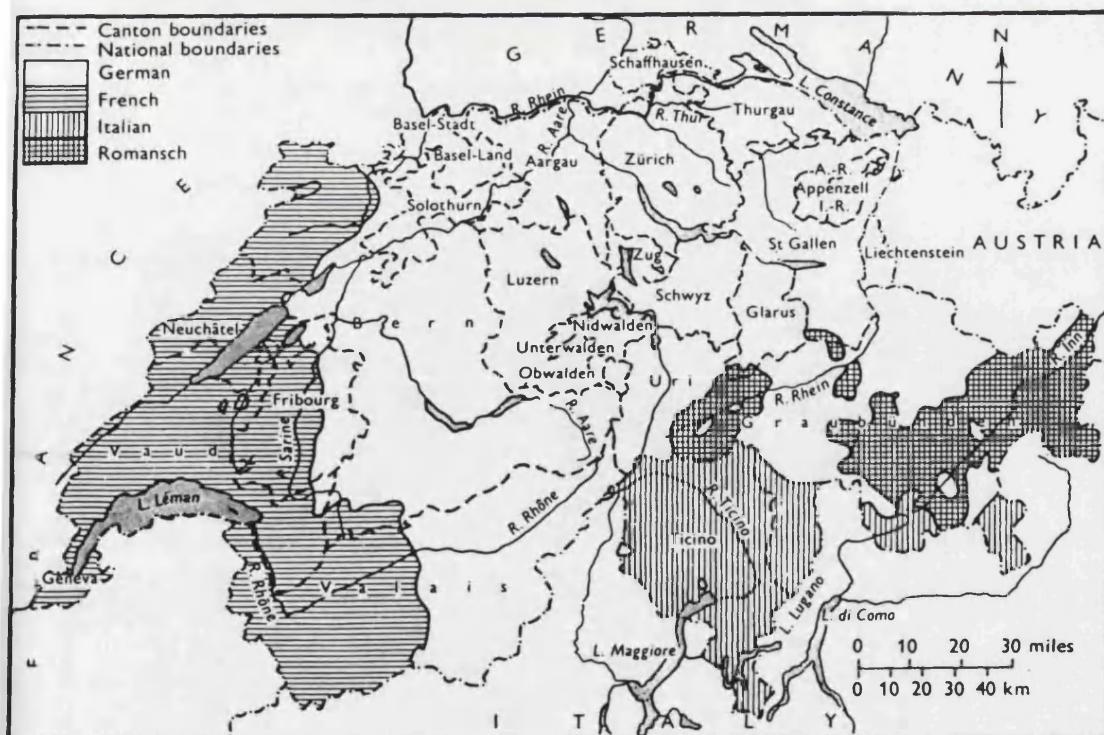
Chronological Table

1291	Alliance between the forest cantons of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden
1315	Battle of Morgarten
1353	Expansion of the Confederation from three to eight cantons (& Lucerne, Zurich, Glarus, Zug, Bern)
1386	Battle of Sempach
1499-1500	War between the Swiss Confederation and the German Reich, which results in the de facto independence of the latter from the Reich.
1500	Basle and Schaffhausen join the Swiss Confederation
1515	Defeat at Marignano
1525	Reformation in Zurich
1531	*Kappeler Krieg* (first religious war)
1648	Treaty of Westphalia results in the formal independence of the Swiss Confederation from the German Reich.
1653	Swiss Peasant War. *Three peasant leaders, dressed up as Wilhelm Tell, assassinate a high representative of the Lucerne authorities*
1729	Albrecht von Haller, *Die Alpen*
1762	Founding of the *Helvetische Gesellschaft*
1767	Johann C. Lavater, *Schweizerlieder*
1798	French invasion; abolition of the feudal tax
1798-1803	Helvetic Republic
1813-1815	Congress of Vienna: Switzerland's neutrality is recognised
1815	Geneva becomes Swiss canton
1815-1830	Restauration period
1824	First National Shooting Festival in Aarau
1830/31	Regeneration: introduction of liberal constitutions in numerous cantons
1832	First National Festival of the Gymnasts
1842	First Swiss Folk Song Festival
1844/45	*Freischarenzüge:* two (unsuccessful)attempts by groups of radical volunteers to overthrow the pro-Jesuit Lucerne government
1845	Founding of the *Sonderbund* alliance of the Catholic cantons
1847	*Sonderbund* War between Catholic and Protestant cantons; Jesuits are expelled from Switzerland
1848	Founding of the Swiss nation-state; Bern becomes capital
1856	Conflict with Prussia over Neuchâtel

1861	Beginning of the Democratic Movement
1866	Jews are given equal rights
1872	Founding of the University of Geneva
1873	First revision of the Constitution
1882	Opening of the railway line through the Gotthard
1883	First National Exhibition in Zurich
1889	*Wohlgemuth-Handel:* political crisis between Switzerland and the monarchical powers
1890	Founding of the Swiss Social Democratic Party
1891	First Catholic-Conservative Federal Councillor
1891	August 1st becomes National Holiday
1894	Founding of the Swiss Liberal-Democratic Party
1895	Tell monument in Altorf
1933	*Frontenfrühling:* proliferation of right-wing movements promoting a radical agenda of national renewal
1935	Social Democrats explicitly recognise the official military defence Programme
1935	Initiative proposing a radical revision of the Constitution (*Totalrevisionsinitiative*) is rejected by an overwhelming majority of votes
1938	Government publishes its *Kulturbotschaft*
1939	National Exhibition in Zurich

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My parents have offered me moral support throughout. I am certain that they secretly doubted at times where this enterprise would lead to, but they kept such thoughts to themselves. For that, too, I am grateful to them. My greatest debt, however, is to my wife, Sonja, who has helped me in more ways than I can say. Her persistent encouragement has made me stay on course despite recurrent moments of despair.

Introduction

When I first conveyed my interest in the topic of Swiss national identity to a friend whose own research bore some relation to mine, he understood my enthusiasm for the topic but did not share my conceptual concerns. I told him that I felt like Fernand Braudel who wrote, in the introduction of his *The Identity of France:* 'The word "identity" appealed to me, but has not ceased to torment me over the years.'[1] At the root of my concern was this: while in everyday usage the word 'identity', and especially 'national identity', tended to be typically associated with continuity, with sameness over time, my own experience told me that what was most interesting about the phenomenon of 'national identity' was its process-like character.

In this connection, a number of questions sprang to mind. What provokes public struggles over the definition of nationhood? Why do changes in definitions of national identities occur? What are the driving forces behind such transformations: politics, culture, or international developments? What changes if definitions of nationhood change, and what remains constant, and why? What is the relationship between nationalism and national identity? Is the way in which national identities are publicly defined determined by nationalist doctrine? To what degree do antecedent cultural structures (comprising specific values and communal narratives) shape the reconstruction of national identities over time? These, I told my friend, were some of the questions I would like to address in my research. How, I asked him, was it possible to get to grips analytically with such an elusive social phenomenon? In an attempt to alleviate my concerns, my friend replied in a straightforward manner: 'National identity is what's there. What undergoes change is nationalism'.

My friend's answer did not help me out of my conceptual quandary. As subsequent discussions with people whose opinion I greatly respect have made me aware, however, his was the majority view with regard to the issue of 'national identity'. Even among social scientists, those who treat national identity as a stable and continuous phenomenon rather than a process are in the majority; not that the colleagues and teachers I consulted were not interested in social and cultural

transformations. In fact, most of them were historical sociologists whose research centred, in one way or another, on the question of social change. What their reactions to my thorny questions seemed to indicate, however, was that I was dealing with a socio-cultural phenomenon that lent itself more to detailed description than to sophisticated explanation. A glance at the two grand theories of nationalism, those of Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson, was not encouraging either. Both treat national identities as structurally determined: as a function of modern industrialisation (Gellner), or as tantamount to that new cognitive style – nationalism – brought upon us by the combined effect of religious decline and the rise of print capitalism (Anderson).

But can we take national identities for granted in this way? Is it really possible to regard them as givens, as the natural companions of the modern nation-state? I do not deny that structural conditions and state institutions partly explain why the nation persists as a cognitive and emotive category. What I increasingly felt, however, was that the reproduction of nationhood depends to a considerable degree on the active contribution of social actors. While there are numerous studies that describe and classify the features that constitute national identity in a particular empirical case, few of these works examine the mechanisms that determine how national identities are formed and change over time.[2]

These issues formed the point of departure to my present research. This dissertation examines the formation and transformation of Swiss nationhood in the period from the late eighteenth century to the beginning of World War II. My case study is Switzerland and my concern with the reconstruction of national identity in the face of a changing social context provides the guiding thread of my thesis. Specifically, this thesis addresses three questions:

- when does the nation become a subject of public debate, and what are the driving forces behind the reconstruction of nationhood?

- to what extent can nationhood be invented or constructed during periods of heightened concern about national identity?

- how are 'civic' and 'organic' conceptions of nationhood related to each other in this process of national reconstruction, and how do shifts in the balance between them occur?

Switzerland, it seems to me, is a particularly interesting case for an examination of these questions. First, because Swiss nationalism does not fit easily with either of Europe's ideal-type models of nation formation – France, where nationalism radiated outwards from a powerful centre, and Germany, where princely particularism for centuries impeded a similar development. Consequently, neither a 'top-down' nor a 'bottom-up' approach, if applied in isolation, is likely to produce good results in the Swiss case. Hence, Swiss nationhood was formed, as it were, from both 'below' and 'above', as opposed to the English and French case, where nation-building occurred through cultural pervasion and bureaucratic incorporation by a powerful aristocratic elite.[3] From the fifteenth century onwards, an ethno-symbolic memory, comprising a repertoire of myths, symbols, and narratives evolved in tandem with a set of Confederate institutions. This pre-existing memory simultaneously furnished and posed constraints on the ideological projects of the late-eighteenth century patriots and the nation-building elites that followed their example in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This specific constellation renders Switzerland an ideal case for an examination of how modern nationhood is forged and reconstructed at the interface of popular historical memory and elite-driven projects of national invention.

The second factor that makes Switzerland an intriguing case for the sort of analysis to be conducted here concerns the polyethnic composition of the Swiss nation-state. When modern nationalism began to spread across Europe from the turn of the eighteenth century (and particularly with the rise of ethno-linguistic nationalism from around the 1870s), Switzerland's national elite faced a particularly challenging task. Unlike their counterparts in linguistically homogenous countries such as Germany, France or England, Swiss would-be nation-builders could not refer to shared ethnicity (in the sense of shared ethnic descent or linguistic affiliation) to bolster their claims. Yet the national ideology they constructed out of this quandary was not purely 'political' or 'civic'. (Although the concept of civic exceptionalism, as will become evident in the substantive chapters of this thesis, has been part and parcel of the country's national self-definition ever since the rise of an early Swiss nationalism in the late eighteenth century.) Rather, they responded to this challenge by constructing a

Swiss national identity that combined civic and organic elements. More specifically, they claimed that the Swiss nation was both a voluntary and a natural community – an exemplar of a *Willensnation* yet also a true *Wesensgemeinschaft*. Hence, rather than the absence of popular nationalism (as some commentators have claimed), it is the fact that Swiss claims to nationhood have had to be realised in a polyethnic environment that renders Switzerland distinct from most other cases.

These ideas are reinforced in the two chapters of the final part (part III) by way of systematic comparison. Contrasting Switzerland and Germany, the penultimate chapter highlights the impact of collective memory on modern nation formation. Using Canada and the United States as comparative examples, the final chapter examines the significance of geographical determinism for the construction of nationhood in polyethnic societies.

Method and plan

The basic method used in this study is what Ragin described as the 'qualitative comparative method'.[4] In concrete terms, I shall apply both a diachronic and a synchronic comparative strategy. The major part of the dissertation (part II) contains a diachronic comparison of different historical periods relevant to the reconstruction of Swiss nationhood between the late eighteenth century and the Second World War (chapters 3 to 6). Here the objective is to explore national identity as a process and account for its reproduction and transformation over time. The concluding part (part III) compares the Swiss case with Canada and Germany respectively. This cross-cultural comparison will allow me to discuss the general relevance of my arguments and findings and to develop new theoretical distinctions and historical types.

My analysis of Swiss national identity draws upon both primary and secondary documents. The former include newspapers, pamphlets, official reports and debates, sermons, speeches, histories, poems and folk songs, magazines and periodicals, records of ceremonies and national festivals, and minutes of national movements. Hence, for

each of the periods considered, I examined a variety of sources that would reflect different social and political orientations and conceptions of nationhood. The major criterion for the selection of the sources was whether they could contribute to an explanation of national identity as a public phenomenon.

Let me emphasise at this point what this study is not. To begin with, it is not a general history of Switzerland, although historical events and developments play a vital part in the overall argument.[5] Nor is it a representative account of Swiss national identity. I have severe doubts whether such an aim could be accomplished at all. Switzerland may be a small country, but the great diversity of its political culture precludes a reasonable answer to the question 'what does Swiss national identity consist of?'[6] In addition, the demand for a comprehensive picture of Swiss national identity is in itself predicated on the static notion of national identity that I have criticised in this chapter: national identity conceived in terms of a content or relatively stable state of mind, rather than as a process of reconstruction.

Nor do I pretend to have given equal weight to all the linguistic groups that constitute the Swiss population. The bulk of sources that I have considered for this study pertain to the German-speaking majority. (Nevertheless, attitudes of French-speaking Swiss will resurface prominently throughout the text, while the Italian-speaking public has received less attention.) As much as I regret this, it poses no problem for my analysis because, with very few exceptions, Switzerland's polyethnic structure was a cognitive norm that structured the thoughts of those who participated in the public discourse of national identity irrespective of their linguistic affiliation. This dissertation focuses on how different social actors redefined nationhood at particular historical junctures, and why they embraced some definitions rather than others; it does not aim to describe how nationhood was conceived in each and every corner of Swiss society. Accordingly, the analytical focus is on politics and culture, and how they interact in the reconstruction of national identity, while economic variables are given less systematic attention.

The period under consideration spans the time from the rise of Swiss nationalism in the late eighteenth century to when it reached its greatest intensity in the

late 1930s. The decades after the Second World War have not been included in the systematic analysis because of my belief that during the post-war era Swiss nationhood underwent a sea change. Faced with economic globalisation and European integration, various sections of society have begun to express dissatisfaction with what is increasingly perceived as the country's conservatism and its aloofness from what is happening in the rest of the world. Particularly since the 1970s, therefore, traditional features of Swiss national identity – particularly its marked historicism and geographical determinism – have come under fire. A further thesis would be required to investigate the causes of this transformation.[7]

The dissertation is in three parts and eight chapters. In the first chapter of **Part I** (chapter 1), the thesis is situated within the theoretical literature on nationalism and the argument, outlined in the introduction, is further elaborated. Chapter 2 traces the emergence, between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, of an ethno-symbolic memory composed of a repertoire of symbols, myths, and values.

Part II, comprising four chronological chapters (chapters 3 to 6), focuses on the reconstruction of Swiss nationhood in the period from the late eighteenth century to the beginning of the Second World War. Chapter 3 shows how the ethno-symbolic memory that had emerged by the eighteenth century shaped the discourse of the Helvetic patriots between the 1760s and the turn of the century, and how they subsequently fused its ('civic' and 'organic') components into a cohesive national narrative that would supply the basic building blocks for future national discourse. Chapters 4 to 6 concentrate on three relatively short time frames, all of which were characterised by heightened concern with questions of national identity: a) the revolutionary transformations of 1798 and 1848, respectively, which were accompanied by fierce struggles over the definition of Swiss nationhood; b) the late nineteenth century (1880-1900), when a conjuncture of domestic and geopolitical developments led to a massive increase in nation-centred activity; and c) the 1930s (1933-1939), when authoritarian volkish nationalism from Germany challenged Switzerland's polyethnic conception of nationhood.

Part III addresses two problems by way of comparison. Chapter 7 looks at nation-formation in Switzerland and Germany in the nineteenth century to determine the impact of collective memory and historical events on the construction of nationhood in each case. I show that each of the two societies followed a distinct road to nation-formation: German nationhood can be understood as a product of nineteenth-century events, while Swiss nationhood was decisively shaped by antecedent symbolic structures. Chapter 8 examines the construction of national identity in Switzerland and Canada during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, highlighting how ideological entrepreneurs used landscape symbolism to foster an organic definition of nationhood. I attribute this to the divergence between the nationalist ideal of cultural homogeneity and the polyethnic composition of the two national-states in question. The conclusion summarises the results and considers, in the form of a suggestive postscript, the development of Swiss nationhood in the post-war period.

Notes

[1] Braudel (1989: 23).

[2] For recent historical studies that support this view, see Linda Colley's (1992) study on the formation of British identity between 1707 and 1837, and Michael Kammen's (1991) near encyclopaedic book on the United States.

[3] On lateral and demotic ethnies, see Smith (1986: ch. 6).

[4] Ragin (1987: x).

[5] The best such work in the English language is Steinberg (1996). For a highly informative recent account of modern Swiss history, see also the chapters in *Eine kleine Geschichte der Schweiz* (Hettling et. al. 1998).

[6] As Jonathan Steinberg (1996: 1) has put it in what is still the best general history of Switzerland in the English language: 'The sheer variety of Swiss life ... makes it hard to write a coherent account of the place'.

[7] There are remarkably few accounts of post-war Swiss identity. For an analysis of the anti-immigration movement of the 1960s and 1970s, see Romano (1999). The contributions in Imhof et. al. (1999) address various topics relevant to this issue. See also Zimmer (forthcoming).

PART I:

THEORY AND HISTORY

CHAPTER ONE

The Reconstruction of Swiss National Identity: A Framework for Analysis

The nation can have its BEING only at the price
of being forever in search of itself.

Fernand Braudel[1]

Although national identity has become fashionable as a term in both public and scholarly debate, little effort has gone into its development as an analytical concept. While identity theories have sprung up thick and fast, there is no theory of national identity.[2] On the other hand, most existing theories of nationalism tend either to pay scant attention to the question of national identity, or else take it for granted as a social phenomenon. National identities, so a prevalent view has it, are the cultural by-products of modern nationalism. In a recent essay, anthropologist Richard Handler has even recommended that the term should be abandoned altogether because of its origins in nationalist discourse.[3] Instead, I propose to develop national identity as an analytical tool that can help us to get a better grasp of the dynamics of modern nationhood.

Given my dissatisfaction with how existing theories of nationalism address the question of national identity, the main purpose of this chapter is to introduce and develop a framework and method that represents an alternative to existing approaches. I shall argue that national identity ought to be conceived of as a process that is shaped by both political and cultural factors, with special attention devoted to the interaction of domestic and international contexts. As far as the Swiss case is concerned, I consider the interaction of three sets of conditions to be of particular importance: competition between domestic political actors, inter-nationalist competition engendered by the search for international recognition as a nation-state (which is further reinforced by particular historical events), and symbolic resources.

Furthermore, I shall call into question the usefulness of classifying nation-states by their adherence to a 'civic' or 'ethnic' conception of nationhood. Instead, I shall demonstrate that both civic and organic understandings of what constitutes nations furnish definitions of national identity to varying degrees, and that the balance may shift in one or the other direction depending on time and circumstance. This will lead to a revision of the classical model in favour of an approach that distinguishes between two boundary mechanisms ('civic' and 'organic') and four symbolic resources (political values/institutions; history; culture; geography). Yet before I develop my analytical framework along these lines, I shall present, in the form of a typological outline, some of the most prominent scholarly attempts at coming to terms with the idiosyncrasies of Swiss nationhood.

Explaining Swiss exceptionalism: variations on a theme

If Switzerland has repeatedly attracted the curiosity (but rarely the systematic attention) of nationalism scholars, this is indeed because its very existence flies in the face of nationalism's core doctrine: namely, that nations are communities of shared culture, preferably in the form of a common language. Nationalism scholars, sometimes because they followed this doctrine, and more often because there was little empirical evidence that suggested otherwise, tended to agree that ethnic homogeneity – although there are only very few ethnically 'pure' nation-states in the world, monolingual societies have usually claimed that they are ethnically homogenous – was a significant factor for the long-term survival of modern nation-states. Thus Switzerland, according to this logic, constitutes an anomaly. The Swiss should never have become a 'nation' in the first place, bound together by an overarching 'national identity'. If they did somehow manage to acquire one, then it should have dissolved long ago. But it hasn't. Why? (Switzerland's linguistic composition between 1888 and 1980 is reflected in Tab. 1-1.)

Tab. 1-1: Swiss resident population according to linguistic affiliation (native tongue) in o/oo

	German	French	Italian	Rhaeto-Romansch	Other
1888	714	218	53	13	2
1910	691	211	81	11	6
1920	709	213	61	11	6
1930	719	204	60	11	6
1941	726	207	52	11	4
1980	650	184	98	8	60

Source: a) Statistisches Jahrbuch, 1945, Tab. S. 41; b) Weibel (1986: 222).

Perhaps the most convincing attempt at solving this puzzle derives from those political scientists who have focused on a combination of systemic (consociationalism) and structural (cross-cutting cleavages) factors. Building on Lijphart's theory of consociationalism, for example, McGarry and O'Leary discuss 'cantonisation' as a conflict-regulating device that has produced good results in Switzerland in particular: 'Under cantonisation the relevant multiethnic state is subjected to a micro-partition in which political power is devolved to (conceivably very small) political units, each of which enjoys mini-sovereignty.'[4] The theory of cross-cutting cleavages, on the other hand, rather than focusing on the role of deliberately created political mechanisms, pays attention to the pattern of cultural division within a society. Its central premise is that where several cultural features (particularly religion and language) coincide the potential for conflict is enhanced. Hence, unlike, for instance, in Belgium, religious and linguistic boundaries in Switzerland are not coterminous. This, along with the small size of the country, facilitated the emergence of cross-cutting loyalties between Swiss elites of different linguistic and religious affiliation. This is indeed the mechanism that operated in all the major conflicts which immediately preceded the founding of the Swiss nation-state in 1848 (most notably, this applies to the Helvetic Revolution of 1798, and the civil war of 1847).[5] The combined effect of consociationalism and the cross-cutting of cultural cleavages, in tandem with the constitutional recognition of

three (now four) languages, has helped to reduce the potential for ethnic conflict in Switzerland to the present day.

Another group of scholars has attributed the success of the Swiss model to effective social communication and collective learning. Karl W. Deutsch, the founder of this school of thought, has argued that the emergence of the Swiss nation-state can be best understood as a unique process of political integration in which several cultural groups participated over a period of several centuries. This process had produced a stock of common institutions, especially communalism, a popular army, and political neutrality. These gradually came to form the basis of an overarching Swiss national identity. What enhanced Switzerland's capacity for political integration was its leading role in the modernisation process. By the turn of the nineteenth century, Deutsch argues, Switzerland had overtaken most other European countries in three crucial areas: the popular education of its citizens, economic innovation, and social communication (embodied in the high density of its newspapers).[6]

Unlike Deutsch, whose theory operates with an abstract concept of social communication, Benedict Anderson stresses the role of shared language for the rise of nationalism. Consequently, the Swiss example poses a considerable challenge to the validity of his argument that modern nations are essentially communities of shared language. In marked contrast to Deutsch, Anderson maintains that Switzerland's relative economic and cultural backwardness made it a late-comer to nationalism, and that this enabled its survival as a nation in spite of its polyethnic composition. According to Anderson, then, Switzerland, with no nationalism worthy of the name before 1900, is 'part of the "last wave"', 'not much older than Burmese or Indonesian nationalism'. This, for Anderson, explains why Switzerland could do without a single shared language. As he explains: 'In other words, [Swiss nationalism] arose in that period of world history in which the nation was becoming an international norm and in which it was possible to 'model' nationness in a much more complex way than hitherto.'[7]

I find both accounts unconvincing. Deutsch's explanation, it seems to me, tends to equate political with national integration: why should large-scale communication in

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itself produce an overarching national identity within a polyethnic polity? Anderson's central argument, on the other hand, that modern nationalism came late to Switzerland (while it certainly serves the purpose of corroborating the core argument that nations are essentially language communities) does arguably not correspond with the historical facts: republican nationalism gathered momentum from the 1830s onwards, realising its aspirations in 1848 with the founding of the Swiss nation-state. If anything, the success of the republican movement in the first half of the nineteenth century helped to withstand the centrifugal forces that resulted from European ethnic nationalism. Thus I would argue precisely the opposite of Anderson: if no popular Swiss nationalism had emerged until the late nineteenth century – the period, that is, in which ethno-linguistic nationalism was on the rise all over Europe – the probability of Switzerland disintegrating would have been enhanced rather than reduced. If any historical period gave cause for concern to those European polities which, for structural reasons, were bound to construct nationhood along more complex (that is, non-linguistic) lines, it was the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[8]

Finally, a fourth group of scholars, taking a more idealistic stance, has seen in the specific nature of Swiss nationalism the major reason why Switzerland managed to survive as a polyethnic nation-state. Swiss nationalism, they have maintained, has been political rather than ethnic in content and orientation. Hans Kohn has been the paradigmatic proponent of this view. In his essay, *Nationalism and Liberty: the Swiss example* (first published in 1955 in German), he treats Switzerland as an example of the 'Western', liberal variety of nationalism. According to Kohn, then, Swiss national identity is similar in nature to that of England in its emphasis on liberal-democratic institutions rather than ethno-cultural features such as language or putative ethnic descent. Kohn emphasises that the Swiss constitution, as it came into being in 1848, constitutes a synthesis of American and French role models. Hence what Kohn and those who take a similar view are saying is that Switzerland is a voluntary nation, a *Willensnation,* and that this peculiar ideology, this particular brand of nationalism, explains both its formation and survival as a polyethnic nation-state.[9] Although I do not deny the significance of the civic component for Swiss nationhood, I do not agree with

Kohn's observation. Ever since its inception in the late eighteenth century, two conceptions of nationhood furnished the formation and subsequent reconstruction of Swiss national identity: one 'civic', the other 'organic'. For the reproduction of Swiss nationhood over time, both were of equal significance. I shall discuss the relevance of the distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism to my own analysis further below.

Moving beyond Swiss exceptionalism: outline of the argument

The conclusion that I draw from the foregoing assessment is this: if there ever was a puzzle to be solved about Switzerland's existence, it has been solved decades ago. The theories of consociationalism and of cross-cutting cleavages have provided the most convincing answers to the question of why Switzerland succeeded as a multiethnic nation-state. McGarry and O'Leary, writing in the early 1990s, have merely fine-tuned an argument that has been formulated previously by scholars such as André Siegfried and Arendt Lijphart. Karl W. Deutsch's model accounts for political rather than national (and thus inevitably also ethno-cultural) integration, while Benedict Anderson's view of Switzerland as a later-comer to nationalism does not stand up when confronted with historical evidence (see chapters 2 and 3 in particular).

Anderson's account in particular suggests that more research needs to go into the genesis of Swiss nationalism, and in the way in which national identity was defined at different stages of Swiss history. Hence, rather than continuing the narrative of Swiss exceptionalism, this thesis takes a fresh look at Swiss nationhood, placing it in the context of recent theoretical developments in nationalism research. More specifically, it intends to contribute to two theoretical debates. The first concerns the relationship between 'collective memory' and 'elite invention' in the reproduction of national identity: between antecedent cultural patterns and elite-induced political activity. The second is the issue of civic and ethnic forms of nationhood and their impact on nationalism and nation formation. The outcome of this endeavour, I hope, will be mutual enrichment: first, a more differentiated understanding of how national identity is

reconstructed at the interface of culture and politics; and, second, a new, theoretically informed account of Swiss national identity.[10]

On the substantive level, the focus of the thesis is on the formation and transformation of Swiss nationhood in the period from the late eighteenth century to the beginning of Second World War. The objective is to identify the driving forces behind the reconstruction of nationhood, and to examine the impact of a changing social context on the definition of national identity. While the major case study is Switzerland, with four relatively short time frames receiving particular attention, the two thematic chapters of the final part use Germany (chatper 7) and the United States and Canada (chapter 8) as comparative examples to explore specific questions.

Collective memory versus patriotic invention

When, how, and to what extent do cultural traditions influence social actors? These questions have received two distinct answers. For some scholars, 'culture' – whether in the form of shared codes, received values, or inherited ways of life – is considered the major determinant of human affairs and the glue of any social order. In sharp contrast to this view, a second paradigm conceives of culture as a symbolic 'toolkit' from which social actors select particular elements depending on time and circumstance. For the proponents of the first viewpoint, then, 'culture' constitutes a structure that determines social actors, while those adhering to the second position tend to regard it as a superstructure, as the respective outcome, that is, of profound social transformations and/or a function of political power struggles. This basic analytical division has its concordance in the scholarly literature on nationalism and national identity, particularly when it comes to the question of the impact of the 'national past' on contemporary nation formation. To juxtapose the two positions that mark the endpoints on an analytical continuum, radical 'perennialists' maintain that the past determines the national present, while for instrumentalist and constructionist 'modernists' political

interests, shaped by present circumstances, determine the course of nation formation and the construction of national identities.[11]

It is undoubtedly the second orientation (that which treats cultural traditions as epiphenomena of more fundamental social processes and/or functions of political power struggles) which has been more influential in the field at large. It is at the heart, for instance, of Hobsbawm's concept of the 'invention of tradition'. While conceding that popular national symbolism 'enters into the making of nations', Hobsbawm emphasises the pivotal role of nationalist elites not only in mobilising social and political resources, but also in determining the way in which nationhood is publicly defined.[12] Through the selection of specific national symbols and traditions, Hobsbawm argues, particularly state elites and their associated personnel try to influence the definition of nationhood.

The picture Hobsbawm is painting of nationalist activity, epitomised in his concept of 'invented traditions', is based on three inter-related, although logically distinct, assumptions. These are: instrumentalism, creationism, and diffusionism. The *instrumentalism assumption* refers to the question of why 'the nation' becomes a topic of public debate at particular points in time. According to Hobsbawm, this is because the politics of national identity serves state-elites and other political power holders as a means of legitimating their interests. In other words, references to the 'national past' serve as strategic handmaidens of contemporary needs. The *creationism assumption* relates to the question of what shapes the constructions of national ideologues. It entails the view that traditions are malleable, and that, therefore, elites face relatively few cultural constraints as they go about the business of defining national identity. The *diffusionism assumption* refers to the question of how particular conceptions of national identity disseminate among the wider public. Here Hobsbawm argues that particular definitions of nationhood diffuse, relatively unhindered, from their elite-producers downwards to the populace at large.

Thus for Hobsbawm, national symbols are little more than political devices invented for political reasons. Specifically, the concept of the nation serves to shore up the authority of certain power elites keen to secure legitimacy for themselves in the face

of rapid social and economic change with its uprooting effects on large sections of the public. Although Hobsbawm concedes that the 'most successful examples of manipulation are those which exploit practices which clearly meet a felt ... need among particular bodies of people',[13] this does not lead him to move beyond his elite-centred political functionalism. As he accounts for the salience of 'invented traditions' in modern societies:

> [Invented traditions] ... are highly relevant to that comparatively recent historical innovation, the 'nation', with its associated phenomena: nationalism, the nation-state, national symbols, histories and the rest. All these rest on exercises in social engineering which are often deliberate and always innovative, if only because historical novelty implies innovation.[14]

According to Hobsbawm, therefore, it was particularly from the late nineteenth century onwards that the enthusiasm for invented traditions became a conspicuous feature of European nationalism. Embodied in public rituals and national ceremonies, these inventions are to Hobsbawm a project in symbolic politics initiated by particular power-holders. As he comments on the proliferation of national mass ritual in Europe between 1870 and 1914: 'After the 1870s, therefore, and almost certainly in connection with the emergence of mass politics, rulers and middle-class observers rediscovered the importance of "irrational" elements in the maintenance of the social fabric and the social order.'[15]

It is plainly evident that the impetus behind Hobsbawm's significant contribution was an effort to debunk many of the essentialisms that nationalists have promoted over decades and centuries: e.g., that nations are natural and immemorial communities rooted in a continuous past, and they reflect the 'inner self' of their constituent communities. Following Hobsbawm's lead, many scholars have begun to stress the political nature of nationalism and the invented character of national identity.[16] This is no doubt an important undertaking, given the extent to which the nationalist rhetoric and mythology has acquired the status of a taken-for-granted reality almost everywhere in the world. No less problematic than taking nationalism at face

value, however, is the opposite tendency of confusing the analysis of how people construct nationhood with an exercise in the revelation of false consciousness.

If Hobsbawm has stressed the political and invented nature of nationhood, Anthony D. Smith has directed his attention to the cultural dimension of modern nationalism and its embeddedness in the historical *longue durée*. In a systematic critique of the modernist standpoint embraced by Gellner, Anderson and Hobsbawm, Smith has developed what he designates an ethno-symbolic approach to nation formation. In a series of contributions, he has argued that nationalism (and modern national identities) has stronger roots in pre-modern ethnicity than the modernists are ready to admit. In particular, he has emphasised the role of *ethnies* and ethno-histories in the formation of nationalism and modern national identities. The former he defines as 'named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory, and a sense of solidarity'.[17] Smith distinguishes sharply between *ethnies*, which have their origins in the pre-modern period, and nations, which he defines as modern political communities. What distinguishes nations from *ethnies* is that they are based on a 'mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members'.[18]

For Smith, the significance of pre-modern ethnic groups lies in their being the bearers and producers of myth-symbol complexes or ethno-histories, composed of particular symbols, myths, and historical memories. Through institutions such as the Christian church, kingdoms with their lateral *ethnies*, communal treaties, cults and customs, these myth-symbol complexes are preserved and transmitted over centuries. In the form of ethno-histories, they have often provided the cultural resources from which national ideologues have constructed and reconstructed national identities from the eighteenth century onwards. While Smith does not accept the primordialist view that ethno-histories rigidly determine the definition of modern national identities, he nonetheless maintains that they delimit the scope for the kind of elite-driven national invention which for Hobsbawm is the hallmark of nationalism. As he puts it:

Nationalists have a vital role to play in the construction of nations, not as culinary artists or social engineers, but as political archeologists rediscovering and reinterpreting the communal past in order to regenerate the community. Their task is indeed selective – they forget as well as remember the past – but to succeed in their task they must meet certain criteria. Their interpretations must be consonant not only with the ideological demands of nationalism, but also with the scientific evidence, popular resonance and patterning of particular ethno-histories.[19]

National identity as politics and culture

The foregoing review has concentrated on the works of Hobsbawm and Smith because they have developed the kind of 'middle-range' theory that is pertinent to the type of study to be conducted in this thesis, and because they provide insights into how nationhood is reconstructed over time by social actors. This cannot be said of the two 'grand theories' of nationalism, those of Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson, which largely focus on how 'the nation' and nationalism came about rather than on how nationhood is reproduced as a symbolic order.[20] So far, however, remarkably little substantive and theoretical effort has gone into studying nationhood as a phenomenon that is ultimately determined at the intersection of culture and politics rather than by either one factor.[21] In my own approach, I therefore try to combine Hobsbawm's view of nationalism as political activity with Smith's emphasis on the cultural, ethno-symbolic dimension of nationhood. The result is a fusion of two assumptions: that social actors play a crucial role in the recurrent reconstruction and reformulation of nationhood over time; and that cultural antecedents – if they form part of a collective memory – delimit the scope for inventing national identities by shaping the definitions. (I accept the view they share with Anderson and Gellner, namely that nations and nationalism are modern phenomena, directly related to the process of increased functional differentiation unleashed in the wake of the social and economic revolutions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As such, they are quite distinct

from the related phenomena of ethnic groups and ethnicity, which have been known since antiquity.) What matters here is not so much 'historical truth' but 'popular resonance'. As Calhoun has put it: 'Ethnicity or cultural traditions are bases for nationalism when they effectively constitute historical memory, when they inculcate it as habitus ... not when (or because) the historical origins of the claims are accurate.'[22]

Such efforts to reconstruct nationhood are both path-dependent and contingent. They are contingent in that they present symbolic 'responses' to specific conditions and events, which can be both domestic and international in nature. Yet at the same time, such projects of national reconstruction are path-dependent. That is to say, their mostly intellectual protagonists are bound to draw, to some degree at least, upon existing cultural resources (consisting of certain cultural idioms, symbols, values, and myths) that are deeply entrenched in a given society. The impact of such cultural resources on the process of national reconstruction is conditioning rather than determining. By furnishing the cognitive and expressive frameworks for those involved in the project of national reconstruction, these resources reduce the likelihood of pure invention.[23] To state my argument by mixing metaphors from Hobsbawm and Marx: people do invent traditions, but not in circumstances of their own choosing.[24]

'Strategic' thinking may play its part when political elites use familiar symbols to buttress their projects. As Kertzer puts it: 'Every culture has its own store of powerful symbols, and it is generally in the interest of new political forces to claim those symbols as their own.'[25] Yet regardless of whether strategic conduct is involved, and irrespective of whether actors are aware of their impact, symbolic antecedents shape the reconstruction of nationhood at any particular point in time. Archer thus attributes culture's conditioning influence on social actors above all to the temporal embeddedness of all social processes: 'Because of the pre-existence of those structures which shape the situations in which we find ourselves, they impinge upon us without our compliance, consent or complicity.'[26] The idea can be figuratively presented by referring to Archer's morphogenetic cycle (see Fig. 1-1).

Fig. 1-1: The reconstruction of nationhood in morphogenetic terms

T1		CULTURAL CONDITIONING	
T2		SOCIO-CULTURAL INTERACTION	T3
T4	↓	CULTURAL ELABORATION	
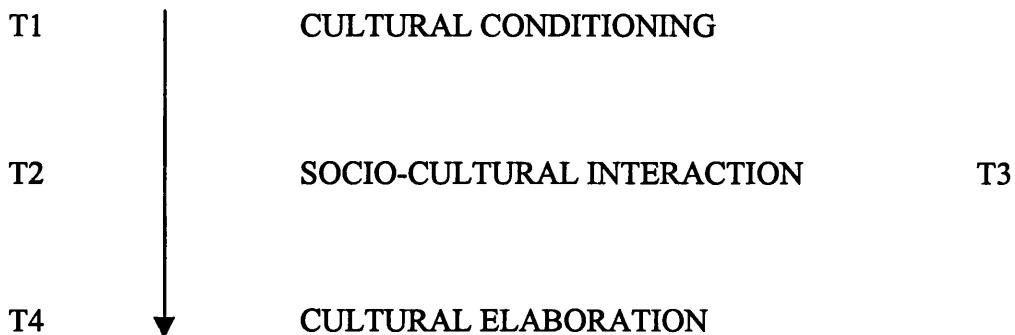
The core concepts: ethno-symbolic memory, nationalism, national identity

Three concepts are central to this examination. The first is *ethno-symbolic memory*. Composed of a repertoire of myths, symbols, narratives and values, such an ethno-symbolic memory crystallised within the Swiss Confederation between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries (chapter 2). As will become evident in subsequent chapters, this ethno symbolic memory supplied the cultural resources upon which social actors drew as they re-defined Swiss nationhood at particular historical junctures.[27] I will argue that ethno-symbolic memory can influence elite constructions of nationhood in either one of two ways: (a) as a constitutive factor, and (b) as a constraining factor. In its constitutive mode, collective memory forms a more or less self-evident part of social actors cultural frameworks. In its constraining mode, on the other hand, collective memory becomes relevant to elites' concerns because of its apparent salience among the wider public.[28] The extent to which collective memory can put constraints on ideological entrepreneurs varies from case to case. This is the theme of the comparison between Switzerland and Germany in chapter 7.[29]

The term *national identity*, by contrast, is meant to refer to the process whereby nationhood is reproduced at the interface of culture and politics. Hence, as employed

here, both national identity and ethno-symbolic memory are distinct in meaning from the terms *nationalism* or *nationalist ideology*. These latter terms are reserved for the nation-centred 'idea systems used by identifiable political actors' or actor groups.[30]

The conceptual distinction between ethno-symbolic memory and nationalism/nationalist ideology has the purpose of analytically separating 'culture' (which pertains to the paradigmatic level) from socio-political action (which relates to the syntagmatic level). The idea behind this analytical distinction is similar to what Skocpol had in mind when she distinguished between 'ideology' and 'cultural idioms'. As she explains: 'Cultural idioms have a longer-term, more anonymous, and less partisan existence than ideologies. When political actors construct ideological arguments for particular action-related purposes, they invariably use or take account of available cultural idioms, and those idioms may structure their arguments in partially unintended ways.'[31] (The three concepts are summarised in Tab. 1-2).

Consequently, the conception of national identity proposed here differs from most other definitions in two important respects. First, 'national identity' is defined as a process of reconstruction rather than in terms of certain properties, attitudes and perceptions.[32] Second, 'national identity' is equated neither with continuity of meaning nor with any kind of societal consensus. While the persistent empirical relevance of certain cultural resources – indigenous folk traditions, myths, symbols, narratives and beliefs – may indicate certain continuities of focus and even of interpretation, as an analytical a priori, the association of identity with continuity is problematic. The same goes for the equation of national identity with a consensus of interpretation. Much of the power and appeal of national symbols, myths and rituals lies precisely in the fact they enable the members of a community to build political solidarity in the absence of a consensus.[33] As defined here, therefore, national identity represents the respective outcome of a contentious process in which different individuals and groups participate and which is shaped by ethno-symbolic memory and nationalist activity.[34]

Tab. 1-2: Concepts and analytical levels: ethno-symbolic memory, national ideology, national identity

Concept	Meaning	Analytical Level
Ethno-Symbolic Memory	Myths, Symbols, Narratives and Values (constitutive and potentially constraining)	Paradigmatic Level: Cultural System
Nationalism / Nationalist Ideology	Political actors that construct ideologies for particular purposes	Syntagmatic Level: Social Action
National Identity	The process whereby nationhood is reconstructed	Interaction of the Paradigmatic and the Syntagmatic: Socio-Cultural Interaction and Cultural Elaboration

Identity politics: when nations become topics

Not only does national identity represent a process rather than a fixed state of mind, but, contrary to what the classical nationalist doctrine may profess, 'the nation' is also but one potential object of loyalty and collective identification; and as such, it has to compete with other potential foci of allegiance in the public realm. These include gender, region, religion, class, political affiliation, occupation or lifestyle. Many of these categories are immediately relevant to peoples' everyday lives, and for much of the time, they may play a more salient role than the nation.[35] This does not mean that nationhood is either 'there' or 'absent': identities are not, in Gillis' words, 'something that can be lost as well as found'.[36] What it suggests, however, is that modern nations go through 'settled' and 'unsettled' periods. During settled periods the values, symbols and myths that make up the nation as a socio-cultural category are more or less taken for granted so that they form, as it were, a cultural tradition or common sense. During

unsettled historical phases, on the other hand, national identity is called into question. It is during such periods that we witness the formation of competitive public struggles over the definition of nationhood.[37] The chapters of part II focus on how national identity was reconstructed during such periods.

What causes such struggles to emerge in the first place? We have already noticed that in the theories of Gellner or Anderson, this question does not really arise. The same is true of the state-centred accounts, especially those of Anthony Giddens, Michael Mann, and Charles Tilly.[38] Their underlying logic is straightforwardly diffusionist: state-elites (besides streamlining their bureaucratic regimes and consolidating their territorial authority) produce and propagate national ideologies; nationhood becomes of public concern when these elites intensify the production of such ideologies for particular reasons. A more instrumentalist version of this argument underpins Hobsbawm's empirical observation concerning the proliferation of national ritual in late-nineteenth-century Europe.[39]

Approaches that conceive of nationalism largely in terms of an intra-national dynamic harmonise nicely with instrumentalist notions of nation-formation as elite-induced ideological projects designed to legitimate state authority. There can be little doubt that power elites have a vested interest in shoring up their authority through staging national mass celebrations; and Hobsbawm's observation that the proliferation of public national ritual in Europe coincided with the expansion of democratic rights is therefore a perceptive one. The 'nation', which constitutes a symbolic order, lends meaning and legitimacy to the political order that is commonly referred to as the 'state', which is rooted in a set of legal, political and economic institutions.

Nevertheless, a top-down approach to nation-formation, with its inherent bias in favour of domestic factors, leads to a highly reductionist picture. Not only do appeals to nationhood only make logical sense in an international context, but to a far greater extent than any other ideological movement, nationalism established itself as an international force from the outset. The classical nationalist claims – that the world is divided into nations, that the nation is the source of all political and social power, that nations and their members possess a distinct character and identity, and that loyalty to

the nation overrides all other allegiances[40] – came to provide an international norm from the early nineteenth century onwards.

Once nationalism had established itself as the dominant political force in nineteenth-century Europe, then, it was bound to stir up competition among different conceptions of nationality and to serve as a major catalyst of national self-assertion. Whether or not a claim to nationhood received international recognition depended in large measure on the ability of the claimant to show that their nation was authentic and distinct. Hence, the European-wide discourse of national identity reveals that declarations of cultural difference and demands to be recognised as a nation among nations were but two sides of the same coin. In other words, the driving force behind this new and increasingly conspicuous kind of 'identity politics' was inter-nationalist competition between existing and emerging nation-states rather than domestic struggles.[41] In Europe, the impact of inter-nationalist competition on the reconstruction of nationhood became marked in the second half of the nineteenth century.

To be sure, the domestic dimension was important too. The state and its officials, furnished by intellectuals and the professional intelligentsia, tended to be the first to respond to the challenge of inter-nationalist competition. Locked in the relentless dynamics of inter-nationalist competition, these strata employed a variety of means and resources to forge national identity and thus to secure international recognition. The most frequently employed strategies included official speeches on the state of the nation, the staging of public festivals and commemorations, the passing of new legislation to promote national art and exhibitions, and the provision of extra funds to promote the scholarly study of the national past. But if the nation became a topic of public debate during such periods, this was by no means merely the result of state-induced nationalism. Intermediate social groups – especially private associations and political parties – played a major part in this overall endeavour. If the nation recurrently became a public topic, then it was often due to the combined weight of intra- and inter-nationalist competition. The interaction of inter-nationalist and domestic ideological competition and how it fuelled and shaped the reconstruction of Swiss nationhood will be examined in chapters 5 and 6.

Civic and organic nationhood

I have now developed a general framework for the examination of national identity. What is needed in addition is a set of analytical tools adequate to deal with the following question: *how* was national identity defined, and *what* prompted changes in definitions of nationhood? The second theoretical discussion pertinent to this thesis therefore concerns the role of 'civic' and 'organic' conceptions of nationhood. As my examination in the substantive chapters will show, both civic and organic elements entered into the fabric of Swiss national identity. The question can thus be reformulated as follows: how were 'civic' and 'organic' conceptions of nationhood related to each other in national discourse during different phases of Swiss history, and how did shifts in the balance between the two occur?

The intellectual origins of this distinction hark back to the turn of the twentieth century. The eminent German historian of the first half of the twentieth century, Friedrich Meinecke, in his seminal *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat* (first published in German in 1907), a study of the intellectual genesis of the German national state, may be regarded as the first scholar to have applied this conception to an empirical case. Meinecke distinguished between a *Kulturnation* and a *Staatsnation.*[42] Writing at the end of World War II, Hans Kohn, in his equally influential *The Idea of Nationalism* separated a 'Western', political type of nationalism from an 'Eastern', organic variety.[43] The 'civic'-versus-'ethnic' bipolarity has retained its important analytical role in more recent studies of nationalism. Among the authors to have used it systematically and thus contributed to its further refinement over the last decade, the works of Anthony D. Smith, Rogers Brubaker, Liah Greenfeld, and Michael Ignatieff spring to mind.[44]

To be sure, each of these authors has different terminological preferences: Renan, while he has not coined his own shorthand terms, distinguishes between a voluntary and a determinist type of nationality. Meinecke, as indicated, uses the terms 'Kulturnation' and 'Staatsnation' to separate a state-centred from a culture-centred conception of nationhood. Kohn employs the concepts of an 'Western' and an 'Eastern' type of nationhood, while Brubaker contrasts a 'state-centred and assimilationist' with

an 'ethno-cultural and differentialist' conception of nationality. Finally, Smith,
Greenfeld and Ignatieff use the terms 'civic' and 'ethnic' to separate different types of
nationalism. Greenfeld has proposed to further subdivide civic nationalism into an
'individualistic-libertarian' and a 'collectivistic-authoritarian' variety. Up to a point,
these different terms stand for a slightly different conceptual emphasis. It cannot be my
task here to trace these differences in every detail.

Whatever the terminological and substantive differences separating these
authors, three dichotomies tend to inform their conceptualisation of the civic-ethnic
distinction.

Political voluntarism versus ethnic organicism. The first dichotomy separates
two orientations that could be termed 'political voluntarism' and 'ethnic organicism'
respectively. While the civic or political conception of nationhood is voluntarism,
putting human will above naturalistic criteria, its ethnic counterpart conceives of the
nation as determined by historical or ethno-cultural traditions. These traditions, so the
assumption runs, have a life of their own and influence human actors irrespective of
their being aware of it. This notion is present in all works discussed above that make
use of the concept, sometimes under the heading of 'cosmopolitianism versus
particularism', but it is perhaps captured most evocatively by Ernest Renan: 'Man is the
slave neither of his race, his language, nor his religion; neither of the courses of the
rivers, nor the mountain ranges. One great aggregate of men, of sound spirit and warm
heart, creates a moral conscience that is called a nation.'[45]

State-centredness versus culture-centredness. The second dichotomy is between
a state-centred and a culture-centred conception of nationhood. The civic nation, so the
argument goes, is primarily a political reality. Here the nation is seen as rooted in the
institutional framework that constitutes the modern state. It is the state and its
institutions, in other words, that ultimately constitute the nation. The legitimacy of
ethnic nationhood, by contrast, rests on the claim to a shared culture in the broadest
sense of the word, embodied in a common language, religion, shared historical
experiences, or genealogical descent. The civic conception of nationhood, we are told,
is likely to emerge where the state developed prior to or coincided with the emergence

of nationalism, as was the case in England, France, the Netherlands and the United States. An ethnic conception of nationhood, by contrast, is more likely to be found where the realisation of a unitary state was protracted and contentious, as was the case in Germany and many countries in Eastern Europe. In Kohn's words: 'Nationalism in the West was based upon a nationality which was the product of social and political factors; nationalism in Germany did not find its justification in a rational societal conception, it found it in the 'natural' fact of a community, held together ... by traditional ties of kinship and status.'[46]

Modernism versus pre-modernism. The third and final dichotomy refers to the temporal dimension and distinguishes a modernist conception from one that emphasizes the role of the pre-modern past in the evolution of nations. From this viewpoint, civic nationhood is not only voluntaristic but also essentially modernist. Civic nationalists searching for national founding moments illustrates this. While they too show a keen interest in determining national origins, they tend to go back no further than the late eighteenth century. They show a marked preference for revolutionary turning points – 1776, 1789, 1798, or 1848 – when the 'sovereign people' became an autonomous actor and when politics became a public affair. This is different in the case of the proponents of the ethnic conception of nationhood, who conceive of the nation as an organism that develops slowly and more or less continually in the course of history's evolution. This temporal break marks the shift from an organic to a voluntarist or, to use Meinecke's words, from a 'vegetative and dormant' period of national life to a period when the people 'express themselves in great united actions and manifestations of will'.[47]

I believe that the civic-ethnic dualism has proved useful in two cases: as a broad scheme of classification; and in institutional analyses of nation-building of the kind that Roger Brubaker has pursued in his comparison between France and Germany. In other words, if the focus is, as in Brubaker's study, on how particular understandings of nationhood – civic-political in the case of France, ethno-cultural in the case of Germany – shaped citizenship legislation, the model works well. Hence Brubaker is able to show that the French citizenship law of 1889 was informed by a civic understanding of

nationhood, while the German *Reichs- und Staatsangehörigkeitsgesetz* of 1913 was

based on an ethnic conception of the nation.[48]

Civic and organic boundary mechanisms

However, a more nuanced framework is needed if we are to examine how national

identities are publicly re-defined and re-constructed at particular historical junctures.

As an alternative to the classical model, I propose to distinguish between two levels

which are not kept separate in either of the classical formulations of the civic-ethnic

distinction. We need to distinguish, on the one hand, between the *mechanisms* which

social actors use as they reconstruct the boundaries of national identity at a particular

point in time; and, on the other hand, the *symbolic resources* upon which they draw

when they reconstruct these boundaries. On this basis, I differentiate between two

boundary mechanisms.[49] The first of these two boundary mechanisms rests on a civic

conception of nationhood and can therefore be described as the *civic boundary*

mechanism. The second is predicated on an organic conception of nationhood and we

can therefore call it the *organic boundary mechanism*. (Civic and organic conceptions

of nationhood are described in Table 1.3).

Tab. 1-3: Civic and organic conceptions of nationhood

Conception	Logic	Focus
CIVIC	voluntaristic	• community of law • state-institutions • modernity • political culture
ORGANIC	deterministic	• community of native culture • pre-modernity • ethnic descent

At the same time, I distinguish between four symbolic resources. These cultural resources provide the symbolic raw material which social actors use as they reconstruct and redefine national identity. Here I distinguish between *four symbolic resources*: political values/institutions; culture; history; and geography. When they define national identity in public, social actors 'nationalise' these resources. Yet depending on which boundary mechanism is employed – civic or organic – a different picture of national identity emerges. Hence rather than focusing on national identity in terms of its symbolic content (territory, a civic culture, legal institutions, historical myths and memories), we should start by asking how the boundary of nationhood is constructed at particular points in time. What are the mechanisms used to create and legitimate this boundary? Is nationhood created by invoking the will of the citizen, the knowledge of certain cultural codes and ways of life, or by relating the nation to particular historical experiences, myths of ethnic descent or certain geographical factors?

In practice, there is considerable likelihood that those who adhere to a civic conception of nationhood will reveal the following priority in the selection of symbolic recources: political institutions (1st priority), culture and history (2nd priority), nature (3rd priority, rather unlikely). The proponents of the organic conception of nationhood will emphasise geography (embodied in concepts such as 'nature', 'homeland', or 'landscape') first, then history and culture, and only in the third instance will they draw on political institutions. But the crucial thing about these two distinct conceptions of nationhood is *not what* resources they refer to, *but how* they conceive of these resources: the civic conception of nationhood processes the available resources in voluntaristic terms – as a product of human action; the organic conception of nationhood, by contrast, processes the resources in deterministic terms – as embodiments of the communal organism. (These operations are summarised in Figure 1-2.)

Fig. 1-2: The construction of nationhood: boundary mechanisms and resources

BOUNDARY MECHANISM   RESOURCE

```
┌─────────┐                                    ⎧  Political Values/
│  Civic  │──────────╲                         ⎪  Institutions
└─────────┘            ╲                        ⎪
                        ╲────────▶              ⎪
             ⎛‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾⎞                     ⎪  Culture
             (  Social Actors )                ⎨
             ⎝_____⎠                     ⎪
                                                ⎪  History
                    ──────────▶                 ⎪
┌─────────┐    ─────                            ⎪
│ Organic │────                                 ⎩  Geography
└─────────┘
```
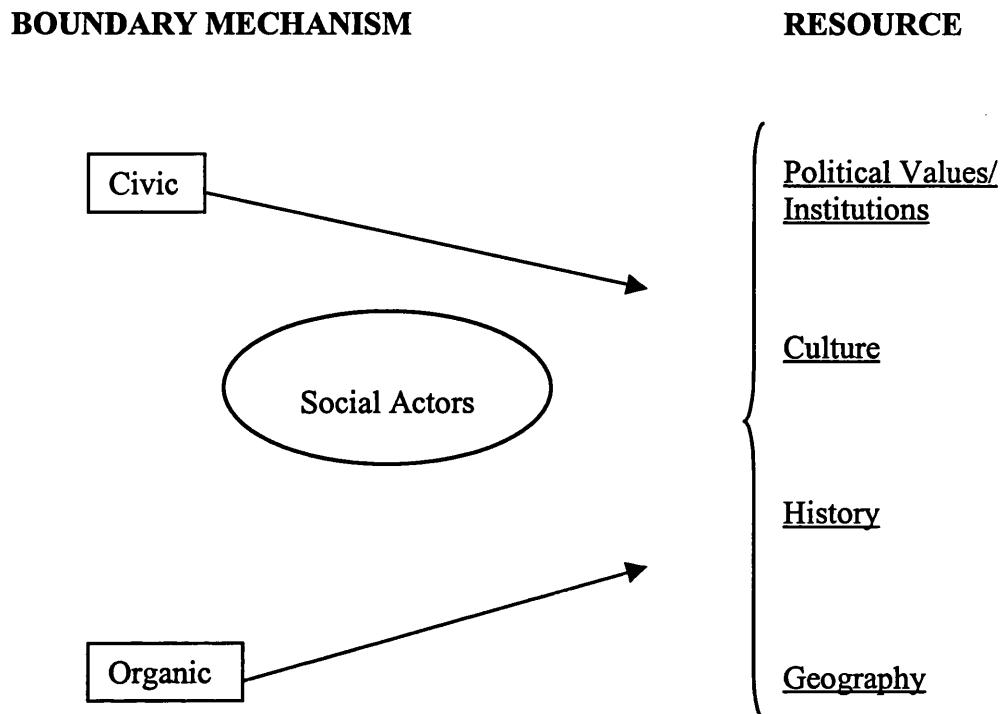
Each of these conceptions in itself would have been insufficient for the formation and subsequent reproduction of polyethnic Switzerland. It was their fusion that was paramount, resulting in a nationalism that proved both internally integrative and capable of securing Switzerland's recognition internationally. The civic conception of nationhood was decisive in that it helped to transcend ethno-linguistic pluralism while at the same time decreasing the potential for ethnic conflict. In the Swiss context, the construction of 'national unity' could only derive from a voluntary commitment to a set of political values and collective loyalty to the state and its institutions.

Yet, the organic conception was equally significant, particularly for two reasons. First, all social institutions need 'some stabilizing principle to stop their "premature demise"'. The organic conception of nationhood, resting on a mechanism that Mary Douglas has called the 'naturalization of social classifications', provides national identities with such a stabilising principle. As Douglas has put it in a crucial passage: 'There needs to be an analogy by which the formal structure of a crucial set of social relations is found in the physical world, or in the supernatural world, or in

eternity, anywhere, so long as it is not seen as a socially contrived arrangement.'[50] 'Nations' and 'national identities' are no exception in this regard. In fact, they are prime examples of naturalised cultural institutions. Where the civic subscription to a set of abstract political values and institutions would leave 'the nation' underdetermined, references to its organic rootedness serve to establish a link with the invariant in a world of recurrent change.

The second reason for the significance of the 'organic' conception has to do with the international ideological context in which the constructors of Swiss national identity had to operate. This context was defined by classical nationalism's central doctrine: that nations are organic communities and that this organic character is expressed in a single shared culture (preferably language). The Swiss, unable to fulfil the criterion of ethno-cultural homogeneity (and fostering a myth of civic exceptionalism), did their best to demonstrate to the outside world that they too were members of a 'natural' nation. Asserting that Switzerland had continuously emerged out of a pre-modern past, and that the country's natural environment (especially the Alps) had fostered an authentic national character, they tried to do justice to the organic ideal of classical nationalism.

Looking ahead

The chapters to come present a comparative historical analysis of the formation and transformation of Swiss nationhood, executed within the frame of reference developed in this chapter. Chapter 2 traces the emergence and subsequent dissemination of an ethno-symbolic memory in the Swiss Confederation between the late medieval period and the close of the seventeenth century. Part II focuses on the reconstruction of Swiss nationhood during four periods between the late eighteenth century and the beginning of the Second World War. Finally, the two thematic chapters of Part III discuss the core issues of this dissertation – the role of ethno-symbolic memory in modern nation formation, and the respective impact of 'civic' and 'organic' notions of community on

the construction of nationhood in a polyethnic setting – by placing Swiss developments in a comparative context.

Notes

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[1] Braudel (1989: 23).

[2] See, for example, Giddens (1991).

[3] Handler (1994: 30).

[4] McGarry and O'Leary (1993: 30-35).

[5] This logic is at the heart of Lijphart (1977: 75-81), who had identified three factors as decisive for the prevention of linguistic conflict in Switzerland: that language cuts across both religion and class; the smallness of the country; and a decentralised political system. The relevance of cross-cutting cleavages in Switzerland is discussed in Weibel (1986: 2210230), Amstutz (1996: 35-6), Siegfried (1950: 123-141), and Bickel and Schläpfer (1994: ch. 2). For a succinct discussion of the conditions of success of the consociational model, see also Schöpflin (1995: 47-49). The only case of separatist ethnic nationalism in Switzerland, the Jurassien movement that emerged after the Second World War in the canton of Bern, corroborates the significance of cross-cutting cleavages as a deterrent against ethnic conflict. The Jurrassien movement could mobilise around both religion and language. It appealed to a population that was Catholic and French-speaking, while the political entity against which its ethno-nationalism was directed, the canton of Bern, was Protestant and German-speaking. The movement was successful, and in 1976 the Swiss citizens voted in favour of a new canton of Jura. On the Jura conflict, see Jenkins (1980).

[6] Deutsch (1976).

[7] Anderson (1991: 139).

[8] Anderson's drawing on a single source of information (Christopher Hughes' general history of Switzerland), as well as his concern to keep his theory pure, leads him to paint an inaccurate picture of the Swiss development. To begin with (and as already mentioned), there was Swiss nationalism well before the late nineteenth century, as will become evident in chapters 3 and 4. Furthermore, despite the fact that until the twentieth century a relatively high proportion of its total population worked in the agricultural sector, Switzerland was among Europe's first industrialising countries, as numerous economic historians have pointed out. For an authoritative work in this area, see Braun (1990). The same is true of Switzerland's system of education. Republican in spirit and ideology, this system of education was geared to providing a high standard of education for the broad public. By the turn of the twentieth century, the average Swiss was better educated than the members of most other European countries. Its pillars were a well-developed system of popular education, an extraordinarily high density of newspapers

and of societies and associations. For a recent analysis of the state of Swiss public communication, see especially Guggenbühl (1998a and 1998b), who names the advanced state of public communication as one of the distinctive features of nineteenth-century Switzerland. On popular education, see chapter 4 of this thesis.

[9] Authors who have argued along similar lines include: Altermatt (1996); Bendix (1991);

[10] The two best and most comprehensive studies of Swiss national identity, written by Marchal (1990) and Im Hof (1991), do not systematically address these questions. Im Hof's highly informative account shows an affinity with the perennialist perspective. He stresses the historical continuity of a Swiss national consciousness which, he argues, is about five-hundred years old. In contrast to Im Hof, Marchal's distinguishes between continuous and discontinuous features of Swiss national identity. Nevertheless, failing to situate their investigations in the theoretical literature on nationalism, both authors produce highly informative but eventually descriptive accounts.

[11] For a discussion of rival approaches to collective and national identity, see in particular Michael Schudson (1989); Olick and Robbins (1998); Smith (1995b).

[12] Hobsbawm (1993a: 10).

[13] Hobsbawm (1983b: 307).

[14] Hobsbawm (1983a: 13).

[15] Hobsbawm (1983b: 268). A number of students of nineteenth-century Swiss nationalism have followed Hobsbawm's general interpretation. This is true in particularl of Kreis (1991). But see also Marchal (1990: 369-372). For an anthropological approach to Swiss national ritual, see Bendix (1992).

[16] This tendency is represented, for instance, in Gillis (1994); see also the contributions Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983).

[17] Smith (1986: 32).

[18] Smith (1991: 40).

[19] Smith (1995b: 19).

[20] Both Gellner and Anderson are interested in the emergence of nations rather than its reproduction. In addition, both advance deterministic models, which results in a peripheralisation of social actors. Gellner (1983) adheres to a structural-functional determinism. For him, nationalism is essentially the product of economic modernisation and its functional requirements: above all, a communication high culture based on a single language. Social actors have little room in Gellner's account. For him, the reproduction of nationhood is ultimately guaranteed by the structural patterns of industrialism and not by nationalists or other ideological entrepreneurs who participate in national discourse. If these basic conditions were to change – for example, if 'industrialism' declined and 'globalism' became the prevailing economic reality, nationalism would wither away. By contrast, Benedict Anderson's theory (1991) rests on a cognitive determinism. This is because for him modern nations fundamentally rest on a new cognitive style that became possible only in the modern era: the imagination of nationhood by means of a shared

language. Brought about by Protestant 'print-capitalism' and its products, especially books, newspapers, novels, and other printed media with the potential of reaching a mass public. Hence for Anderson, from the moment the 'nationalist mindset' – this new cognitive style – has pervaded the mindset of the masses, the reproduction of nationhood occurs automatically.

[21] While both these analytical orientations – the one focusing on culture, the other on politics – are perfectly legitimate in their own right, and have produced many new insights, their separation has resulted in a conceptual either-or-ism that I consider unfruitful Its underpinning logic can be summarised as follows: either you are in the cultural camp, in which case you must be dealing either with questions of 'subjective meaning' or 'cultural representation'. Or you believe in the superior explanatory power of 'political interests', in which case you are bound to treat culture as a mere epiphenomenon. If, on the other hand, you cannot make up your mind as to whether humankind is ultimately driven by the invisible hand of culture, or by political entrepreneurs seeking to enhance their position in a context of anomie and crisis, you are bound to end up in the muddy waters of conceptual eclecticism.

[22] Calhoun (1993: 222).

[23] The way I conceptualize the reproduction and change of national identity for the purpose of this analysis draws heavily on two most illuminating theoretical essays: Swidler (1986) and Sewell (1996).

[24] In an analysis of events and personalities commemorated in the United States Capitol, Barry Schwartz (1982: 396) concluded on the dynamics of collective memory: 'Given the constraints of a recorded history, the past cannot be literally constructed; it can only be selectively exploited. Moreover, the basis of the exploitation cannot be arbitrary. The events selected for commemoration must have some factual significance to begin with in order to qualify for this purpose.'

[25] Kertzer (1988: 43).

[26] Archer (1995: 200).

[27] Remains the question of why certain definitions of nationhood appeal to the broader public, while others either fail to catch popular imagination or provoke outright resistance. Here I go along with Calhoun's argument that, contrary to what nationalist activists may proclaim, the impact of such ethno-historical patterns on modem nationhood does not so much depend on their antiquity, nor on their historical accuracy. What matters is whether or not they 'inculcate the habitus' of significant numbers of a given population. Calhoun (1993: 222).

[28] The potentially constraining capacity of 'collective memory' is discussed in Olick Levy (1997); Schudson (1989); Schwartz (1991). For a systematic review of collective memory research, see Olick and Robbins (1998).

[29] On the impact of ethno-symbolic memory on the work of late-nineteenth century Swiss historians, see Zimmer (forthcoming).

[30] Skocpol (1994: 204).

[31] Skocpol (1994: 204).

[32] The only systematic treatment to date, Anthony Smith's *National Identity* (1991) defines national identity in terms of a number of 'fundamental features' – these, he argues, include a historic territory, common myths and memories, a common, mass public culture, common legal rights and duties for its members – rather than as a process. For a critical exploration of the concept, see Schlesinger (1987).

[33] Kertzer (1988: 67).

[34] As Eley and Suny (1996: 9) put it recently: 'Culture is more often not what people share, but what they choose to fight over.' As far as nationalism is concerned, my own position is that such struggles over culture often contributed more to producing 'the nation' as a focus of mass loyalty than any kind of putative national consensus. For a recent study of national ritual that forcefully argues along this line, see Waldstreicher (1997).

[35] Calhoun (1994: 314).

[36] Gillis (1994: 3).

[37] This distinction between 'settled' and 'unsettled' periods is elaborated in Swidler (1986).

[38] See Giddens (1985); Mann (1993); Tilly (1975).

[39] Hobsbawm (1983b).

[40] Smith (1991: 74).

[41] Calhoun (1994: 25) has noted correctly that, while the claim to national identity 'normally involves a rhetoric of cultural difference', it is 'in large part a claim to equivalent standing with other nations – i.e. to be the same sort of thing that they are'. For substantive investigations that point to the role of inter-nationalist competition in the formation of national identities, see Hobsbawm (1983b) Greenfeld (1992), Colley (1992).

[42] See Meinecke (1917). Meinecke's work was in part a response to the writing of Ernest Renan, who in his famous essay *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* (1882) had polemically argued against the insistence on language, blood and soil that had gained currency in Germany at the time. A nation, Renan argued, though based on a pre-modern legacy of culture and history, was essentially a product of human will, a *plébiscite de tous les jours*.

[43] See Kohn (1957).

[44] See Smith (1986; 1991; 1995a); Brubaker (1992); Greenfeld (1992); Ignatieff (1994).

[45] Renan (1882: 58-59).

[46] Kohn (1955: 391).

[47] Meinecke (1917: 6).

[48] On the historical origins of these distinct understandings of citizenship, see Brubaker (1992: especially chs. 1 – 3).

[49] The classical work on the significance of symbolic boundaries for group identities is of course Barth (1969). See also Eriksen (1993).

[50] Douglas (1986: 48).

CHAPTER TWO

The Formation of an Ethno-Symbolic Memory (15ᵗʰ – 18ᵗʰ Century)

The belief in common ethnicity often delimits 'social circles', which in turn are not always identical with endogamous connubial groups, for greatly varying numbers of persons may be encompassed by both. Their similarity rests on the belief in a specific 'honour' of their members, not shared by the outsiders...

Max Weber[1]

Swiss nationhood did not evolve naturally out of a pre-modern Swiss ethnicity, nor can it be described in terms of an ancient psychological attachment to a putative Swiss 'homeland'. The first explanation would be unduly deterministic, while the latter would be reductionist in the extreme. Nevertheless, as subsequent chapters will reveal, cultural antecedents are too important to be ignored altogether. In the next chapter (chapter 3), I shall argue that these patterns supplied the symbolic 'raw material' from which the late-eighteenth century patriots constructed Swiss nationhood. Hence, if our aim is to account for the formation and reconstruction of Swiss national identity in the period from 1760 to 1939, these cultural patterns deserve more than cursory attention.

This chapter will supply the evidence necessary to sustain my argument. To this end, it provides a systematic analysis of the formation of the ethno-symbolic memory of the Old Swiss Confederation. Such a memory emerged between the late-medieval and early modern periods as a number of towns and rural communities developed into the alliance that came to be referred to as the Swiss Confederation. The term ethno-symbolic memory, as I use it here, refers to the repertoire of myths, symbols and narratives that describe the genesis and subsequent evolution of a community, and that locate it in time and space. An ethno-symbolic memory, thus understood, is both indicative of, and supplies a group with, a shared sense of purpose, mutual loyalty, and self-identity. Whilst a sense of collective loyalty developed among the members of the Swiss Confederation in the course of the fourteenth century, it took at least another

decade until this collective loyalty found expression in an increasingly rich ethno-symbolic memory. In the centuries that followed, the myths, symbols and narratives that constituted this memory became salient among the wider populace.

The formation of this repertoire of symbols, myths and narratives within the emerging Swiss Confederation sprang from two mutually inter-linked processes. The first was the development of the Confederate alliance and its central institutions: the various treaties of alliance, the concordats, the Confederate Diet. These institutions functioned as an incubator for the emerging Confederate self-identity. The second process with an effect on the production of Confederate group identity concerns the power politics in the area: the antagonism between the nascent Swiss Confederation and the Habsburg dynasty and other feudal lords. This conflict literally produced the Confederate *mythomoteur,* the central political myths and the symbolic boundary that constituted the Swiss Confederation as a distinctive community with a separate sense of identity. The first two sections of this chapter are devoted to an examination of these two processes. The third and concluding section assesses the popular salience of the core myths and legends and argues that they had become a political factor in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The institutional framework: towards an alliance of rural communities and towns

The opening of the Gotthard Pass and the expansion of Habsburg rule in central Switzerland

If its military successes of the fourteenth and fifteenth century allowed the Swiss Confederation to survive as a distinctive political entity in a Europe dominated by feudal powers, its unique geographical location enabled it to come into being in the first place. For one thing, central Switzerland, the region that emerged as the core of the nascent Confederate alliance, had been on the periphery of the Holy Roman Empire

until the thirteenth century. It was only from the twelfth century onwards that the colonisation movement began to affect the mountainous areas north of the Gotthard. The process of feudal penetration occurred after a similar delay. Unlike the villages and towns of the plains, which had come under feudal jurisdiction during the High Middle Ages, the valleys north of the Gotthard had remained largely unaffected until the mid-thirteenth century. The first mention of the three valley communes, which in 1291 were to conclude the first Confederate alliance, dates from the first half of the thirteenth century: Uri was mentioned in 1231; Schwyz in 1240; and Unterwalden was named for the first time in 1291, when it joined the original alliance.

When the Alpine valleys of central Switzerland did eventually attract the interest of the feudal powers, geography again played a vital part. The opening of the Gotthard pass at the turn of the twelfth century led to a profound change in the political dynamics of that region. Not only did the Gotthard provide the shortest route over the Alps, the proximity of waterways both on its northern and southern slopes allowed for the speedy traffic of goods and people along Europe's north-south axis.[2] After the decline of a number of small dynasties that had helped to colonise the area around the Gotthard, the Habsburgs emerged as the dominant feudal authority in central and north-eastern Switzerland. Anderson identifies the construction of a 'magnified Germanic State' in the South of the Empire.[3]

A number of territorial acquisitions indicate this new drive towards expansion and unification of their domains: in 1285 Rudolf of Habsburg took over the imperial protectorate *(Reichsvogtei)* in the canton of Uri, and in 1291 the same ruler purchased the rights over the town of Lucernee. These were early indications of what became a systematic effort on the part of the Habsburgs to intensify their territorial ambitions in central Switzerland. It is hardly an accident that their efforts to increase their influence in central Switzerland coincided with the opening of the Gotthard route. Of all the regions which they controlled within Swiss territory in the thirteenth century, the area around the Gotthard was the most lucrative because of the high customs revenue from the north-south traffic.[4] At the same time, the Gotthard traffic provided a vital source of income for the inhabitants of the adjacent valleys. Here revenues from transportation

services and profits from the rapidly developing cattle and meat trade between the valleys and northern Italy were of particular importance. It was their geographical position on the Gotthard route which largely explains why the inhabitants of those Alpine regions were often not poor.[5]

The rise of the communes

The fact that Habsburg-Austria did not enter a political vacuum as it began to intensify its authority in central Switzerland in the latter half of the thirteenth century proved significant for what was to come. When the Habsburgs became the dominant political player in the area, the valleys of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden in particular had already established themselves as communes with a relatively high degree of political organisation and autonomy from the Holy Roman Empire.[6] The most important of these three Alpine communities, Uri, had in 1231 become *reichsfrei* – which meant that it was subject to no lord save the Emperor. The neighbouring community, Schwyz, obtained a similar charter of freedom in 1240, but unlike that of Uri the legality of this did not go unchallenged.[7]

The process whereby rural or town communes developed a form of political organisation to make them more autonomous from feudal lords has been referred to as 'communalism'.[8] According to Brady, 'communes' were 'sworn associations of adult males formed to get, guard, and exercise rights of self-administration and government'. However, they only became 'politically significant when they federated to exercise higher judicial and military functions'.[9] Such communes sprang up all over Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. They first appeared in the more urbanised areas of northern and central Italy, southern Germany, and the Netherlands. Rural communes emerged somewhat later, particularly along the coast of the North Sea and the Alpine regions.

Overall, was more likely to develop in mountainous regions, where a harsh geography and relentless climate forced the peasants to co-operate to secure a supply of water throughout the year and for measures to be taken against rockfall. Many of the

Alpine communes that organised themselves as associations of adjacent valleys were in fact formed out of a sense of self-preservation. Historical evidence also suggests that the communes that developed in Alpine areas had a better chance of long-term survival. For one thing, their location at the periphery of a large empire or lordship allowed them to develop considerable strength before they had to compete with ambitious territorial rulers. For another, Alpine topography favoured their chance of military success even against the far superior armies of the nobility. These favourable geographical conditions were absent in the plains. With the exception of the communal movement of northern Italy, towns in the plains, even if they formed encompassing alliances, fared far less successfully in the competition with feudal powers. An example of this occurred in he towns of southern Germany when they formed a communal alliance in the fourteenth century, and eventually lost out against the nobility.[10]

In Switzerland, where conditions were more favourable, a communal federation began to take shape from the late thirteenth century onwards, which was increasingly in opposition to the territorial policy of Habsburg-Austria. When the Habsburg rulers tried to bring the Alpine communities around the Gotthard under their immediate jurisdiction, the Swiss comunes opposed such a change and demanded instead that their ancient liberties – their *Reichsfreiheit* – be respected.[11] Thus a classical conflict emerged between feudal and communal principles and ambitions. The peasants, who resided in the valleys around the Gotthard pass, had developed their own political and economic interests well before the Habsburgs had become the dominant dynasty within the Holy Roman Empire in the course of the thirteenth century. When the Habsburgs began to pursue a more rigid approach in the closing decades of the thirteenth century, tensions rose. Keen to reinforce their territorial lordship in central Switzerland, the House of Habsburg began to establish a network of control by sending their own officials into the area. Given the determination of the valleys to maintain the status quo or even to expand their territorial authority, a protracted conflict was the inevitable consequence. As Peyer puts it: 'The fight for independence from external powers, ... the effort not to be stamped out by the territorial authorities of the time, is characteristic

of the history of the Swiss Confederation from the thirteenth to the end of the fifteenth century.'[12]

The formation of the Swiss Confederation

This antagonism provided the impetus behind the evolution of the Swiss Confederation between the thirteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The first alliance was concluded in 1291 between the valleys of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden. This original alliance was confirmed in 1315, only three weeks after the Habsburgs had been defeated in a first decisive battle at Morgarten. Five other communities joined the Confederate alliance over the following decades to form an alliance of eight cantons: Lucerne (1332), Zurich (1351), Glarus (1352), Zug (1352), and Bern (1353). These eight member cantons – four of them rural valleys (Uri, Schwyz, Unterwalden, and Glarus), and four of them towns (Lucerne, Zurich, Zug, and Bern) – made up the core of the Swiss Confederation of the late fourteenth century. According to Perry Anderson, it is this coalescence of Alpine valleys and towns 'within the complex inventory of European feudalism' that rendered the Swiss Confederation a unique political phenomenon.[13]

From 1393 onwards, the member cantons regularly confirmed their mutual allegiances by oath – the term *Eidgenossenschaft,* Switzerland's official name to this day, literally means Oath Confederation.[14] By the early sixteenth century, five other cantons had followed to form the Confederation of thirteen cantons: Freiburg and Solothurn in 1481, Basel and Schaffhausen in 1501, and Appenzell in 1513. A number of so-called *zugewandte Orte* were quasi-protectorates of the Confederation. These included, among others, the abbey and town of St. Gallen, Mulhausen, Neuenburg, and Geneva. A marked hierarchy separated the full from the affiliated members of the Confederation, the so-called *Zugewandte Orte,* which was reflected in the contracts that the Confederates concluded with the latter. However, in some cases *Zugewandte Orte* managed to become full members. This applied to the five cantons that joined the Confederation between 1481 and 1515 – Freiburg (1481), Solothurn (1481), Basle (1501), Schaffhausen (1501), and Appenzell (1513). Yet the old cantons, the so-called

Alten Orte, made sure that the five new ones remained in the position of junior partners. For example, they did not participate in the administration of the subject territories, and their freedom to conclude other agreements was firmly circumscribed. For a discussion between full and affiliated members of the Confederation.[15] Finally, a third circle consisted of the so-called *gemeine Herrschaften,* territorial acquisitions from the wars of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. These common custodies were jointly administered, thereby forcing the cantons to co-operate and reaffirm their political alliance at a time of deep religious schism.[16]

Nevertheless, the conflict with Habsburg-Austria was not the only reason why the Swiss Confederation came into existence as a separate political community. Domestic factors were important as well. Hence, in the original as well as in subsequent alliances, the cantons pledged mutual aid against violence from inside and outside their pact, as well as common actions against feud, extortion, and robbery. In other words, political functions that normally fell under the jurisdiction of a princely houses or other local lord, had been taken up by an alliance of peasant and town communes. In addition to political motives, economic considerations also played their part. Marchal speaks of an 'economic interdependency' that had evolved between the Alpine valleys and the towns of the plains during the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[17] The towns depended on supplies of cattle and dairy products from central Switzerland; the Alpine regions, in turn, had an interest in securing grain and salt supplies from the plains; and both the towns and the Alpine valleys benefited from the north-south trade via the Gotthard route. Although these economic issues were not mentioned in the various treaties of alliance, it is safe to assume that they provided an important incentive to consolidate the coalition between the valleys north of the Gotthard and towns such as Lucerne, Zurich or Bern.

Nevertheless, an anti-Habsburg tendency is clearly discernible in all these alliances. The original Treaty of 1291, for example, entails the provision that 'we will accept or receive no judge in the aforesaid valleys [Uri, Schwyz, and Unterwalden] who shall have obtained this office for any price, or for money in any way whatever, or one who shall not be a native or a resident with us'.[18] It is quite evident that this

paragraph was directed against Austrian attempts to intensify authority through the purchase of rights which were then looked after by their local officials. The Treaty of 1315 confirmed and expanded upon the original alliance. Concluded three weeks after the defeat of a Habsburg-led army at Morgarten in 1315, this new treaty further strengthened the anti-Habsburg dimension of the Confederate alliance. In it, the three valleys agreed that none of them would acknowledge another authority without the consent of the other two, and that they would not hold separate negotiations, or conclude special agreements, with external powers. Given the strong anti-Habsburg element in the Treaty of 1315, Marchal has described its purpose as that of 'coordinating a common policy towards external forces'.[19]

The expansion of the original alliance over the subsequent decades and centuries confirms this picture. The town of Lucerne had come under Habsburg control in the thirteenth century, and its citizens were forced to participate in the economic blockade against the valley cantons. When in the 1320s Austrian officials began to restrict the political and economic rights of the citizenry of Lucerne, its patrician elite began to revolt and in 1332, Lucerne concluded a treaty of alliance with the three valley cantons.[20] The anti-Habsburg tendency was to play a vital role in subsequent treaties between the three valleys and Zurich (1351), Glarus (1352), Zug (1352), and Bern (1353).

In the period from 1353 to 1415, new institutions were set up that led to a deepening of the alliance of eight cantons. Two such institutions merit our attention. The first is the so-called *Tagsatzung* or Confederate Diet. As an institution that emerged out of the political practice of the Confederation, it manifested an increasing need for a common decision-making body. Every canton sent two representatives to the *Tagsatzung*. Between 1353 and 1400, 48 conferences were held, but the number increased to 126 between 1401 and 1420. In 1410 alone, five conferences took place, and in 1460 the number was a high as 18. Decisions required either unanimity (especially for matters that concerned the Confederation as a whole) or majority vote, depending on the issue in question. The questions that were debated in the Diet

included the preparation of warfare, mediation in case of internal and external conflicts, the regulation of mercenary services, as well as economic matters.[21]

Plate 2-1: The representatives of the Confederate cantons assembled at the Diet in Baden, 16th century.

The second new institution, the Confederate concordats, was a creation of the second half of the fourteenth century. These concordats presented agreements between all the member cantons, while the previous treaties (with the exception of the 1291 Treaty between the Forest cantons) contained special provisions for particular cantons. The *Pfaffenbrief* of 1370 and the *Sempacherbrief* of 1393 exemplify the more inclusive nature of the concordats. The *Pfaffenbrief* contained the provisions that everybody who lived on Confederate territory, even if they were in Austrian services, had to swear allegiance to his town or land; that bishops who were not members of the Confederation were prohibited from appealing to foreign courts; and that all cantons were bound to guarantee the safety of the traffic from the Gotthard to Zurich. These agreements represented a significant step towards the territorialisation of Confederate jurisdiction and penal authority.[22] The *Pfaffenbrief* also manifests a fairly developed common consciousness among the members of the Confederation. The expression 'our

Confederation' was used for the first time in reference to the Confederate territory of the eight cantons. Similar expressions were employed in various concordats, especially in the *Sempacherbrief* (1390) and the *Stanser Verkommnis* (1481).[23]

Ironically, many of the bills that had the effect of promoting communal solidarity had the character of peace treaties aimed at preventing the escalation of conflict between Confederates. In the wake of the battle of Sempach (1386), domestic feuds and expansionist wars were a constant threat. These problems were accompanied by rising tensions between the rural cantons and the towns. The *Sempacherbrief* of 1390 had the purpose of preventing private warfare both between cantons and between a canton and a foreign power. Other provisions concerned the regulation of Confederate warfare, including the treatment of deserters and the partition of booty among the cantons. The conflicting interests and economic inequality between rural cantons and towns were again strikingly revealed after the wars against Burgundy. The threat of a civil war could be diffused through the *Stanser Verkommnis* of 1481, which prohibited the members of the Confederation to wage war against each other and regulated the distribution of war booty.[24]

Wars and Confederate myth-making

If the Swiss Confederation acquired permanence because it was able to develop a set of common institutions, it was also forged by warfare. To begin with, warfare had an existential significance for the nascent Confederate alliance. Without success in warfare, the Confederation's institutional framework – the various treaties of alliance, the common concordats, the Confederate Diet – would either not have come into existence or remained short-lived. Besides, war was decisive in forging the myths and legends that infused the member cantons with a common consciousness and sense of mutual loyalty. Te Brake writes on the relationship between warfare and communal identity in the early modern period:

Of course, most of these largely defensive unions did not survive in the long run, but when they did, the Dutch and Swiss cases suggest, the historical experience of often 'heroic' collective efforts became deeply embedded in the political culture of the resulting confederations.[25]

Most significantly, however, wars produced a number of diacritical markers and thus served to fortify a symbolic boundary that structured Confederate consciousness in a permanent way. As Smith has argued concerning the role of warfare in forging 'adversarial identities': 'Through the creation of chronic adversaries, usually endowed with negative stereotypes, warfare sets the pattern of relationships with significant collective outsiders ... War may not create the original cultural differences, but it sharpens and politicizes them'.[26] Wars also set in train a myth-making process that became manifest in the fifteenth century. In fact, it is no exaggeration to maintain that the battles that the Confederates fought over the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries produced many of the myths, legends and symbols that constituted their ethno-symbolic memory.[27] These myths, legends, and symbols came to form part of a dramatic narrative about the historical origins and subsequent evolution of the Swiss Confederation. At the same time, they embellished the symbolic boundaries between the Confederates and those groups and political entities that were increasingly perceived as 'outsiders'.[28]

The most important of these military encounters include:

1315:	Battle of Morgarten (against Habsburg-Austria)
1386:	Battle of Sempach (against Habsburg-Austria)
1474-77:	Burgundian Wars (against Duke Charles the Bold)
1499-1500:	Swabian Wars (against the Habsburg-led Swabian League)

In each of these wars, armies of the nobility, often led by a powerful feudal dynast, suffered defeat at the hands of the Confederate infantry. In the battle of Morgaten in 1315, for example, prince Leopold of Austria fought with a contingent of 2,000-3,000

knights against little more than 1,000 peasant soldiers from the three forest cantons (Uri, Schwyz, and Unterwalden). The outcome of the battle was unexpected: the peasant infantry of the three valleys routed the Austrian seigneurial cavalry. Some seventy years later, as the tensions between Habsburg-Austria and the Swiss Confederation reached a new climax, a second battle broke out between the same opponents. In the Battle of Sempach in 1386, the Habsburg-led army, despite again having a superior number of soldiers at its disposal, lost and Leopold III of Austria died on the battlefield. This second defeat initiated the decline of the House of Habsburg as a political player on Swiss territory. Serfdom was consequently abolished in Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden within a decade.[29] In the Burgundian Wars (1474-77), the Confederate armies eventually gained the upper hand over Duke Charles the Bold, then the most significant opponent of the French King. The Swabian League – a coalition of nobles and cities founded in 1488 as a bulwark against the Swiss Confederation's expansionist military behaviour in southern Germany – met the same fate in 1499.[30]

Feudalism versus communalism: the emergence of an ethno-symbolic boundary

Thanks to its military success, the Swiss Confederation managed to thwart the territorial ambitions of Habsburg-Austria, Burgundy, or the princes of Savoy. What was even more significant in the eyes of the nobility, however, was the fact that the Swiss Confederation represented a principle of social and political organisation which contradicted and challenged the feudal order. Losing against a more successful competitor was part of the military and political reality to which every dynasty or small lordship that harboured territorial ambitions was used to. So long as those competitors were of noble birth, military defeat did not necessarily amount to a catastrophe. What made the Confederation a particularly dangerous opponent, however, was that its mission was, at least in part, an anti-feudal one. This is well in accordance with Smith's point that although 'wars have occurred between every kind of group from the family to the empire, it is those that have been waged between different kinds of political authority … that have had the greatest impact upon ethnic formation and persistence'.

The fact that the defeat of a feudal power at the hands of a peasant infantry was to remain the exception in late-medieval and early-modern Europe made it all the more suitable as a catalyst for the development of a Confederate self-identity. [31]

Fearing a demonstration effect among their own subjects, nobles of different status and power began to set up coalitions against the Swiss Confederation. In 1407, the bishops of Augsburg and Constance, the duke of Teck, seven counts, and eighty-six nobles founded the Society of Saint George's Shield, a forerunner of the Swabian League which was to be set up a few decades later in 1488. Its self-declared aim was to assure that 'we will all, individually and severally, secure aid and advice in the best and most expeditious way against the peasants of Appenzell and all of those allied to them'.[32] Brady argues that it was mainly fear of 'the growing strength of the idea of turning Swiss among the common [South German] folk' that made cities like Nuremberg, Augsburg, or Ulm join forces with Habsburg-Austria in the South German League.[33]

The protracted conflict between the Swiss Confederation and its feudal opponents served to forge an ethno symbolic boundary that came to structure Confederate self-identity for centuries to come. Its outward manifestation took the form of mutual verbal abuse between Confederates and nobles. The literature containing such assaults and counter-assaults rapidly proliferated throughout the fifteenth century, reaching its apex during the Burgundian and Swabian wars.[34] Blickle maintains that the

> nobles' reaction illustrates the incompatibility of feudal and communal principles, and the documented behaviour of the Habsburgs and their noble clientele toward the Swiss strengthens this impression of antagonism. Ever since the Swiss defeat of the Habsburgs near Morgarten in 1315, the Austrian and Swabian nobles had developed a fear of the Swiss that can only be called pathological. In the Habsburg and neighbouring regions during the later Middle Ages and beyond, the nobles feared the rise of a 'new Switzerland'. The image served to demonize any alternative principle to feudalism.[35]

These fears were anything but groundless. According to Brady, the 'idea that Confederate power fed on the destruction of lords and lordship was fact, not fantasy'.[36] The influence of Swiss communalism manifested itself most forcefully in south and

south-western Germany as well as in the Alsace, as the history of peasant protest clearly shows: 'Each of the nearly sixty rural uprisings in this great region between 1336 and 1515, plus every alliance of rural with urban communes, formed a link in the tremendous running social war that began with the Swiss victory at Morgarten in 1315 and ended with the Revolution of 1525.'[37]

During the German Peasant War of 1525, moreover, a peasant pamphlet had it that the entire Swiss Confederation was the product of a revolutionary upheaval, an alliance that had grown

> out of the blatant tyranny of the nobles and other lords, who drove and forced
> the Common Man unceasingly and without scruple, against all justice, with their
> unchristian, tyrannical violence, motivated by their own arrogance, mischievous
> power, and plans.[38]

The successive victories of the Confederate armies against their noble opponents, the German peasants concluded, had "doubtless happened from the power and decree of God. How else could the Confederation, which daily grows in strength, have arisen from only three simple peasants?"[39]

King Maximilian's *'Manifesto against the Swiss Confederacy'* (1499) confirms that it was a dread of a possible mirror effect rather than territorial ambitions that drove the German cities and nobles into a war against the Swiss cantons. The Swabian War was 'a preventive social war against the spread of masterlesness into Tyrol, Vorarlberg, Swabia, and the Upper Rhine'.[40] In his tirade against the Confederates, King Maximilian alluded repeatedly to the daunting prospect of Swiss communalism gaining ground in southern Germany:

> How much damage [the Confederates] have caused to the German nation, the
> Holy Roman Empire and the whole of Christianity may be obvious to all those
> of us who know that their deceptive words and actions ... brought many of our
> subjects on their side. Those members of the Empire that decided to emulate the
> Swiss peasants and to support their vicious cause have now begun to act in an
> unlawful and rude manner against their neighbours and against the Empire as a
> whole.[41]

The above quotation also contains the central accusation directed against the Confederates: namely, that they had violated the feudal order in which the nobility held the top position and the peasantry the bottom in the hierarchical pyramid.[42] Numerous accounts of the nobility as well as the songs of the German *Landsknechte* depict the Swiss Confederation as a community that had shamefully perverted this God-given order. The *Landsknechte* were the foot soldiers that constituted the German infantry. Recruited mainly from indigent members of the lower nobility, they emerged as the main rivals of the Swiss peasant soldier on the market for mercenaries from the sixteenth century onwards. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Swiss mercenaries and German *Landsknechte* were serving under French, Spanish, Austrian as well as Dutch commanders. [43]
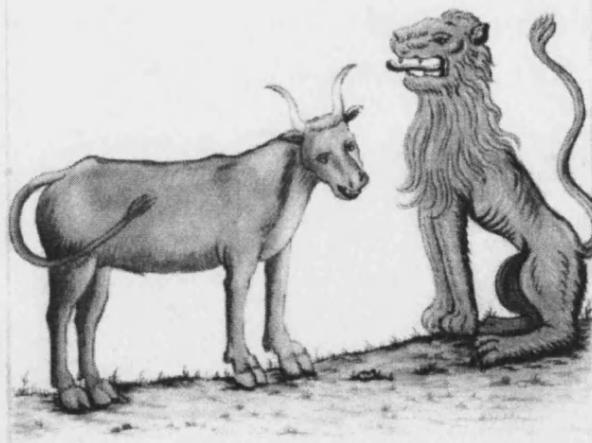
Plate 2-2: Swiss Cow and Habsburg Lion. Illustration
for an anonymous song against the Swiss Confederates,
16th century.

Hence the competition between Confederates and German *Landsknechte* on the market for mercenaries partly explains why, in many statements of the time, the Confederates are disdainfully referred to as 'peasants' and 'villains' notable for their rude and primitive behaviour. The mayor of Bern, Niklaus von Diesbach, in a speech he addressed to Frederic III in September 1473, categorically repudiated all these charges. In fact, he defended the political behaviour of the Swiss Confederation over the preceding centuries, putting the blame squarely on the Habsburg officials in central Switzerland. These officials, he claimed, had not only introduced new, exorbitant taxes to subjugate the population, but they had also maltreated the women of the valleys. Faced with such a situation, Diesbach concludes, the Confederates had had no choice but to resist.[44]

Tab. 2-1: The formation of an ethno-symbolic boundary

Basic Dualism:	Communalism	vs.	Feudalism
Diacritical Features:	Peasantry/ Townspeople	vs.	Nobility
Subjective Value Orientations:	Equality	vs.	Hierarchy
	Simplicity	vs.	Sophistication
	Independence	vs.	Authority/ Control

The Confederate Mythomoteur

The most serious allegation of all, however, held that the Swiss Confederation was an anti-Christian community. This allegation was implied in the accusation that the Confederates had violated the feudal order (which was seen God-given), and it appeared explicitly in numerous other communications and speeches. In his *Manifesto*

against the Swiss Confederates, for instance, King Maximilian I described the Confederates as 'cruel Turks' who were a danger to the Christian faith.[45] Following along these lines, the humanist scholar, Jakob Wimpfeling, maintained that the Confederation's wars against the nobles had not only been unjust but also damaging to Christianity. In a medieval society, the charge of anti-Christian behaviour must have carried great weight, which in part explains the Confederates furious reaction. The fierce controversy that ensued over these issues gave birth to the Confederate *mythomoteur* or myth-symbol complex.[46] It comprised three myths.[47]

The myth of ethnic election. If God had not agreed with their cause, several Confederate propagandists proclaimed, he would not have led them to victory against the nobility in successive battles. In other words, the battle victories were perceived as a sign of the covenant between God and the Confederates. As a folk song by Matthias Zoller of the late fifteenth century put it: 'You were guided, like the people of Israel, through the sea without much suffering.'[48] Various sources from the fourteenth century onwards report that the Confederates had adopted particular customs of worshipping to underline their covenant with God. Most notably, they were described as praying with their arms crossed (*Beten mit zertanen Armen*) in order to symbolise Christ's suffering for a sinful humanity.[49] This provoked disapproval among the clergy. The Dominican Johannes Winckel, for example, used all his erudition to prove that the Confederates' custom of praying was but a vain attempt to conceal their actual sinfulness. Condemning their practice as 'reprehensible, evil, and superstitious', Winckel argued that the 'utterly boorish Swiss, who formed an alliance against justice and common religious doctrine, ... are in danger of eternal damnation'. 'Equally doomed', he argued, was their belief of being God's chosen people: 'Not he who recommends himself is elected, but he whom God recommends'.[50]

Myths of foundation and liberation. We encounter the myths of foundation and liberation in the humanist chronicles of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as well as in a number of folk songs that can be dated to the early fifteenth century. In fact, much evidence suggests that the humanist chroniclers drew inspiration from an oral tradition that had emerged shortly after the historical events which were then found expression,

in dramatised form, in the three myths outlined above.[51] The legitimation of the Swiss Confederation as a distinctive political unit provided, once again, the motivation behind the chronicles. As Hans-Conrad Peyer has argued, it is this particular motivation that gives 'all the Swiss chronicles ... the character of a plea'. Their purpose 'was to fend off Austrian demands' and 'to reject the allegation that the Confederates were merely a bunch of rebels who had fought against their rightful authorities'.[52]

The myths of liberation and foundation were first recorded in the White Book of Samen by the Obwalden chronicler, Hans Schriber, in 1471. The myth of foundation found expression in the legend about the Oath of the Rütli, while the myth of liberation was personified in the figure of Wilhelm Tell. According to the myth of foundation, the Habsburg Yoke provided the impetus behind the conclusion of a secret alliance between the leaders of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden. The legend has it that this alliance was concluded secretly on the Rütli meadow above Lake Uri in August of 1307. The notion that the Confederates had liberated themselves from an external enemy, already present in the foundation myth, was then personalised in the legend of Wilhelm Tell. According to the latter, Tell assassinated the Habsburg bailiff, Gessler, to liberate his people from a relentlessly oppressive regime.[53]

However, the White Book, though influential, was far surpassed in salience by Aegidius Tschudi's *Chronicon Helveticum*. Tschudi's chronicle, written in the third decade of the sixteenth century, came to be seen as the key text of the Confederation's past by successive generations of scholars and the political elite alike.[54] A member of the ruling elite of his native Glarus, Tschudi worked in a manner that was typical of the chroniclers of his time. Although making use of legal documents in his work, he fell back on his imagination to fill in remaining gaps and to add a poetic flavour to the overall narrative by personalising the historical reconstruction based upon the available records. This applies, most notably, to the myths of liberation and foundation: i.e. Wilhelm Tell and the Oath of the Rütli.

Although the documentary evidence available could substantiate neither the events nor all of the protagonists that constitute the myths, Tschudi did not hesitate to present them as factual evidence. It was thus that, by filling these historical gaps,

Tschudi created three legends, complete with dates and places, that henceforth came to form the cornerstones of the Confederation's communal mythology: the Oath between the leading representatives of the three valley-communities (allegedly sworn on 8 November 1307, on the Rütli-meadow above Lake Uri); the assassination of the Habsburg bailiff Gessler by Wilhelm Tell (on 19 November 1307, in Küsnacht in the canton of Schwyz); and the destruction of a number of castles, the centres of Habsburg authority in central Switzerland, by the self-liberating Confederates (1 January 1308).[55]

Tab. 2-2: The Confederate *Mythomoteur*

	Historical Background	Manifestation/Representation
Myth of Ethnic Election	a) Battle Victories b) Status Violation	Custom of Prayer, Chronicles, Pamphlets, Songs
Myth of Foundation	Charter of 1291: Alliance of the three valleys (Uri, Schwyz, and Unterwalden)	Oath of the Rütli
Myth of Liberation	Battles against the Habsburgs	Legend of Wilhelm Tell

The diffusion and political relevance of the Confederate *mythomoteur*

The diffusion of the myths

The appeal of the mythical repertoire that I have just described was not confined to a limited number of scholars and educated officials. In fact, several scholars have convincingly argued that by the fifteenth century the Confederate myth-symbol complex had come to form a constitutive part of a 'public discourse' in which several social groups participated.[56] We have already indicated that the myths that acquired popular salience in the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries did not depend

for their effectiveness upon their being true. But why, we have to ask, did they retain their appeal over the following centuries?

To begin with, as dramatic narratives that had emerged out of actual historical events and processes, they possessed a plausibility structure. What made them myths and thus half truths rather than mere fictions was that they could be associated with collective actions and events that actually took place: battles in particular, as well as the conclusion of alliances and the taking of oaths to confirm their content. Steinberg thus concludes (rightly in my view) that the 'story of William Tell is not false, even if there never was a man of that name and he never shot an apple off his son's head. Its truth is the truth of a communal tradition by which the Swiss defined and made precise their public values.'[57] In other words, the fact that the liberation narrative appears plausible against the historical background is what explains its salience, not the actual existence of a person named Wilhelm Tell (for which we have no evidence).

This and their capacity to create foci of communal allegiance and sympathy apparently greatly assisted their dissemination through chronicles, historic folk songs, folk plays, pamphlets, sites and monuments, which emerged in great number during the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Through such means of symbolic communication, the Confederate myth-symbol complex became more firmly rooted in the life-worlds of a wider segment of the population.[58] From the sixteenth century onwards the core myths with its heroic figures and narratives – Wilhelm Tell, the Oath of the Rütli, the maltreatment of the local population at the hands of the Habsburg officials – were represented through a variety of different means, including: coins, wooden statues, cups, as well as statues in churches and town halls.[59]

Historical texts, songs, and public rituals helped to reproduce the myths and legends and to maintain the memory of the historical events that they dramatised. One form of public remembering were the so-called *Schlachtjahreszeiten,* the commemorations of the late-medieval battles that took place annually. At these commemorations, religious services were held in honour of the fallen soldiers, and special attention was paid to the war heroes whose legends were narrated and thereby made known to a wider public.[60] Another, and no less important, way to sustain a lively

memory of the battles, myths and legends was through folk songs which emerged in large numbers since the latter half of the fifteenth century. The so-called *Tellenspiele* – festival productions devoted to the legend of William Tell which had been staged regularly since the beginning of the sixteenth century – also served to popularise and reproduce the myths. Such festival productions assumed a significant role during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the religious divide posed a serious threat to the Swiss Confederation. In these plays, the founding era was portrayed as the golden age of Confederate history, and the religious divisions were described as a departure from the virtues of the forefathers.[61]

The political salience of the myths

What was even more important for the long-term survival of the Confederate myth-symbol complex or *mythomoteur* was the political significance it acquired almost from the outset. In part, this was but a natural consequence of its spread during the late-medieval and early-modern periods. However, the diffusion of the myths from the late-medieval era onwards would not have sufficed to render them politically significant. What was decisive in this regard was the distinct social and political reality of communalism. Blickle argues that as a principle of social and political organisation, communalism, unlike feudalism, favoured the emergence of a 'public sphere' in the Swiss Confederation. Such a public sphere, he maintains, took shape in the late fifteenth century. He also maintains that this public sphere, once it had come into existence, forced the Confederate elites to legitimate their actions before a wider public: 'The policies within a certain territory thereby become dependant on a "public".' In this context, the historical past, expressed and personified in the myths, acquired an important function in securing political legitimacy.[62]

A side-glance at the Scottish case can help to illustrate the specificity of communal identity formation in the Swiss Confederation. In Scotland, too, recurrent medieval warfare (i.e. the war of independence against England that began in the late thirteenth century) served as a catalyst for the formation of a sense of communal

identity. Under the stress of constant attacks from England, the Scottish government produced, in the words of Susan Reynolds, 'the most eloquent statement of regnal solidarity to come out of the middle ages'.[63] In a letter to the pope known as the Declaration of Arbroath, thirty-nine Scottish barons justified their claim to regnal independence from England by pointing out the common descent of the Scottish kings, and that the Scots had from earliest times been unconquered and independent. Despite the fact that these claims fly in the face of many of the relevant facts, the Declaration reflects the Scottish leadership's belief 'in the historic regnal unity [of Scotland] and their right to independence'.[64] Yet, essentially, the myth of ethnic origin and independence that found expression in the Declaration of Arbroath reflects the self-identity of a regnal community dominated by kings and nobles. This tiny elite provided the driving force behind the creation of the communal myths that the Declaration of Arbroath contains. It was not geared to a public (its sole addressee was the pope), and the indications are that it possessed limited popular resonance among 'ordinary' Scots at the time (even if this was to change from the eighteenth centuries onwards).[65]

This was different under conditions of Confederate communalism. Given the strong anti-establishment tendency of the core myths, authority partly depended on the ability of the political elites to prove that their actions did not violate the example set by the supposedly virtuous ancestors whose memory was preserved in the foundation and liberation myths. Indeed, the degree to which the Confederate elite of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries tried to legitimate their claim to authority by references to the mythical narratives is conspicuous. A case in point is the religious conflict that resulted from the Reformation. The Catholic cantons made much of the fact that they had remained faithful to the faith of the ancestors, while the Protestant members of the Confederation had departed from the moral and religious parameters set by the founding fathers. Protestant representatives countered such allegations by criticising the Catholic cantons of central Switzerland for their heavy involvement in trading with mercenary soldiers. This and not the reformation of the Christian faith, they argued, signalled a departure from the legacy of the heroic forebears.[66]

The Swiss Peasant War of 1653 underscores both the popular resonance of the foundation and liberation myths in early-modern Switzerland and their capacity to inspire collective action against the ruling authorities. Hence, when the rebellious peasant alliances denounced the authorities of Lucerne as tyrannical, they explicitly referred to the anti-Habsburg foundation myths to legitimate their actions. For the same reasons their forefathers had defeated the oppressive Austrian nobility and expelled their bailiffs, they claimed, they now raised their weapons against the territorial authorities. Andreas Suter has shown that the Confederate myth-symbol complex that had emerged in the fourteenth and fifteenth century was decisive in inciting the rebelling peasants to take military action in 1653. In particular, the myth of liberation personified in the figure of Wilhelm Tell possessed a mobilising capacity because it formed 'part of a cultural tradition which involved both elite- and popular culture' and also cut across religious boundaries as well.[67] Only days after the peasant revolt had been crushed in a short and bloody encounter, three peasant leaders took revenge by assassinating a high representative of the Lucerne authorities. The three men who executed the assassination were all disguised as Wilhelm Tell. The next day, they went to mass in the village of Schüpfheim, apparently displaying the murder weapon to the gathered crowd. Thus they expressed their conviction that their actions had been in accordance with God's will, and the impromptu reactions of the local population suggest that their deed was understood as they had intended: as tyrannicide.[68]

Plate 2-3: The topography around Lake Lucerne with the three Confederates of the founding myth in the top left-hand corner. Woodcut, 16th century.

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the formation of the ethno-symbolic memory within the Swiss Confederation between the late-medieval and early-modern periods. It was composed of three communal myths: a myth of foundation (embodied in the myth of the Rütli); a myth of liberation (expressed in the legend about Wilhelm Tell); and a myth of ethnic election, serving as an explanation for the Confederate victories over the Habsburg armies and as a justification for their resistance to the feudal status order. This ethno-symbolic memory provided the outward manifestation of an increasingly salient Confederate self-identity. In a crucial sense, this self-identity was predicated on the dualism between communalism and feudalism, which served as the Confederate *mythomoteur*.

By the turn of the eighteenth century, this dualism, dramatised and typified in the three core myths, had become a political factor: an ethno-symbolic memory which

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would play a significant role in both the legitimation of power and the mobilisation of social protest. Would this pattern of legitimating one's actions and one's authority through references to the core myths continue into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the era of modern nationalism? The chapters of part II seek to determine the impact of this ethno-symbolic memory on the construction and re-construction of Swiss nationhood in the modern era, and how new events and processes led to reinterpretations of its constitutive parts.

Notes

[1] Weber (1978: 389).

[2] The first reports that give evidence of regular traffic over the Gotthard pass appeared after 1230. See Marchal (1986: 153); Peyer (1980).

[3] Anderson (1979: 301).

[4] Peyer (1980: 228).

[5] Marchal (1986: 153).

[6] This combination of peripheral geographical location and high degree of social and political organisation, which proved of vital importance for the Confederation's future development, is stressed by Deutsch (1976: 37).

[7] Peyer (1980).

[8] See in particular Blickle (1980a & b), (1985), and (1990). For an illuminating exploration of the "oath community" *(Schwureinung)* as a socio-political phenomenon, see Oexle (1995).

[9] Brady (1985: 29).

[10] See Brady (1985). Communalism also strongly developed in the Valais, an Alpine region in the western part of what today forms Switzerland's territory, which in the early fifteenth century entered into an agreement with the forest cantons. See Marchal (1986: 194-5). Geneva provides an example of a town that opposed the policy of a feudal power. Like the Valais region and much of the rest of Switzerland's western parts, Geneva was under the rule of the princes of Savoy from the mid-thirteenth century onwards. In the sixteenth century, the town entered a treaty of alliance with the Swiss Confederation. See Marchal (1986: 189-192).

[11] Deutsch (1976: 38) is rightly critical of the standard argument that the Confederates' strategy was merely one of defending ancient rights. To be sure, the peasant communes usually referred to their 'ancient rights' in order to justify their demands. Yet, their demands were steadily expanding in proportion to the growth of their military strength.

[12] Peyer (1978: 14). Peyer (1978: 56-57) has also shown that, over the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Swiss cantons began to pursue a policy that was very similar to that of the Habsburgs and other feudal powers. It was aimed at achieving control over both territory and jurisdiction in their respective areas of influence. This also led to rivalries and conflicts among the Confederates themselves.

[13] Anderson (1979: 301).

[14] Peyer (1978: 37).

[15] Peyer (1978: 37-39).

[16] This included, among others, the following territories: Baden and the Freiamt (1451), the Thurgau (1460), Grandson (1475), Sargans (1483), Bellinzona (1503), Locarno, Lugano, and Mendrisio (1512). Von Muralt (1980: 418) has argued that it was in part because of common tasks such as the administration of the *Gemeine Herrschaften* that the Swiss Confederation did not break up after the Reformation.

[17] Marchal (1986: 154-55).

[18] *Erster Ewiger Bund der drei Waldstätte. 1291 Anfang August.* Eidg. Abschiede Bd. 1 S. 242 – Quellenwerk z. Entstehung der Schweiz. Eidgenossenschaft, Urkunden Bd. 1 Nr. 1681. Susan Reynolds is certainly correct in maintaining that the alliance between the forest cantons of 1291 should not be regarded as an attempt at 'complete independence' from the Habsburg overlords. Yet, if revolution was not the aim, the securing of a certain degree of political autonomy, determined by economic interests and (increasingly) a distinct group identity, provided an important motive. See Reynolds (1984: 238-40).

[19] Marchal (1986: 175).

[20] Marchal (1986: 207).

[21] Peyer (1978: 31, 39).

[22] Peyer (1978: 32).

[23] Marchal (1986: 202-3); Blickle (1990: 24-25).

[24] Peyer (1978: 33-41); Schaufelberger (1980: 326-27).

[25] Te Brake (1998: 173-4). It seems indeed to be the case that, of all possible examples, the Dutch one bears the greatest degree of resemblance to Switzerland. On the genesis of Dutch patriotism (as manifested in the forging of myths of liberation and godly election) in the early modern period, see Schama (1991: ch. 2).

[26] Smith (1986: 39).

[27] According to Smith (1988: 2), 'myth exaggerates, dramatises and reinterprets facts. It turns the latter into a narrative recounted in a dramatic form, and this in part explains its wide appeal. For the myths *are* often widely believed, and though their components change, they generally exhibit certain basic forms'.

[28] Hans-Conrad Peyer (1978: 42-43) argues that a 'common national consciousness' had become discernible by the early fifteenth century which expressed itself in a variety of ways: antipathies towards those who spoke a different language; self-praise for the war-prone peasants and fervent rhetoric against

the anti-Swiss propaganda of the Austrian and South-German nobility; competition between the German *Landsknechten* and the Confederate mercenaries; and in the historicist discourse of the Humanists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Von Muralt (1980: 418) maintains that the Swabian War (1499-1500) was crucial in forging a Confederate consciousness that was not focused on the German nation (a concept that had gained in currency in the fifteenth century).

[29] Marchal (1986: 208). Anderson (1979: 302).

[30] Peyer (1980: 339). By the turn of the sixteenth century, the Swiss Confederation had established itself as one of the foremost military powers in Europe. However, the defeat at Marignano in 1515, which signalled the end of its expansionist temptations, also indicated its limited capacity to compete with the most powerful European states. After the defeat at Marignano, Confederate soldiers were in high demand as mercenaries in foreign armies. See Peyer (1978: 9-20); Morard (1986).

[31] Smith (1986: 37-38). It is worth noting that in 1388, only two years after the Battle of Sempach, the *Schwäbischer Städtebund,* an alliance of South-German towns concluded to fight the territorial ambitions of rising princely states such as Württemberg, Bayern, and Austria, suffered a heavy defeat. After the cities were again routed at Nuremberg in 1449/50 their alliance dissolved. The devastating defeat of the German peasants against the German princes in the war of 1525 is well known. See Peyer (1978: 22); Brady (1985).

[32] Blickle (1997: 34).

[33] Brady (1985: 57).

[34] The beginnings of this anti-Confederate propaganda date from the battle of Sempach (1386) and to the death of duke Leopold of Habsburg on the battlefield. The critics of the Swiss Confederation saw in Leopolds death an act of assassination committed by his own subjects. This is discussed in Marchal (1982: 126-27).

[35] Blickle (1997: 36).

[36] Brady (1985: 36).

[37] Brady (1985: 30).

[38] Quoted from Brady (1985: 39).

[39] Quoted from Brady (1985: 39-40).

[40] Brady (1985: 58).

[41] Quoted from Sieber-Lehmann and Wilhelmi (1998: 90). As late as 1502, King Maximilian was convinced that the Confederates were intent on invading southern Germany 'to set the peasants against the clergy, nobility, and the other lords'. Quoted from Brady (1985: 71).

[42] For the salience of the feudal order and the conceptions of social ranks during the medieval ages, see Oexle (1987).

[43] See Im Hof (1991: 74).

[44] Sieber-Lehmann (1998: 4).

[45] Sieber-Lehmann and Wilhelmini (1998: 80).

[46] I take the term *mythomoteur* from Armstrong (1982: 8), who argues that 'over long periods of time, the legitimizing power of individual mythic structures tends to be enhanced by fusion with other myths in a *mythomoteur* defining identity in relation to a specific polity'.

[47] Marchal (1982: 124).

[48] Quoted from Marchal (1987: 772). See also Sieber-Lehmann (1998).

[49] Marchal (1982: 126-27).

[50] Quoted from Sieber-Lehmann and Wilhelmi (1998: 161).

[51] Marchal (1987) and (1990).

[52] Peyer (1980: 194).

[53] The emergence and content of these myths is explained in Ulrich Im Hof (1991: ch. 1); Marchal (1990: 313-326). The content of the White Book is discussed in Peyer (1980: 194-96).

[54] On Tschudi's *Chronicon Helveticum,* see Stadler and Stettler (1968: 10).

[55] Stettler (1970: 48); Im Hof (1991: ch. 1).

[56] Sieber-Lehmann (1998: 7); Marchal (1987).

[57] Steinberg (1996: 28)

[58] Marchal (1987).

[59] See Suter (1995). These various forms of symbolic representation are well illustrated in von Tavel (1992). The use of communal historicism as a means of legitimating the Swiss Confederation as a separate political entity is discussed in Stadler (1958).

[60] For the commemoration of these battles, see Im Hof (1991: 40), as well as Marchal (1987: 774).

[61] See Im Hof (1991: 83); Marchal (1990: 326-35).

[62] Blickle (1985: 195). Needless to say, this early-modern public sphere lacked many of the central ingredients of the bourgeois public sphere described by Habermas (1990). Above all, it was not coupled with a 'demand for representative government and a liberal constitution' (Eley 1992: 290). The Swiss communes were not democracies in the modern sense, as Peyer (1978) and von Muralt (1980: 401-403) were able to show. Oligarchic tendencies were particularly marked in the towns, and in the rural communes much authority rested with a handful of powerful families. Particularly in the valley communes, however, annual popular assemblies – the so-called *Landsgemeinde* democracies – were a common practice. Nevertheless, in terms of how it affected the execution of power the early modern public sphere (which emerged in tandem with 'communalism') was remarkably similar to the modern public sphere defined by Habermas: to an exceptionally high degree, it forced the political authorities to legitimate their actions and decisions before a wider public.

[63] Reynolds (1984: 274).

[64] Reynolds (1984: 276).

[65] Here I follow Webster's argument (1997: 87-93). An equally successful case of identity formation along communal lines, of course, is the United Provinces of the Northern Netherlands. For a comparison of the Swiss and Dutch roads of early modern state formation, see Te Brake (1998: ch. 5).

[66] The rural (Catholic) cantons of central Switzerland dominated the trade with mercenary soldiers, while the more affluent cities of the plains played a marginal role in it. See Im Hof (1991: 74).

[67] Suter (1995: 380, 386).

[68] For a brilliant examination of the Swiss Peasant War of 1653, see Suter (1995). See also Peter Blickle (1980b: 215-308).

PART II:

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF SWISS NATIONHOOD

CHAPTER THREE

Nationalising the Ethno-symbolic Memory:
The Synthesis of the Helvetic Patriots (1760-1798)

The revered founders of our republic were brave fighters rather than experienced statesmen or thoughtful legislators. They fought as only true and unique heroes can fight for the liberation of their Fatherland; but they neglected to give to their state, created from the mere iron of their weapons, a proper nature capable of incorporating all its different parts into a single coherent body. ... It has been left to our times to penetrate more deeply into the core of the state and – like a medical doctor whose knowledge of the illness is the cause of the patient's recovery – to select and apply the appropriate remedy. Ought we not to believe that this happy time has now arrived, like the beautiful sunrise which testifies to the arrival of a new day? Has not predestination placed flames on our horizon, which are to enlighten us?
Address delivered at the 1763 meeting of the Helvetic Society[1]

How to transform Switzerland from a relatively loose confederation of cantons and subject territories into a modern nation-state? This was the question that preoccupied the minds and fuelled the emotions of the Helvetic patriots during the late eighteenth century. While the question received a variety of answers, two narratives structured the discourse of Swiss patriotism in the late eighteenth century. The first could be termed the future-oriented narrative of social and political improvement. The numerous references to the future are testimony to the patriots' hope that a better, more rational, more virtuous, and less divided society – most of them used the term 'common Fatherland' to denote the society of their dreams – was on the horizon. The second narrative that permeates patriotic discourse could be described as the narrative of historical origins. The invocation of a glorious past, the veneration of virtuous ancestors, was rarely absent whenever the patriots discussed how to transform a lamentable present into a promising future. In concrete terms, they referred to the myths, symbols, and narratives that by the eighteenth century had come to constitute the ethno-symbolic memory of the Swiss Confederation (see chapter 2).

Essentially, therefore, the patriots' project can be regarded as an ongoing attempt at fusing these two narratives – the one forward-looking, the other retrospective – into a single definition of Swiss nationhood. Theoretically, civic universalism and ethno-symbolic particularism are imcompatible. In practice, however, the relationship between the two narratives was one of ambiguity and tension rather than direct contradiction, and the patriots' persistent endeavour at solving this tension served as the catalyst for early Swiss nationalism.[2] In the course of this process, the pre-modern myths, symbols, and narratives were reinterpreted in the light of the civic values of the Enlightenment that inspired the patriots. Though concentrated in the Protestant, German-speaking areas of the Swiss Confederation, the patriotic network that expanded rapidly in the closing decades of the eighteenth century cut across linguistic and religious boundaries.[3]

This chapter analyses this process of identity formation as it unfolded between 1760 and 1798. It comprises three sections. The first examines the rise of Swiss patriotism from the 1760s in terms of its ideological programme and organisational structure, while the second puts forward an explanation as to how and why this rise took place. The third section examines the patriotic discourse about Swiss nationhood as a process of boundary construction.

The rise of Swiss patriotism: ideology and organisation

The genesis of Swiss patriotism in the late 1750s and early 1760s overlapped and built upon the historicist revolution that became first noticeable shortly after the turn of the seventeenth century. The latter was based on the belief that individual and social phenomena can best be interpreted as the 'product of sequences of events which unfold the identity and laws of growth of those phenomena'. For the adherents of the historicist worldview, moreover, the communal past was a source of inspiration and moral authority.[4] Hence the more salient this worldview became among the educated

public, the more bound were the patriots to legitimate their political aspirations and programmes in the language of historicism.

As early as the 1720s, the minister, Johann Jakob Breitinger and, even more prominently, the literary critique and historian, Johann Jakob Bodmer, developed an interest in the Confederation's past. More than three decades before Rousseau was embarking on a similar enterprise, these two intellectuals of the Enlightenment had pioneered the historicist reaction against the rationality and universalist orientation of the French Enlightenment. Campbell Orr, for example, argues that Bodmer and Breitinger, together with other Swiss intellectuals of their generation, 'pioneered the way from classicism to Romanticism, while stopping short of the fully developed Romantic creed associated with Germany ...'.[5]

Yet, while engaging with its fundamental premises, their criticism was not confined to the French *philosophes* but included the chroniclers of Swiss medieval history. The civic humanists, who in the sixteenth century had begun to chronicle the pivotal events of Swiss history, became a preferred object of their scorn. Bodmer in particular launched a fierce attack on the method and style embraced by the historians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, arguing that they were 'among the most simple-minded of their profession'. He complained that their uninspired narratives had amounted to nothing more than 'the faithful collection and registration of past events'.[6] Such scholars, whom Bodmer described as mere 'copyists', were contrasted with more imaginative historians, who tried to determine the character of a people by studying their history. Thus for Bodmer, the history of the Confederation represented 'a source of the most beautiful expeditions', and he declared that 'whoever is going to write it will be embarking on an eulogy to an entire people'. As he sketches out his programme for national renewal:

> We therefore expect specific messages about the most alien customs and
> fashions there are in the Swiss country; especially those which are peculiar to
> a town, or to Switzerland as a whole, such as: the distinct ways of upbringing,
> of caressing young women, of having a wedding, of treating one's wife ... Yet
> although those moral novelties are to be given preference that set Switzerland
> apart from other countries, this does not mean that we should exclude ...

examples of ... generous contempt, of despicable admiration for wealth or lasciviousness, honour, and life; neither should we leave aside natural speeches on the weaknesses and strength of men, of the joy and misery of human life.[7]

No doubt greatly influenced by the pioneering work of Bodmer and Breitinger in Zurich, and of Albrecht von Haller in Bern, others were to follow their example. The year 1758 is particularly significant in that it saw the publication of three pamphlets in which a mostly cautious critique of the political order of the *ancien régime* was couched in an openly patriotic language. The three authors were Isaak Iselin, Franz Urs Balthasar and Johann Georg Zimmermann. The titles of their works were *Philosophische Träume eines Menschenfreundes* ('Philosophical Dreams of a Philanthropist'); *Patriotische Träume eines Eidgenossen von einem Mittel, die veraltete Eidgenossenschaft wieder zu verjüngen* ('Patriotic Dreams of a Confederate about Possible Means of rejuvenating the Old Confederation'); and *Nationalstolz* ('National Pride'). Works entailing a patriotic critique of the status quo appeared also in the French language throughout the eighteenth century, notably by Abraham Ruchat, in Lausanne, Louis Bourguet, in Neuchâtel and, if much later, by the minister Philippe-Sirice Bridel, in Basle. Moveover, around 1755, a network of private correspondence connecting Helvetic patriots from Zurich, Lucerne, Bern and Basle was set up by young disciples of Bodmer and Haller.[8]

In the course of the 1760s, therefore, ethnic historicism spread outwards from the drawing rooms of closely-knit learned circles to become the cognitive model of a rapidly growing number of patriotic circles. It was thus the early nationalist movement was born in Switzerland (see Figure 3.1.).

Fig. 3-1: Number of patriotic associations, 1761-1797

45 bestehende Gesellschaften

Source: Im Hof and de Capitani (1983: 66).

It is not difficult to ascertain the social backgrounds of the leading lights of this movement. They were all members of an educated elite, and, almost without exception, they were critical of the existing order. Their agenda included such demands as the introduction of a single constitution for the whole Confederation, majority rule for the decision-making in the Confederate Diet, equality for the subject territories. All these measures should serve the advancement of the patriotic spirit among the public at large.[9]

The Radical Movemement

The national discourse of the period between 1760 and 1798 gave rise to two distinct concepts of national identity. A radical strand of patriotism was developed in Zurich by a circle that had formed around the charismatic intellectual and scholar Johann Jakob Bodmer in Zurich.[10] The activities of this movement were dominated by young or prospective scholars, ministers and artists. The overwhelming majority of those who joined the circle were former or actual students of the Carolinum in Zurich, where

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Bodmer was lecturing in patriotic history between 1731 and 1775. The Carolinum was an academy for the education of ministers. Faced with a major crisis in proto-industrial production during the 1760s, a large part of Zurich's economic elite sent their male offspring to the Carolinum instead of encouraging them to join the familial enterprise. This led to a sharp increase in student numbers.[11]

Once there, the young students, most of whom came from backgrounds where Enlightenment ideas were eagerly consumed, found themselves in a highly conservative institution where strong discipline and orthodox practices of education were the rule. Students were prohibited to use languages other than Latin in their private conversations in the corridors. However, they had the opportunity to listen to a teacher like Bodmer, who taught a secular subject matter and was an ambidextrous ideological entrepreneur. In his lectures, he acquainted his students with the doctrine of natural law and with Rousseau's philosophical works and expressed criticism of the status quo.[12] Thanks to his radical views and his enthusiasm as a teacher, Bodmer came to be greatly admired by the students.[13] Many of his young adherents followed his doctrines without much reservation. As one of his disciples described the purpose of the radical movement:

> The main purpose of this society is to examine the principles and doctrines of a truly philosophical policy in order to get a better grasp on the advantages, mistakes and improvements of the different ways of government. To this end, we shall pay much attention to the history of the Fatherland and try to draw practical lessons from it.[14]

Democratic republicanism and the doctrine of natural law constituted the ideological basis of radical patriotism. Bodmer, for instance, argued that the 'superfluous affluence of the aristocrats is very damaging to a free state, because inequality in material goods produces various pernicious passions in the hearts of the citizens, thus abolishing the natural equality which originally existed among men.'[15] In his play, 'Gesslers Tod, oder das erlegte Raubthier' ('Gessler's death, or, the hunted-down predator', printed in 1775), he justified the assassination of the Habsburg official at the hands of William Tell with the argument that the former, by breaking traditional legal agreements and

oppressing the local population, had acted like a criminal. In his own words: 'One is entitled to use any means to end the life of a beast. I cannot prosecute somebody according to the rules of law who has repealed all lawful procedure.'[16]

Some of his young followers went even further in their radicalism than their teacher by portraying the Confederation's history in terms of a succession of revolutionary acts and upheavals. This applies, for example, to the young Rudolf Kramer. In 1768, he published a history of what he called the 'revolutions in the Confederate states from the seventeenth century to the present'. The book provided an explicit justification of the Swiss peasant war of 1653 and of ensuing rural uprisings and protests, arguing that there was 'ample evidence that the revolutions which occurred from time to time in the Helvetic states' were the result of the lack of republican equality.[17]

Despite its initial success, however, the demise of the radical youth movement began in the 1770s. It was hastened by the censorship, repression and public stigmatisation of Zurich's patrician authorities, and by the latter's success in domesticating some of its most radical proponents and turning many of them into reformers. Eventually, this led to a split of the radical movement, with some members going underground and organising themselves in secret societies with limited capacity to influence public opinion. But many of the movement's most gifted thinkers and agitators, like Johann-Caspar Lavater, Johann Heinrich Füssli or Heinrich Pestalozzi joined the patriotic reformers in the Helvetic Society and embarked on successful political careers.[18] One former radical and Bodmer's successor as professor of patriotic history at the Carolinum who came to embrace a reform strategy was Johann Heinrich Fuessli (1745-1832). In 1778, he gave the following advice to his students:

Young men! Conceal before the eyes of the plebeians the holy enthusiasm of virtue. If you have insights, enlighten your fellow citizens by means of your manners ... and your scholarly work ...But do not storm your way, and do not talk inconsiderately. Do not throw arrows against vice unless you are convinced that you can destroy it, for otherwise you will only earn the scorn of the mocker.[19]

The reform-oriented patriots gathered in the Helvetic Society, who embodied the prevailing strand of Swiss national identity on the eve of the Helvetic Revolution. The distinctiveness of the conception of Swiss nationhood it advanced rests upon three broad features:

1. The nation as a balanced synthesis of ethno-historical and civic elements.

2. Nation-formation as an attempt to simultaneously supersede and guarantee loyalties and attachments below the national level (regional/cantonal).

3. Nation-formation as a gradual process, not as a radical or revolutionary act.

The Helvetic Society was founded in 1761 and ceased to exist following the outbreak of the Helvetic Revolution in 1798. It formed the first patriotic association to be set up with the deliberate aim of attracting members from all parts of the country. The plan to set up such a society emerged from a discussion between the politicians Isaak Iselin (Basle) and Kaspar Hirzel (Zurich), and the poet Salomon Gessner (Zurich). At the time of the foundation of the Helvetic Society, Iselin and Hirzel had already been prominent figures for some time in the patriotic movements in their respective home towns.[20]

Measured against contemporary standards, the Helvetic Society pursued an open membership policy. Its initiators rejected plans – formulated, for instance, by the radical patriots Johann Jakob Bodmer and Heinrich Zellweger – to develop the new association into a kind of scholarly club, or an academy for the education of future statesmen. While the Helvetic Society's founders greatly respected Bodmer for his achievements in the field of patriotic history – he was made a member in absentia at the society's first meeting in 1762 – his radical inclinations were perceived as potentially

harmful to the patriotic cause. Instead of opting for visionary exclusiveness, the protagonists of the new society (at least from the 1770s onwards) chose a realist course that took account of actual socio-political conditions. It was thus in accordance with this basic orientation when the protocol of the 1763 meeting, politely but firmly, rejected the radicals' plan to turn the Helvetic Society into an elitist academy devoted to the improvement of Swiss politics:

> Even though it is conceded that the propositions of Mr. Bodmer and Mr. Zellweger are very advantageous and well considered in their general intentions, and as much as we would wish their being realised, it is nonetheless necessary to postpone these propositions until the arrival of more pleasant times.[21]

Instead, the leaders of the Helvetic Society tried to combine patriotic and social activities. This involved meeting influential people from other parts of the Swiss Confederation, and entering into political discussions with them. As for discussion topics, matters of a practical nature were considered as vital as having scholarly debates about the latest works of the *philosophes* or the written contributions of other active members of the society. For example, on October 17, 1763 Johann Caspar Hirzel, by then a leading figure within the Society, wrote to Isaak Iselin with regard to the request put forward by Bodmer and his associates:

> If we choose to become a learned society, we will inevitably frighten off those who would like to visit us as long as we simply met as faithful Confederates. I admire every scholar, but I would welcome with the same enthusiasm a sensible, honest man from Uri or the Melchthal as a teacher of the sciences.[22]

The new statutes of 1766 officially sanctioned this open approach. Among the purposes of the annual meetings the formation of 'close friendships' between 'Confederates from all cantons and parts of our common Fatherland' was named and the hope was expressed that 'these more than private friendships would provide the seed from which numerous and multiplying contacts would gradually spread all over the nation'.[23] The

atmosphere at the annual meetings, which used to last four days and to which the wives of the members had access, was often quite lively. In the afternoon, the members, mostly in small groups of two or three people, would go for walks in the surrounding countryside. Social events would be followed by patriotic ceremonies. After dinner with wine and music, around midnight, three youths would step on the podium in front of the gathered members to create a symbolic renewal of the Oath of the Rütli, followed by a sip from the liberty cup of the heroic blood of their forefathers. The ceremony would be brought to a close with a collection for the poor of the town where the meeting took place.[24] All this was in sharp contrast to the puritan spirit that reigned during the gatherings of the radical Bodmer circle in Zurich, where the consumption of tea, coffee, and tabacco, let alone alcohol, was prohibited during the meetings.

At least initially, however, the growth and appeal of the Helvetic Society was impeded by censorship and other forms of oppression brought about by the ruling authorities. Despite its non-subversive political agenda, from the very outset various cantons, among them Bern and Solothurn, reacted with suspicion to the new society. Consequently, the membership in the late 1760s stagnated at between 60 and 80, only sharply increasing from the middle of the 1770s onwards. At the same time, the social composition of its membership changed dramatically, with an increasing number of cantonal magistrates joining the Society's ranks.[25] The Protestant and German-speaking element dominated within the Society, outnumbering Catholic and French-speaking members by a ratio of almost ten to one. However, the fact that all the cultural segments of Swiss society were represented meant that the Helvetic Society could effectively be regarded as a microcosm of early Swiss nationalism.[26]

Those who could make it to the annual gatherings of the Helvetic Society, spending four days socialising and debating with other members on the state of the Confederation, took home from these meetings a memorable patriotic experience. Most importantly, for those in a position to share this experience, the Swiss nation had ceased to be a purely 'imagined community', an 'invisible ... beauty which can only be envisaged with the eyes of reason'.[27] In the eyes of its members, the Helvetic Society was the literal embodiment of this nation. Its inclusiveness and nation-wide appeal

made it unique according to late eighteenth-century European standards.[28] As opposed to the radical Bodmer-circle in Zurich, the bulk of its members were not free-floating intellectuals but belonged to the country's political and economic elite; besides, it must be born in mind that the great majority of those taking part in its activities were at the same time members in similar societies in their respective home regions. This way a considerable network of patriotic activity all over the country emerged and was sustained for several decades, making an important contribution to the education of two generations of Swiss patriots.

But how did this patriotic network affect the great majority of Swiss who did not belong to any such circle and for whom the nation largely remained an 'invisible beauty'? There was, to be sure, no shortage of proposals on how to spread the national message to wider sections of the population. These proposals included requests to intensify social interaction between the various social groups and regions that composed the Confederation;[29] they furthermore entailed a plan to set up a national academy for the education of future statesmen which – unlike 'foreign academies' – would fully appreciate the complex structure of the Swiss Confederation as embodied in the 'differences between the various Confederate states';[30] they finally contained the wish for a national assembly, where the 'general Fatherland' could be perceived 'as a concrete entity', and which, by enabling the Swiss 'to overlook the whole', would provide the inspiration necessary to 'concentrate all [their] efforts on improving [their] common Fatherland'.[31] However, few of these projects were actually realised during the eighteenth century.[32]

Nevertheless, perhaps the most important plan to foster national consciousness was about to be realised. Apparently at the request of the 1765 or 1766 meeting of the Helvetic Society, Johann Caspar Lavater (himself an active member) began to compose a considerable number of folk songs on various historical topics. In these songs, the foundation period, epitomised in the medieval myths and battles, took pride of place. In 1767 a first collection of Lavater's songs was published, and others were soon to follow. At the Helvetic Society's 1768 meeting, Füssli had only the highest praise for Lavater's work. At a time of crisis and corruption, Füssli argued, there could not have

been a better 'antidote' to the challenge at hand than 'national songs'. Within a very short period, so he claimed, Lavater's songs had had a considerable resonance in many parts of the Swiss Confederation, 'driving out rhyming jokes and popular obscenities', as he put it in a typically moralistic phrase. Turning towards Lavater, who was apparently among the audience, he proclaimed: 'Finally, these songs have penetrated regions where people rarely ever read a book; and it is in such regions that these songs, some foreign words apart, are best understood.' Füssli therefore concluded his speech by requesting Lavater to continue with his compositions, recommending that he pay particular attention to two broad themes: the joy of the peasant in Switzerland as opposed to his counterpart in monarchical states; and the Swabian Wars, which, he claimed, was the only 'epoch of our history' which had not yet found expression in the existing collection of Lavater's historic folk songs.[33]

The rise of Swiss patriotism: an explanation

Why did the nation become such a prominent topic after 1760? Neither a monocausal explanation nor an assessment of different variables in isolation can do justice to the complexities of the process considered. In what follows, then, I seek to explain the rise of the Swiss nation as a cognitive and emotive category resulting from an intersection of four sets of conditions. Each condition, taken on its own, cannot explain the rise of patriotism, but their interaction makes it a likely outcome. These include

1. the sociopolitical conflicts that proliferated in the course of the eighteenth century combined with a parallel lack of cooperation on the Confederate level;

2. the emergence of new cognitive models grounded on rationality and universalism during the seventeenth century and their spread during the eighteenth;

3. the contradictions embodied in the type of regime commonly referred to as Enlightened Absolutism;

4. the existence of a well-entrenched ethno-symbolic memory comprising a repertoire of symbols, myths, and narratives.

Let me deal with each of these issues in turn.

A less than united Confederation: social conflicts and political divisions

In sharp contrast to the conflicts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, most of the conflicts of the eighteenth century were of a social and political, and not primarily of a religious nature.[34] Two developments led to a sharp increase in the number of conflicts in eighteenth-century Switzerland. One concerns the quasi-absolutist policies pursued by a number of Swiss towns, particularly Zurich and Bern. By increasing the tax pressure on agricultural production, these policies resulted in a widening of the socio-economic gap between town and countryside. In concrete terms, this meant that the peasants of the rural areas had to bear the burden of heavy taxation, while the city dwellers were largely exempt from such duties. With regard to political rights, too, the rural population was clearly kept at a disadvantage compared to the citizens of an average town. The 18,000 strong population of Zurich's countryside, for example, possessed virtually no influence on political decision-making, while it carried a heavy tax burden. Hardly surprisingly, this situation favoured the development of tensions and a latent potential for conflicts.[35]

Another line of conflict, which cut right across town populations, resulted from the practice of patrician rule.[36] In Bern, Freiburg, Solothurn, Lucerne and Zurich particularly, the concentration of power in the hands of a few families and cliques, who were reproducing themselves by co-optation, became a prime cause of grievance. Moreover, in the eighteenth century the populations of the larger towns were divided into citizens and those who lacked full citizenship rights. In around 1770, the proportion of citizens in Geneva making up the total population was 27 per cent, in Bern 30 per cent, in Basle 50 per cent, and in Zurich 60 per cent.[37] Conflicts were most likely to occur where political and social inequality coincided with economic hardship. Guild-uprisings are recorded for various towns, notably for Basle in 1691, for Zurich in 1713 and 1777, and for Freiburg in 1781 and 1782.[38] The epicentres of conflict, however, were Geneva and Zurich. In Geneva, the first wave of protests and uprisings

reached its peak in 1782, and the existing authorities could only hold on to their power as a result of French interference. In Zurich, too, where the making of all important decisions lay in the hands of a small group of patricians, a steady increase in conflicts was witnessed between 1760 and 1780. However, by applying a combined strategy of repression and reform, the ruling elite managed to keep revolutionary transformation at bay.[39]

The particularist tendencies within the Old Confederation, i.e. the inability of its parts to co-operate with one another in important matters of internal and external security, presents another feature of the Confederation of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The protracted history of the plan to centralise the Confederation's military defence exemplifies this problem. From the seventeenth century onwards, successive attempts were made to set up a standing army under a central command based on the model of the Low Countries. None of these did come to fruition, however. Efforts to arrive at tighter military integration, promoted most vigorously by Zurich and Bern in particular, met up against two main obstacles. For one thing, the project faced opposition from the Catholic communities of central Switzerland who feared – not without justification – that closer military integration would further strengthen the already existing hegemony of the Protestant towns. For another, the plan was likely to have provoked broad popular resistance because it would have necessitated a substantial increase in the burden of taxation on the countryside.[40]

Another area which reveals the Old Confederation's political disunity concerns the regulation of mercenary service. In the absence of a common policy towards such a regulation, each Confederate could freely and independently enter into contracts with foreign powers to provide mercenaries, depending on their own particular wishes and preferences. This lack of co-ordination between the (mostly Catholic) rural cantons that supplied mercenaries to foreign armies sometimes had dire consequences. In the Spanish Succession War (1701-1714), for instance, 23,000 Swiss soldiers fought on the French side and 20,000 fought in the army of the Alliance. In the battle of Malplaquet in 1709, these Swiss regiments met and almost wiped each other out, much to the outrage of Switzerland's emerging patriotic elite.[41] The fact that up until the eighteenth

century Protestant and Catholic cantons held their separate diets is a further indication of the low degree of cohesion and mutual loyalty within the Confederation. Witnessing the apparent extent of internal discord at close range, a German scholar travelling across Switzerland, while speaking fondly of the commercial spirit and skills he found among the Protestant elite of the towns, concluded in 1795 that 'the much praised unity between the cantons of the Confederation seems to have suffered greatly in recent years'.[42]

Rationality and Enlightenment universalism – the emergence of new cognitive models

The Confederation's internal divisions and the still prevalent particularist orientations among large sections of its population, alone would not have been sufficient to enable the emergence of nationalism as a new ideology and movement. Neither a lack of internal unity and loyalty, nor internal conflict and grievance, let alone inequality, per se can be expected to inspire patriotic passion. A combination of fatalism and regional upheavals would have been likelier outcomes, had there not occurred a cultural transformation that profoundly affected the perception of social and political affairs. I am referring to the spread, during the course of the eighteenth century, of a new cognitive model based on rationality and universalism that affected the educated elites in particular. Measured against this model, the *ancien régime* left a lot to be desired.

'The new philosophy calls all in doubt.' So wrote the English poet John Donne as early as 1612.[43] The spread of scientific rationality, hitherto confined to the new natural philosophies, proved to have an impact on the existing social and political order that no perceptive observer could neglect, and Switzerland was no exception in this respect. To be sure, the culture of science took root later and spread less quickly in Switzerland than, for instance, in England, where it became 'part of public life during the 1640-1660 period.'[44] Nonetheless, natural scientists like Albrecht von Haller in Bern, or the mathematicians Jakob and Johann Bernouilly in Basle, soon gained a European-wide reputation in their respective fields. Inspired by these scholars and their prestige, an ever larger number of educated Swiss started to consume scientific and

other scholarly literature. The increased consumption rate of such works was fuelled by the rapid expansion of 'print capitalism' in the wake of the Reformation. Along with this revolution in the production and dissemination of printed material went a cultural transformation of no less significance. I am referring to the publication of pamphlets, learned journals and books, and what have you, in the 'national' vernaculars (German, French, English, Italian) rather than in Latin.[45]

Taking up the themes of scientific rationality and universal laws, and applying them to human society in general, the Enlightenment movement brought about a fundamental change in the ways in which individuals and groups perceived the world they inhabited. To a far greater extent than their colleagues in the natural sciences, most Enlightenment thinkers were intent on spreading their ideas to the wider reading public. The Swiss participated in the Enlightenment project as both recipients and producers of new ideas. Paris and some of the northern German states, notably Prussia, provided the Enlightenment with its leading centres, but the contributions of Zurich, Basle and Geneva remained anything but marginal.[46] Some, like the Bernese natural scientist Albrecht von Haller, the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau from Geneva, or the literary critic and historian Johann Jakob Bodmer from Zurich, were in the vanguard of the Enlightenment movement and their influence on the Swiss educated public was considerable.[47]

The contradictions of Enlightened Absolutism

It remains difficult for contemporaries to grasp societal contradictions, which potentially engender social transformations, as long as the discrepancy between the value system underlying an existing order and new cognitive models remains in the abstract. What renders such contradictions concrete and visible, however, is if they become entrenched in a social formation or authority structure. The contradictions that were characteristic of the old regime in its later stages – between achievement and ascription, *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, as it were – were not only embodied, but actually institutionalised in the system of Enlightened Absolutism. As a socio-political

authority structure, the latter represents an attempt to infuse a given order based upon rank and hierarchy with enlightened ideals of progress and rationality.[48]

In one regard, Enlightened Absolutism, by providing a bulwark against regional particularism, aristocratic privilege and exclusive forms of representation, prepared the ground for the emergence of constitutional governments based upon quasi-modern notions of equality and justice. At the same time, however, a hierarchy, legitimated by differences of birth and rank, along with the feudal revenue from agricultural production, was to remain at the core of absolutist authority even in its late phase. Hence, while engendering a reform movement and preparing the ground for the emergence of a 'public sphere' which furthered the exchange of rival ideas, considerable efforts were made at the same time to preserve ascribed status.

Voltaire and Diderot, to name but two prominent examples, supported the theory and practice of Enlightened Absolutism because they believed in the possibility of reforming the absolutist system by infusing it with Enlightenment rationality (but not equality!). Rousseau, on the other hand, regarded such a reform plan as inherently contradictory and ultimately doomed, arguing that Enlightenment-values were incommensurate with absolutist rule.[49] As can be seen in hindsight, the frequent unintended consequence of attempts to reform states along such lines was that it cast an even sharper light on the Janus-faced nature of late absolutist regimes. In other words, as a perceptive analyst has put it succinctly, the project of Enlightened Absolutism 'attempts at securing and extending authority while at the same time creating important conditions for its own supersession'.[50]

Of course, at no point during the eighteenth century, let alone earlier, did the Swiss Confederation as a whole possess the two fundamental features of late absolutist states such as Prussia or France: territorial integration and administrative centralism. There was no king to successfully impose on his territory what were the recognised essentials of every self-respecting absolutist state: a standing army, a permanent bureaucracy, national taxation, a codified law, and the beginnings of a unified market.[51] Nevertheless, several Swiss towns, notably the Protestant centres Zurich and Bern went some way down the absolutist path. While such aspirations did not bear fruit at the

Confederate level, these would-be absolutist states were not wholly unsuccessful within their own spheres of influence in centralising authority, homogenising legal and economic matters and tightening the fiscal grip on their subjects. The political elite of these two towns, whether of aristocratic or bourgeois origin, saw as their ideal not republican simplicity but the lifestyle of the international enlightened aristocracy. As in other European cities, these aspirations and claims to political power were symbolically expressed by distinct ways of dressing and ritual behaviour.[52] At the same time, however, this very elite made use of cognitive models that had evolved with the Enlightenment in an attempt to reform the existing order so as to make it more efficient and less vulnerable. Against this background, Zurich and Bern, along with Basle, were to emerge as the epicentres of the nationalist movement that took off in the 1760s, furnishing it with many of its protagonists. It was in these towns that what has been described as the Janus-faced nature of Enlightened Absolutism was visible to the critical public, many of whom were themselves involved, in some way or another, in the politics of the bureaucratic state.

Yet the patrician families that dominated politics showed a general reluctance to accommodate newcomers from the bourgeoisie, and those who eventually gained access to political office had often reached a considerable age. It is hardly a coincidence, then, that particularly young educated town dwellers, who were either unwilling to wait or found themselves shut out from power completely, supplied the radical movement with its main recruitment basis. Even for successful reformers who had never flirted with radical ideas, the contradictions of the old regime provided a major impetus behind their decision to join the patriotic movement. They could not fail to recognise that 'free and unconventional opinions were regarded with suspicion, if not even prohibited or prosecuted'. Nor could they simply ignore that 'the state of the Swiss Confederation as a whole looked increasingly hopeless'.[53] These evident contradictions provided fertile soil for an ideological programme and movement which, while critical of old regime institutions, still largely operated within its parameters.

There can be little doubt that the conjuncture of certain socio-political and cultural factors produced societal contradictions that enhanced the potential for social and cultural change. Yet these conditions formed a necessary but by no means sufficient condition for the arrival of a nation-centred discourse. The fact that the patriots were strongly influenced by universalistic principles can plausibly explain why they launched their criticisms against the existing order in the name of the 'public', 'citizenry' or 'common Fatherland' rather than in the name of a sectional political group. What it does not explain, however, is why their patriotism adopted so profoundly historicist overtones.

Collecting and interpreting the nation's past and making the broader public acquainted with its assumed moral lessons became a paramount task. Some members of the Helvetic Society demanded that the collection of all historical sources be arranged, so that they became available for scholarly examination. As one member expressed this request at the 1766 meeting:

> Let us now, like busy bees, collect the material and use it to construct a building which is to stand out due to its proper structure, its virtue, and not least its usefulness. Let us take the trouble to discover the truth about the deeds of our fathers, and let us spread the insights that we have gained from such an endeavour.[54]

As in the case of the radicals, the foremost concern was with the normative content of the historical past. The question of whether the portrayals were true in an objective sense came second. It did not matter that historical legends, particularly those about William Tell, did not stand up to scientific test. As Bodmer himself freely admitted:

> It is not necessary that these small legends can be considered true history. They can nonetheless have the desired impact on peoples' minds, as by instilling repugnance to tyrants, and in teaching an esteem for the value of liberty and the rights of the people.[55]

What mattered considerably, however, was that the myths could lend moral authority and thus legitimacy to the patriotic project. The view that a community could only be preserved 'by the means it was founded'[56] was shared among the different factions of Swiss patriotism, and its moral force was generated and constantly sustained by two interrelated myths: a myth of the heroic age, and a double myth of communal decline and regeneration.[57] The myth of heroic age located the peak of Confederate history in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

What is significant in this regard is that the liberation and founding myths, as well as the core events to which they referred, were merely alluded to but never spelled out in detail. The lack of substantive exploration indicates the self-evident status of the foundation and liberation myths. The medieval legends and events, so it appears, were assumed to be known, as was their moral value for the community. The fact that the Swiss Confederation (like the Greeks or Romans, but unlike the Germans or French) disposed of a republican heritage that could serve as a legitimate role model for the present was a source of much pride. Hirzel expressed a common view when he referred to the founding of the Confederation in the fourteenth century as the 'establishment of a Republic for the sake of civil liberties'. In fact, he continued, this event formed 'one of the most important occurrences to have honoured humankind'.[58] Simplicity, self-restraint, heroic bravery, and love of liberty constituted the catalogue of virtues associated with a long republican past and the basis of the patriots' civic nationalism.

The gradualist strategy of reform patriotism is evident in numerous statements. In sharp contrast to other 'nations that ... did not know the love of the Fatherland', one patriot declared, the Confederates were not 'drunk with their love of liberty' but 'faithfully ... recognised their duties against their authorities' when they founded their allegiance.[59] What is characteristic of this approach, however, is that it directs its criticism against rigid conservatives and radicals alike. The radicals were accused of portraying the founding of the Swiss Confederation as the work of 'rebellious peasants who got rid of their lawful authorities'. The defenders of the old regime, on the other hand, were criticised because they regarded the teaching of the national past as a subversive activity. To reform-minded patriots, this suspicion was wholly unfounded,

given 'that the first alliance presented the most impressive example of modesty and respect for the legitimate authorities'. [60]

'There is no doubt that the history of our ancestors holds the best lessons for us. ... But are we, the heirs of this liberty which is in its turn the fruit of so much heroic bravery and sacrifice, are we still truly free?' Through stubbornly reiterating the question of whether the Confederation of the present could stand the test of its heroic past, the patriots created a myth of communal decline and regeneration. Naturally, they had little doubt that the Confederates had departed from the path of their forebears and that this was indeed at the very root of the current crisis. The catalogue of identified vices included 'desires that are a consequence of our extravagant ways of life' as well as 'damaging practices in order to rise to lucrative office'. Once the cause of the decline was so clearly established and unanimously recognised, however, the appropriate remedy seemed equally obvious. Emulating the virtues of the glorious ancestors was considered an essential part of that remedy.[61]

What seems clear is that by referring to historical title deeds, symbols and myths the patriots aimed to legitimate their demands for social and political reform as well as to enhance their status within their own community.[62] But why were these myths, symbols and historical narratives so readily at hand? The answer is because they formed part of an ethno-symbolic memory that had emerged in the sixteenth century and was subsequently elaborated and popularised (see chapter 2). By the eighteenth century, it had come to form an accepted part of the worldview of the educated and also possessed a considerable degree of popular resonance. Hence, by introducing the Confederate ethno-symbolic memory as a second cultural variable in addition to Enlightenment universalism, we are able to explain why the quest for civic reform took the form of a ethno-historicist nationalism (see Figure 3.2.).[63]

Fig. 3-2: The rise of Swiss early nationalism: a model

SOCIO-POLITICAL LEVEL   CULTURAL LEVEL

Inequality   Enlightenment
universalism
(social; political; regional)

                        Higher
                        Level Fusion

        Enlightened Absolutism   Ethno-Symbolic
        (contradiction-ridden)   Memory

                Critical Civic Discourse

                Patriotic Synthesis
            of 'civic' and 'ethno-symbolic'
                    components
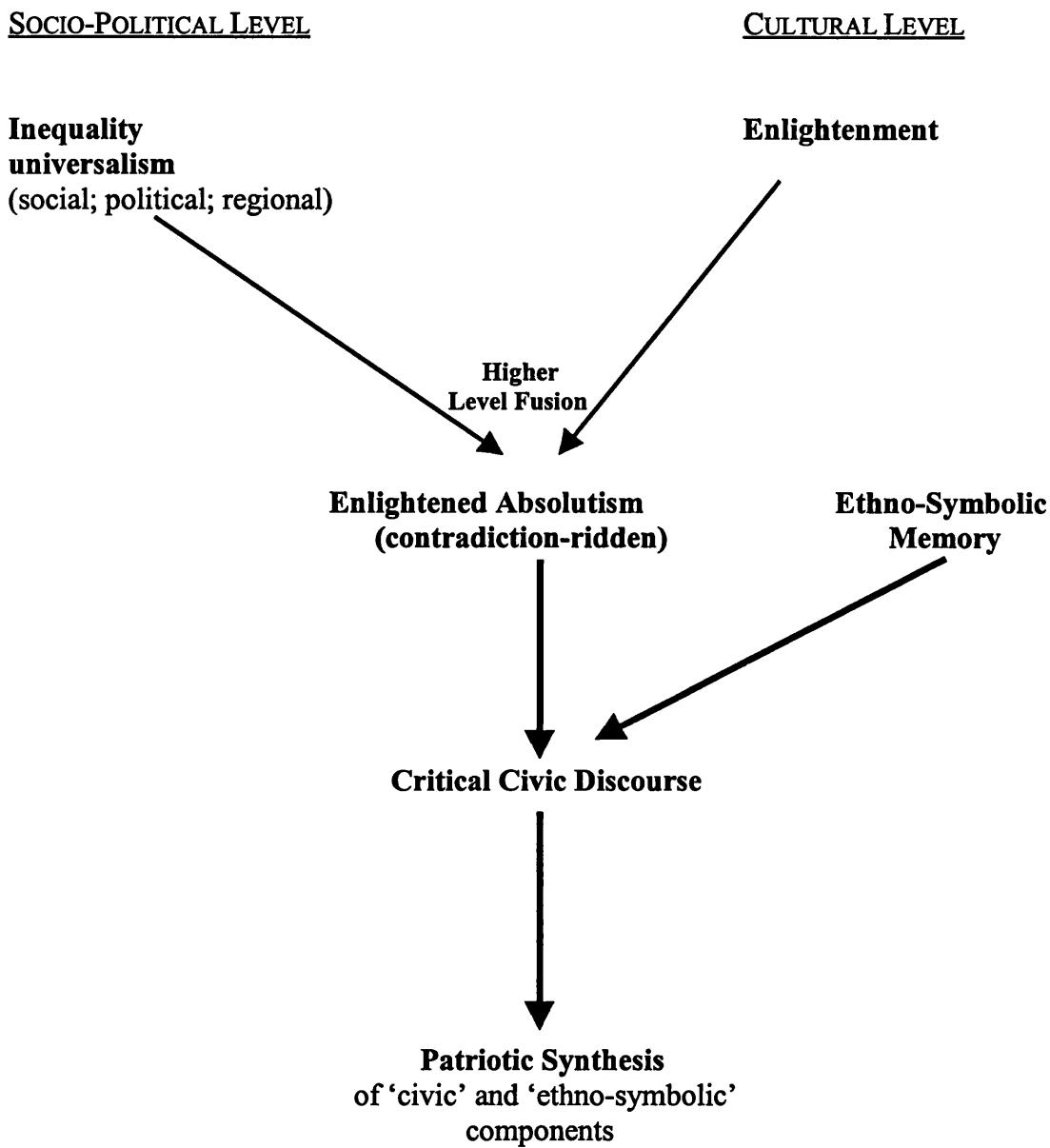
What kind of patriotism? Defining the lineaments of Swiss nationhood

It is now time to take a closer look at the construction of Swiss nationhood in the late eighteenth century. This will lead us to identify the different mechanisms and at times conflicting conceptions the patriots embraced as they endeavoured to define the boundaries of Swiss national identity.

As argued in the introduction to this chapter, this fusion of ethno-historical idioms and modern civic values is always precarious, often contested, and therefore one of the major causes of the dynamic nature of modern national identities. In the debates of the Helvetic Society the tension between the civic and ethno-historical dimension of the nation was clearly noticeable as well. While the moral value of the foundation and liberation legends was considered self-evident, some patriots asked themselves whether it was right and proper to restrict their patriotic feelings to the national level when Enlightenment universalism preached the love of humankind.[64]

This predicament of 'nation versus humanity' was most eloquently expressed in a presidential address by Isaak Iselin in 1764. In his 'Speech about the love of the Fatherland', Iselin drew a distinction between two forms of patriotism. One he called the 'ordinary love of the Fatherland'. Its nature was emotional if not irrational, its content concrete rather than abstract, and its scope defined by the narrow confinements of the present rather than possibilities of what the future might hold. According to Iselin, this version of patriotism was indifferent towards the wider mental and political environment and showed an exaggerated appreciation for one's 'own' customs and manners. For all these reasons, 'ordinary patriotism'[65] took an 'overwhelmingly exclusive' direction. Such an 'ordinary patriotism', Iselin concluded, 'considers only one's own land and fellow citizens, and often only the inhabitants of a single province or town, or even of a single clan, tribe or association, as worthy of respect and love'.[66]

Iselin was quick to point out, however, that even though 'ordinary patriotism' alone is deficient as a basis for true virtue due to its lack of 'reason', it nonetheless provided a bond of solidarity necessary for modern nations to evolve. Where it was absent, 'neither the more noble patriotism nor true virtue, nor genuine grandeur among human beings could ever have developed', and 'the strange historical events that obtain eternal significance would not have occurred'.[67] One therefore had to acknowledge, Iselin continued his exploration, the achievements of those who 'in less enlightened times' fostered this kind of patriotism and thus 'paved the way for the welfare and bliss

of their peoples'. Hence from Iselin's point of view, 'ordinary patriotism', forms a
necessary but transitional stage in mankind's forward march towards 'noble
patriotism', culminating in a 'love of humanity' that would supersede national
limitations. As if to compensate for the fact that human imperfection made it unlikely
that his generation could witness the arrival of this ideal state of affairs, Iselin
concluded by developing a modern myth of election for the Swiss. Being composed of
different ethno-linguistic groups, Iselin argued, Switzerland was the world's living
proof that civic universalism was more than a dream: 'Fortunate circumstances allow
you – circumstances which perhaps no other people could pride itself on – to conceive
of yourself as true citizens of the world, as true citizens of all nations.'[68]
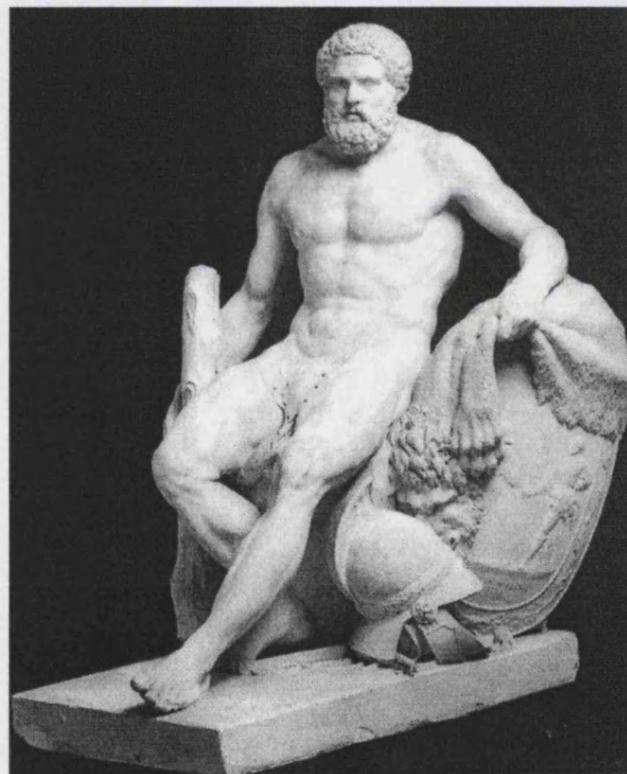
Plate 3-1: Alexander Trippel, *Herkules oder Allegorie auf
die Eidgenossenschaft* (1775). Museum zum Allerheiligen.

From the 1770s onwards, however, we witness a shift in perspective. While prior to that date the neo-classical historicism of the Enlightenment (with its cosmopolitan tendencies) existed alongside a more decidedly ethno-historicist conception of the national past, the latter now became predominant. The following statement from 1775 signals this shift:

> I do not reprimand those whose aim it is to make our youth acquainted with the peculiar deeds of Caesar or Scipio ... Yet what is far more beautiful and worthy of praise is to tell the Confederates about the history and the lives of their forefathers, the origin of the Swiss Confederation, the heroic and noble deeds of those who founded our alliance [69]

The 'humanity versus nation' debate now gave way to a discussion about the relation between two types of loyalties: those below the national level (communal, regional, cantonal), and that to the nation. The problem that needed to be addressed, as several members now argued in their speeches, was that the Swiss possessed a 'dual Fatherland'. One was rather 'general' and consisted 'of all that which, as a result of prudence, developed into a larger entity which as a whole is distinct from other peoples'. The second, more particularist Fatherland plays an equally important role as a focal point of collective loyalty, because it is to the latter that people owe their 'lives, education, security', as well as 'such precious goods as parents, children, the first objects of our tenderness'.[70] Demands to embrace the 'general Fatherland' – 'the nation as a whole' – are frequently justified by references to the heroic deeds of the Old Confederates. The following statement provides a typical example of this nationalisation of Confederate ethno-symbolism, by which a pre-existing repertoire of myths and symbols was re-interpreted in the light of the value catalogue of the republican patriotism of the eighteenth-century: 'Love your own Fatherland; but love even more the wider, more extended Fatherland: it was for the latter that our forebears went to war and thus sacrificed their blood and fortune.'[71]

The major reason, it seems, why the Helvetic *patriots* suddenly felt it necessary to tackle the problem of the 'dual Fatherland' has to do with the development of its membership.[72] As already indicated, during the 1770s the Society witnessed a considerable influx of people with real-world experience. These people were well aware of the prevalence of strong regional attachments in their respective home cantons. They also knew that this situation was rooted in the religious divide that had resulted from the religious wars between the sixteenth and early eighteenth centuries. This history of conflicts and divisions impeded closer cultural and political integration at the Confederate level while reinforcing already existing loyalties at the regional and local level. In the face of the predicament at hand, universalist calls to embrace 'humanity' were considered far-fetched, if not downright irresponsible, and the cosmopolitan idealism which frequently resurfaced in the debates came under increasing attack. Instead of an 'all or nothing' attitude, which was condemned, the leaders of the Helvetic Society began to urge the younger patriots to 'settle for that solution which is most likely to be commensurate with time and circumstance, and with the genius of their fellow countrymen'.[73]

The challenge of cosmopolitanism: patriotism and the search for 'national character'

As cosmopolitanism increasingly became a bad word for many reform patriots, more energy was poured into turning people's particularist loyalties outwards so that they would include the 'greater Fatherland'. This was paralleled by efforts to define more firmly the symbolic boundaries of Swiss nationhood. In the 1760s, for example, Johann Georg Zimmermann came up with an explicit formula of nation formation by exclusion. In his pamphlet, *Nationalstolz,* he argued that national pride rested on two fundamental conditions. The first comprised a group's effort to live up to the 'glory of the forebears'. The second was the possession of 'particular prejudices', for it was 'mainly these prejudices', he claimed, that 'make for the particular pride of a nation, and ... give it its specific character'.[74] The basis from which national prejudice would flourish best, Zimmermann concluded towards the end of his text, were the areas where

a people felt themselves to be distinct from their neighbours. Such distinctiveness Zimmermann saw in the Confederation's republican tradition, and in the widespread contempt among its population for despotism. It was these republican traditions that Zimmermann regarded as being the genuine grounds for the creation of a secularised version of Swiss national election. In view of this glorious republican heritage, he asked rhetorically, was it not only natural that the Swiss 'felt a certain elevation in their hearts', that they considered themselves privileged to be able to 'enjoy a particularly fortunate destiny' and, even, as creatures 'of a higher order' when they compared their own fate with that of their aristocratic neighbours?[75]

Quite frequently, moreover, the delineation of Swiss nationhood went in tandem with a rejection of the cosmopolitan attitudes still widespread among the educated strata, particularly the educated youth. 'What do we gain ... if we know how numerous the French armies are, how many duchies that there are in Germany, how far away Moscow is, ... in one word, how the whole world around us looks like?' one Helvetic patriot asked in 1765. 'As long as we do not know more about our own strength and power', he continued, 'we will remain aliens in our own Fatherland, ignorant of its history and the evolution of our state'.[76] The change of the Helvetic Society's statutes around 1782 was a clear manifestation that the civic nationalists (whose rhetoric was decidedly historicist) had now won the upper hand over those who still openly sympathised with cosmopolitan views. Before that time, both citizens of the Swiss Confederation (i.e. those born in a Swiss canton) and 'foreigners' could become active members. Apparently during the 1782 meeting, however, it was decided that henceforth only the former could be active members, while the status of foreigners *(Froemde)* was restricted to that of honorary members without the right to vote. In fact, the concept of the 'foreigner', which had been largely irrelevant, it seems, to the concerns of the Society's founding members, became salient in the patriotic discourse from the 1780s onwards.[77]

Interestingly enough, almost everything rejected as 'non-Swiss' was associated with cosmopolitanism. The view that 'those who feel at home everywhere are really at home nowhere' was now expressed with increasing frequency.[78] But cosmopolitanism

was not discussed in the abstract. Rather, as the debates of the Helvetic Society developed, it acquired a concrete face insofar as values and orientations held to be cosmopolitan and thus undermining 'Swissness' were identified with the supra-national culture of the European nobility. Consequently, the two neighbouring states in which the monarchical principle held sway – France and, to a lesser degree, Germany – henceforth provided the level of comparison against which a Swiss 'national character' was defined. There was no guarantee, as one patriot told his fellow Helvetians, that the young Swiss elite could 'protect their hearts from being affected by those virtually imperceptible effects of fine obscenities, softness and splendour' that characterised French and German aristocratic culture. Such foreign manners and customs, he continued, went 'directly against the sense of decency which distinguished the republican citizen in general and the free Helvetian in particular'.[79] What could the nation gain, so another member of the Society asked by caricaturing the lifestyle of the court, if the Swiss youth spent their days 'dancing in the anterooms of kings' in the morning and having 'lunch every afternoon with a dragoon-captain and three comedians'.[80] The enthusiasm, furthermore, with which foreign works of philosophy and literature were received within Switzerland became a cause of concern and even suspicion. As one member summed up the argument:

> As things stand in our Confederation, you will not come across many homes
> where you cannot find, along with the most recent products of Gallic
> slipperiness, the sort of German novels and plays which tend to leave you in
> the dark whether the hero or heroine is to be taken as a model to be emulated
> or, quite to the contrary, as an abhorrent example.[81]

Given that they lent themselves ideally to define Swiss national identity based on an opposition between the republican and monarchical principles, the choice of France and Germany as negative examples is hardly surprising. Moreover, every Swiss patriot was well acquainted with French and German culture. The majority of the Swiss political elite had spent a year of their education in France, to learn French and become acquainted with French civilisation and some of the leading thinkers of the time. Apart from France, Germany, too, especially the universities of Berlin and Göttingen, were an

attractive destination for the young Swiss elite. It is against this background that the older generation of patriots expressed concern about 'the impertinence of our widely travelled youth',[82] and notably about the fact 'that almost all youth of a certain age, but in particular those designated to serve the state, are travelling, ... without guidance, to foreign countries'.[83] Several speakers therefore requested that this travel be reduced. One of the main motivations for the young Swiss travelling to Paris, becoming proficient in the French language, no longer warranted travelling abroad since this task, several members of the Society maintained, could as well be achieved at home, by spending some time in those parts of the Swiss Confederation where French was the native language.[84] The danger of being constantly exposed to foreign customs, values and manners was, as one commentator claimed, nothing less than a 'decline of the traditional energy inherent in our national character'. 'No people under the sun, and certainly not the Swiss', another argued, 'can exchange their fundamental internal characteristics for foreign ones without being punished for it'.[85]
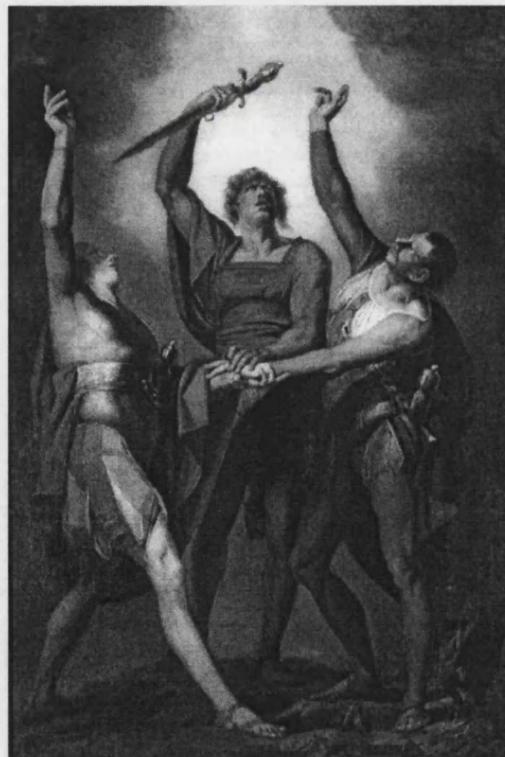
Plate 3-2: Johann Heinrich Füssli, *Die drei Eidgenossen beim Schwur auf dem Rütli* (1780), Kunsthaus Zürich.

Nature complemented history as a symbolic resource in the definition of Swiss national identity. Both mechanisms – the construction of continuity with Switzerland's alleged ethno-historical past (*historicism*) on the one hand and the creation of a sense of naturalness (*naturalisation*) on the other – were employed by the patriots to render Swiss nationhood authentic. Furthermore, nature was used to add an organic dimension to Switzerland's predominantly political (i.e. civic-republican) conception of nationhood.[86]

In Switzerland, nature's national significance was embodied in the Alps. The breakthrough towards the nationalisation of Alpine nature came only in the course of the eighteenth century, when the mountains 'had ceased to be monstrosities and had become an integral part of varied and diversified Nature',[87] and when, towards the end of the century, a cult-like enthusiasm was focused on the Swiss Alps in particular. Various Enlightenment scientists and poets, foreign and Swiss alike, contributed to this development. The English scientist Thomas Robinson, in his *Natural History*, described the Alps as an 'integral and necessary part of nature's harmony'.[88] The Swiss Johann Jakob Scheuchzer (1672-1733), after two decades of travelling the Alps, published in the 1720s a topographical description of the Alpine landscape entitled, *Itinera Alpina*.

From the middle of the eighteenth century onwards, moreover, the classical view, which had conceived of nature primarily in utilitarian and anthropocentric terms, gave way, slowly but surely, to a more romanticized conception in which nature was conceived as an organic force, even as a source of almost religious importance.[89] In an age of enlightened criticism of aristocratic politics and opulence, a large section of the educated public, many of them influenced by Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (first published in 1761), began to see in the Swiss Alps and their inhabitants an expression of simplicity, purity, honesty, and liberty, the republican virtues *par excellence.*

The Alps increasingly became an important aspect of Swiss patriotism in the closing decades of the eighteenth century.[90] The patriots of the Helvetic Society presented the them as the true seat of Swiss virtues. One of its founding fathers, Franz

Urs Balthasar, expressed the significance of this connection in 1763 by saying that the character of the Swiss nation found its complete expression in its untamed Alpine landscape. The Alps were frequently portrayed as the scene where the Swiss Confederation had been founded at the turn of the thirteenth century, making them the genuine source of national authenticity. This argumentative pattern was ideally suited to justify the general fight against cosmopolitanism, manifested in the youth's alleged inclination to excessive foreign travel. For how could 'a mountain people' like the Swiss, so one speaker asked his audience, once removed from the 'rough climate' of the Alps and 'exposed to a tender way of life and milde air', sustain their national character. Like a plant exposed to the wrong climate, he continued, they would 'soon fade away and become extinct.'[91]

Conclusion

The latter half of the eighteenth century witnessed the rise of an early nationalist movement and ideology in Switzerland. Building on ideological precedents, the movement gained momentum from the 1760s onwards, when patriotic circles began to spring up all over the country. Two distinct concepts of national identity emanated from the national discourse of the period between 1760 and 1798. A radical strand of patriotism was developed in Zurich by a circle that had formed around the scholar and ideological entrepreneur Johann Jakob Bodmer in Zurich. Adhering to the doctrine of natural law, the protagonists of this movement and their apostles favoured a radical transformation of the institutions of the old regime. However, it was the Helvetic Society (founded in 1761) that emerged as the epicentre of Switzerland's rapidly expanding early nationalist movement. Preferring a gradualist approach to a revolutionary one, the members of the Helvetic Society fused ethno-historicist and civic elements into a single concept of Swiss nationhood.

The rise of Swiss early nationalism was prompted by an intersection of socio-political and cultural factors. Perceived through the prism of Enlightenment

universalism, the status quo – embodied in the proliferation of conflicts in the late eighteenth century, along with a historical legacy of political divisions – appeared gloomy and a profound change of existing institutions seemed inevitable. The concept and social reality of Enlightened Absolutism was crucial in that it rendered the contradictions of the old regime concrete and visible. Zurich, Bern and Basle, where the authorities had gone some way down the late absolutist path, were to emerge as the focal points of the nationalist movement. The coincidence of these conditions provided fertile ground for the emergence of an ideological movement that questioned the status quo. However, it was a second cultural factor – the ethno-symbolic memory that was constitutive of the patriots' mental frameworks – that explains why it was nationalism that supplied the emerging reform movement with its language and ideology.

The prevailing nationalist programme of the late eighteenth century was based on a fusion of two narratives, the one forward-looking, the other retrospective and historicist – what we have termed the ethno-historicist and the civic-universalist conceptions of nationhood. Some of the founding members of the Helvetic Society tried to shift the balance in the latter direction by arguing that the noblest form of patriotism consisted in a cosmopolitan love of humanity. These efforts were not to succeed, though, and from the 1780s onwards the balance between the two conceptions was restored and cosmopolitanism became a bad word. In fact, the decision to restrict active membership in the Society to citizens of Swiss cantons, along with other efforts to fortify the boundaries of Swiss nationhood more firmly by fostering a linkage between landscape symbolism and Swiss 'national character', suggests that the ethno-historicist conception had gained the upper hand in the closing decades of the century.

While the patriots were unable to transform the institutions of the old regime (this did not occur until the Helvetic Revolution of 1798), the following chapters will demonstrate their ideological project was nonetheless significant in that it set the parameters for the reconstruction of Swiss nationhood in the nineteenth century.

Notes

[1] VHG 1763: 36-37.

[2] Neither the language of improvement and progress nor the invocation of historical origins is peculiar to late-eighteenth century Swiss patriotism. National movements all over Western and Central Europe, and on the North American Continent as well, have used similar arguments and rhetoric styles to further their cause. The literature on late-eighteenth century patriotism is vast and therefore precludes a complete list. For studies on European countries, see especially Smith (1981) and (1986), as well as Colley (1992). On the United States, see especially Bailyn (1992), Kammen (1991), and Waldstreicher (1997).

[3] Its intellectual protagonists included Johann Jakob Bodmer, Isaak Iselin, Johann Heinrich Füssli, Johann Jakob Zimmermann, Johann Caspar Lavater, Peter Ochs, Heinrich Zschokke, and the historian Johannes von Müller.

[4] Smith (1981: 88).

[5] Campbell Orr (1988: 136). The same argument has been made by Berlin (1981: 108 and 164). It is indeed striking that Bodmer's historicist conception is concrete rather than organicist, and that its emphasis is as much on politics as on culture. This is different, for example, to Herder's historicism, with its emphasis on language as the ideal (because pre-political) expression of a community's organic growth. On Herder, see Barnard (1969) and Berlin (1976).

[6] Johann Jakob Bodmer, in a letter to Johann Jakob Breitinger dating from July 11th 1720. Quoted from Rohner (1984: 12).

[7] Johann Jakob Bodmer in the 1720s. Quoted from Tobler (1891: 7).

[8] See Im Hof (1970: 49 and 83).

[9] Peyer (1978: 100).

[10] Graber (1993a: 47).

[11] Graber (1993a: 50).

[12] On the reading list of Bodmer's societies were the major works of the *philosophes* – Rousseau's *Contrat Social* (1762), Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des lois*, La Bruyère's *Les caractères ou les moeurs de ce ciècle*, besides classical texts like the speeches of Caesar and Cato, or Machiavelli's *Ill Principe*. See Graber (1989: 88) and (1993a: 67).

[13] Johann Kaspar Hirzel, for example, more than a generation younger than Bodmer and later to become one of the protagonists of the Helvetic Society, in 1763 described Bodmer as his 'faithful father, to which I owe most of my insights and patriotic feelings ...' (Quoted from Hunziker 1900: 86). Nevertheless, there were former enthusiasts who underwent dramatic conversions and became sharp critics of the radical movement and his spiritual leader. This is true of Pestalozzi who later complained that Bodmer 'was creating among his youth a dreamy existence.' Quoted from Graber (1993a: 56).

[14] Quoted from Braun (1984: 294).

[15] Quoted from Graber (1993a: 68).

[16] Bodmer, *Gesslers Tod, oder das erlegte Raubtier:* 5.

[17] Quoted from Graber (1993a: 74). Given that the historians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had hushed up the peasant war of 1653, Kramer's statement must be regarded as bold. See Peyer (1978: 106).

[18] Braun (1984: 301).

[19] Quoted from Graber (1993a: 124).

[20] Im Hof (1970: 50-51).

[21] VHG 1763.

[22] VHG 1764: 74.

[23] VHG 1768: 17-18. Bodmer reacted with anger to the new statutes. In 1767, he wrote to one of his associates, Johann Georg Sulzer: 'I am sending you herewith the acta Schinznachensia of May 1766 – it is a load of rubbish.' Quoted from Hunziker (1900: 88-89).

[24] This is the ceremonial procedure as described by Im Hof (1970: 53-54).

[25] Im Hof (1970: 52-53). Whereas during the latter half of the 1760s the number of members who travelled to Schinznach stagnated between around 60 and 80, the society witnessed a sharp growth in its membership from 1770 onwards. The figures for the following years are as follows: 1772: 111; 1780: 159; 1785: 188; 1790: 225; 1795: 265; 1797: 283. By the late 1770s, the Society's annual meetings had effectively become get-togethers for Switzerland's political and economic elite. Of the total of 386 active members that the Helvetic Society possessed between 1761-1798, 106 (27,5 per cent) were magistrats, 72 ministers and curates (18,7 per cent), 62 traders and entrepreneurs (16 per cent), 55 scholars, teachers and lawyers (14,2 per cent), 36 civil servants (9,3 per cent), 23 medicals and pharmacists (6 per cent), 10 military officers in foreign services (2,6 per cent), 7 artists (1,8 per cent), 3 craftsmen (0.8 per cent). During its existence between 1760 and 1798, 90 per cent of the secular members of the Helvetic Society held political office of some sort at some point in their careers. These figures are taken from Imhof and de Capitani (1983: 23, and 55-60).

[26] Im Hof and De Capitani (1983: 30-36). Lucerne and Solothurn provided the majority of the Catholic members, while hardly any members from the valley-cantons of central Switzerland participated. Im Hof and de Capitani (1983: 104).

[27] VHG 1777: 20.

[28] Im Hof (1991) argues that the Helvetic Society was the only patriotic society in Europe in the late eighteenth century with a nation-wide membership.

[29] 'If the different parts of the country speak well of each other; if magistrates ... enter into friendly correspondence with each other ... If scholars mutually exchange their excellent insights ... If tradesmen ... promote the mutual exchange of goods; ... If peasants visit each other and discuss the different ways they cultivate their land.' VHG 1775: 29-30.

[30] VHG 1786: 44.

[31] VHG 1777: 20.

[32] Public festivals with a 'national' content merely took part at the cantonal level, and the Helvetic Society's intention to introduce 'national festivals and other forms of public amusement' to 'produce feelings that would strengthen the feeling between us and our Fatherland' (VHG 1796: 101-104) was only to be realized in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

[33] VHG 1768: 16-19. According to Im Hof (1991), Lavater's folk songs rapidly gained popularity.

[34] On the origins and nature of these conflicts, see Peyer (1978: 134-41); Braun (1984: ch. 6); de Capitani (1986: 509-11).

[35] De Capitani (1986: 486).

[36] Peyer (1978: 136).

[37] De Capitani (1986: 501).

[38] See Peyer (1978: 108-12 and 134-41).

[39] Graber (1993b: 144); Peyer (1978: 138).

[40] See Peyer (1978: 93-97).

[41] Im Hof (1980: 684-5).

[42] Anonymus, Ueber die Schweiz und die Schweizer.

[43] Quoted from Merriman (1996: 353).

[44] Merriman (1996: 353).

[45] On the role of 'print capitalism' in the spread of early nationalism, see Anderson (1991). On the rise of the natural sciences in Switzerland, see Im Hof (1970).

[46] Merriman (1996: 399)

[47] De Capitani (1986: 494).

[48] On absolutism in general, see Merriman (1996: chapter 7), and Anderson (1979: 15-42).

[49] Merriman (1996: 428).

[50] Braun (1984: 282-3).

[51] Anderson (1979: 17 and 28).

[52] See de Capitani (1986: 501) and Im Hof (1980: 755).

[53] Im Hof (1970: 43-44)

[54] VHG 1766: 72.

[55] Bodmer, Gessler's Tod, oder das erlegte Raubtier (1775: 13-14). Few of those who questioned the myths on historical grounds went so far as to demand their removal from national discourse. If they had, open controversy could have resulted. In 1760 the Bernese historians Uriel Freudenberger and Gottlieb Emanuel von Haller anonymously published a pamphlet entitled 'William Tell. A Danish Fairytale.' Its authors argued that 'in our [enlightened] times, which asks for the causes of things, the childish repeating of legends would not do us much credit'. The two young Bernese provoked an emotive response, particularly in central Switzerland, where their publication aroused fierce indignation. The authorities of

the canton of Uri intervened with the government of Bern, which in turn prohibited any further

publication or dispersal of the pamphlet. See Im Hof and de Capitani (1983:30) and Im Hof (1991: 104).

[56] VHG 1768: 43.

[57] For a treatment of various ethnic myths and their functions, see Smith (1984).

[58] VHG 1764: 59.

[59] VHG 1774: 29-30.

[60] VHG 1763: 59-60.

[61] All quotations from VHG 1768: 34-36.

[62] The link between nationalist activity and the status-concerns of intellectuals and members of the

intelligentsia, of course, was first pointed out by Max Weber (1985). For an explanation of the ethnic

historicism that works upon similar premises, see Smith (1981: ch. 5).

[63] Here I am following Pierre Nora's distinction between 'history' (which, in the course of the second

half of the nineteenth century, came to be dominated by the standards set by professional historiography)

and 'memory' (for which historical myths and vernacular historical narratives are constitutive). In

Norra's words (1996: 4): 'Historiography begins when history sets itself the task of uncovering that in

itself which is not history, of showing itself to be the victim of memory and seeking to free itself from

memory's grip.'

[64] In the *Encyclopédie* (vol. 11, Neuchâtel, Samuel Fauche, 1765), the view of the 'ancient philosopher'

on cosmopolitanism was cited as follows: 'I am a Cosmopolite, that is, a citizen of the universe. I prefer

... my family to myself, my Fatherland to my family, and the human species to my Fatherland.' Quoted

from Hont (1995: 211). The problem was also at the heart of the struggle for the definition of popular

sovereignty between the Jacobins, Robespierre and Saint-Just in particular, on the one hand, and Sieyès,

on the other. See Hont (1995: 192-205).

[65] The speech was subsequently published in 1786. Here I quote from this published version.

[66] Iselin (1786: 267-68).

[67] Iselin (1786: 268).

[68] Iselin (1786: 279).

[69] Quoted from Joseph Anton Felix Balthasar, *Historische und Moralische Erklärungen* (1775: preface).

On Helvetic nationalism prior to the Helvetic Republic (1798-1803), see Im Hof and de Capitani (1983);

Braun (1984: 282-303).

[70] VHG 1777: 17.

[71] VHG 1775: 39.

[72] The growth of the Helvetic Society during the 1770s was not only due to an increase in the number of

active members. The number of visitors, too, went up considerably during the same time, from 20

percent of the total number of participants in 1764 to about 70 per cent during the 1780s. For these

developments, see Im Hof and de Capitani (1983).

[73] VHG 1782: 84-86.

[74] Zimmermann, Johann Georg. *Vom Nationalstolz* (1758: V and 22).

[75] Zimmermann, *Vom Nationalstolz* (1758: 207).

[76] VHG 1765: 27.

[77] VHG 1783: 11. The decision to restrict active membership to citizens of Swiss cantons did however not result in a decline of the number of foreign visitors.

[78] VHG 1788: 16.

[79] VHG 1769: 18-19.

[80] VHG 1769: 30-31.

[81] VHG 1782: 78-81.

[82] VHG 1768: 14.

[83] VHG 1769: 15.

[84] First suggestions in this direction were made at the end of the 1760s.

[85] VHG 1782: 70-71.

[86] The 'naturalization of social classifications' as a measure to reduce uncertainty is discussed most illuminatingly in Douglas (1987: 48). Benedict Anderson, in his *Imagined Communities* (1991: 12), has made a related point in arguing that 'it is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny'.

[87] Hope Nicolson (1959: 345)

[88] Thomas (1983: 261).

[89] This crucial distinction between the classical and romantic conception of nature is set out in more detail in Wozniakowski (1987) and Short (1991).

[90] Walter (1990: 57).

[91] VHG 1774: 24.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Struggle for Unity (1798-1848): Swiss Nationhood Goes Public

Confederates! Whatever may divide us
We all recognise one God
To whom we remain faithful:
Fatherland! Be our God
That unites us all.
          Radical pamphlet, 1833[1]

If the Swiss patriots of the eighteenth century had failed to realise their major plan – to unite the cantons and associated territories into a single nation-state – they had nonetheless succeeded in nationalising the Old Confederation's ethno-symbolic memory, based as it was on the liberation and founding myths of the late medieval period. In doing so, they had established the cultural parameters within which public debates about Swiss nationhood would henceforth take place.

Their significant contribution to the definition of national identity notwithstanding, the language of national patriotism did not yet capture the popular imagination. Up until the turn of the eighteenth century at least, the number of people who attended the meetings of patriotic societies amounted to one or two thousand at best. If we added to this inner circle those sections of the educated strata that sympathised with the aim of establishing a modern Swiss nation-state, the number would hardly extend beyond ten thousand people. Given that this group included many adroit propagators of the national doctrine, this was not an insignificant number of supporters, but it was certainly not enough to represent a national public. This shortcoming was clearly recognised by several adherents of republican nationalism at the turn of the eighteenth century. In 1798, for example, in one of the first meetings of the newly established Helvetic parliament, a member of the house bitterly lamented the

lack of a common national 'spirit' that would serve to distinguish the Swiss 'from other nations'.[2]

The task of forging and popularising such a 'spirit' was to fall to the two generations that followed the patriots who lived in the latter half of the eighteenth century. During the half-century spanning the time between the two revolutions of 1798 and 1848, republican nationalism spread outwards from the drawing rooms of the patriotic societies to reach ever-broader sections of the Swiss public. This development, praised and supported by liberal and radical-democratic groups, provoked considerable concern among those who opposed the republican movement and its secular religion – nationalism.

Nevertheless, the unfolding conflict that culminated in the short civil war of 1847 enhanced rather than weakened nationalism as a movement for constitutional reform. It spread in a tidal wave, first affecting the cantons and then pushing for a liberal nation-state, a project that was brought to fruition with the Constitution of 1848. The prominent legal scholar and politician, Johann Caspar Bluntschli, for instance, acknowledged with some astonishment the decisive role of popular nationalism in bringing about the modern Swiss nation-state of 1848. Looking back on the turbulent events of the past decade, he argued in 1850 that the 'feeling of Swiss nationality' had been stronger than one would have expected, while the appeal of 'cantonal particularity' had been overestimated by the opponents of the liberal nation-state.[3]

It was thus between 1798 and 1848 that the Swiss Confederation attained the features that, according to Smith, distinguish modern nations from 'ethnies': a clearly delimited territory, a public culture, economic unity and legal rights and duties for all the members of the designated national community.[4]

How had this transformation come about? What provided its major impetus? What were the social carriers of republican nationalism, and what its major institutional forms? In what ways, finally, did the definition of Swiss nationhood change as republican nationalism began to reach the public at large? These are the questions which will be addressed in this chapter. The first section provides an outline of the constitutional conflicts that punctuate the period between 1798 and 1848. The second

section traces the emergence of a national public sphere. A concluding section shows how the anti-republican opposition was nationalised, and shows how the republican movement and its opponents contributed two rival definitions of Swiss nationhood to national discourse.

The dual Revolution: political and constitutional developments

Modern Switzerland is the product of a movement for constitutional reform, which culminated in the revolutions of 1798 and 1848. Republican nationalism, the engine of this transformation into modern statehood, therefore owes much to the socio-political dynamism that these constitutional struggles unleashed.

The Revolution of 1798, which led to the centralised nation-state of the Helvetic Republic, signalled the beginning of an irresistible drive towards a republican order. From its very inception, the Helvetic Republic was severely contested, and it eventually disintegrated in 1803 after only five years of existence. Although the old order was partially re-established, the same old patterns could not be resumed. As early as the 1830s the republican project regained momentum, causing constitutional changes in many cantons and increasing the pressure for national unification under the banner of a federal constitution. In the 1840s, the conflict threatened to escalate in a situation that constantly bordered on civil war. A fully-fledged civil war finally broke out in November 1847 between liberal and radical cantons on the one side, and the mostly Catholic Conservative cantons of the *Sonderbund* allegiance on the other. The defeat of the conservative coalition paved the way for the Swiss nation-state of 1848. It is to these developments, and their implications for the development of national identity, that I shall now turn.

The Helvetic Republic (1798-1803)

In March 1798 the Swiss Confederation (along with the Low Countries, Milan, and the Kingdom of Naples) became one of the satellite 'sister republics' established by France between 1795 and 1799 to consolidate her contested rule on the Continent.[5] Within the space of a few months, the Helvetic Republic had taken the place of a political system that had existed for more than three centuries. The transformation was accompanied by a remarkable shift in the balance of political power, with former radicals forming the core of the Helvetic leadership. But the reality of the Helvetic Republic brought in its wake another novelty: 300 years after the Burgundian wars Switzerland was again the scene of a European war.[6] What Stuart Woolf has identified as revolutionary France's prime motives behind the establishment of 'sister republics' holds true for Switzerland as well. They

> served at one and the same time ideological, political and military purposes: to hold faith to the ideals of the Revolution by creating states in the image of republican France; to requite the expectations of the native patriots, the most loyal supporters of the French; and to strengthen French defences through a semi-circle of cushion states.[7]

The contrast between the new republican order and its predecessor could have hardly been greater. Almost overnight, the Swiss Confederation had changed from a confederation of states *(Staatenbund)* into a highly centralised national state (with a representational system of popular sovereignty) after the French role model. The cantons – some of them newly formed entities – were restricted to mere bureaucratic units without any autonomous legislative power. The traditional inequalities that marked the relations between cantons and subject territories on the one hand, and towns and countryside on the other, were abolished.[8] Consequent upon these developments, formerly subordinate territories (the so-called *Untertanengebiete)* such as the Vaud, Aargau, or Thurgau were elevated to the status of full cantons. Cantonal boundaries were abolished, as was feudal taxation. To enable a better control of those elements most hostile to the new order, the valley-cantons of Uri, Schwyz, Unterwalden and Zug were grouped together into a single canton *Waldstätte.*[9]

The main power and authority now rested with a central governing body, the Helvetic Directory, which put its proposals before a parliament, which in turn represented the Swiss people. A central bureaucracy with various ministries was established, a *Bureau für Nationalkultur* ('Ministry for National Culture') was set up, and a state-sponsored information policy was launched. Popular education, formerly in the hands of the church, was particularly high up on the agenda of the Helvetic authorities. 'The Helvetic Republic', proclaimed the Directory in October, 1798, 'must strive to permeate the remotest valleys with the message of the Enlightenment'.[10] Official rhetoric was followed by practical action: the duration for primary education was extended; the quality of education was improved; the number of children attending school rose considerably; and, perhaps most important of all, the collective belief in the value of popular education was greatly enhanced.[11] However, the fact that the new education policy potentially diminished the influence of traditional (particularly religious) institutions also created a potential for a recurrent conflict between the nationalising state and the (Catholic) church.

The Helvetic Constitution guaranteed several new rights, notably the freedom of conscience and religious faith, freedom of free speech and expression. In addition, the protection of private property rights and of free trade were introduced. The complete reformation of the criminal law in accordance with the values of the Enlightenment found its most marked expression in the abolition of torture.[12] In terms of its political implications, the constitution stressed popular sovereignty as well as territorial and administrative unity, emulating the French notion of *une nation une et indivisible*. The juxtaposition of old and new orders was thus the central theme of the first article of the Helvetic Constitution:

> The unity of the Fatherland and the general interest will henceforth take the place of the weak bond that used to connect the large and small localities ... in a rather haphazard fashion. Where hitherto we only felt the weakness of the single parts, we will now feel the concentrated strength that results from their unification.[13]

The lack of a mass support undoubtedly hastened its demise, but the Helvetic Republic could not have come about without popular support for an abolition of the old order.[14] Notably in the rural areas of Zurich and Basle, where the revolutionary potential had been greatest both prior to and immediately after 1789, as well as in some of the subject territories, such as the Vaud or the Aargau, the prevalent reaction was enthusiastic.[15] The same is true of parts of the Thurgau, the Ticino, as well as St. Gallen. The new order was also embraced by the rural elites of the early-industrialised areas in Zurich and Basle and, at least initially, by the peasant populations of these cantons as well. The prevailing response on the part of the traditional (reform-oriented) elite was one of critical reserve.[16] A third group, finally, spearheaded by the Catholic cantons of central Switzerland, was outrightly hostile to the new order.[17]

From its very inception, therefore, the Helvetic Republic was as much a focal point of social and political conflict as it was an embodiment of constitutional progress. One line of conflict divided federalists from centralists within the Helvetic elite, another separated the supporters of the regime from its sworn enemies. The four coups d'état that took place between 1800 and 1802 testify to the instability of the regime and to the weakness of its constitution. When the European wars ended in 1801 Switzerland lost much of its strategic significance for France. On the initiative of Napoleon, who was concerned about the internal instability of the Helvetic Republic, a federalist constitution was accepted in May 1802. When in the summer of 1802 he withdrew his troops from Switzerland, a number of popular uprisings were the immediate consequence, and the Helvetic Republic disintegrated within the space of a few months.[18]

To subsequent generations, the historical memory of the Helvetic Republic remained ambivalent. Because it was so strongly linked with foreign rule, it was unsuitable as a basis from which to create a popular nationalism. In Switzerland as elsewhere, the French policies of occupation and the creation of new forms of government 'destroyed the sympathy enjoyed earlier by the French revolutionaries, even among the patriots'. For French occupation went hand in hand with 'pillaging, billeting, requisitions and war contributions followed'.[19] This may explain why, as a

focal point for collective identification, the Helvetic legacy was of limited significance. It did not provide, for instance, an ideological focal point for the national movement that had gained such momentum from the 1830s onwards.

The home-made revolution: 1830 – 1848

The period between 1803 and 1830 brought a conservative restoration of considerable proportion: the Act of Mediation of 19 February 1803 effectively restored political sovereignty to the old cantons under a loose, federal constitution; the freedom of residence was abolished; the constitutional unity established under the Helvetic regime gave way to great diversity in terms of guaranteed rights and regulations; and the traditional gap between town and countryside in terms of political and economic rights were to some degree reinstated. Nevertheless, some important achievements of the Helvetic era, such as the abolition of subject territories, remained in place. In fact, the *Mediationsverfassung,* the constitution proposed by Napoleon, elevated many of the previously subject or allied territories to full cantonal equality, and St Gallen, Graubünden, Aargau, Thurgau, Ticino and the Vaud 'took their places as full members of a federal union of nineteen cantons'.[20] (Geneva and the republic of Valais were annexed to France in 1803, but they returned to the Swiss Confederation in 1815.)

Overall, therefore, the institutional conditions, as they presented themselves at the beginning of the nineteenth century, were favourable for the republican nationalist movement that gained currency in the 1830s, further buttressing the trend towards constitutional reform and political and territorial integration.[21] Under the influence of the July Revolution in Paris, liberal constitutional reforms were carried out in many cantons during the so-called regeneration era which lasted from 1830 to 1848. By 1831, the eleven Swiss cantons with the largest populations had introduced republican constitutions. Encouraged by these successes at the cantonal level, the republican movement developed into a national movement that pressed for similar reforms on the federal plane. The first calls to introduce a federal constitution were made at the Diet of 1831.[22] In a meeting of the *Académie des Sciences morales et politiques* held in January

1848 in Paris, Alexis de Tocqueville thus concluded that 'Switzerland has been in a state of revolution for fifteen years'.[23]

Republican nationalism was composed of two major sub-groups, the Liberals and the Radicals. While the former emphasised individual liberty and representative democracy, the latter placed much weight on equality and direct democratic participation rights. Liberalism was largely confined to the traditional elites of the established cantons. It had its strongholds in the towns of the planes, where classical liberal constitutions with representative systems of government were established. In 1830/31 transformations of this kind took place in Zurich, Lucerne, Schaffhausen, Freiburg, and the Ticino. The power of the members of parliament was considerable, while the possibility for the voters to change the constitution was limited. In addition, inequalities between town and countryside persisted in Zurich and Lucerne in particular.[24]

The Radicals, who attracted the strongest popular support, formed the driving force behind demands for a federal constitution and national unification. Members of a new, self-confident middle class, mainly from the small towns and the industrialised parts of the countryside constituted the bulk of its leadership. In terms of professional occupation, tradesmen, craftsmen, merchants, publishers, industrialists and manufacturers provided the strongest contingents. Radicalism had its strongholds in eastern Switzerland, as well as the Aargau, the Vaud, in the rural areas around Basle, and in the Jura.[25]

In those cantons in which the Radicals dominated, parliament was elected directly, and the constitution could be altered at the discretion of the sovereign.[26] The standardisation of civic law, the development of new tax regimes that would replace the feudal system of taxation, as well as a secularisation of the education system were among the most important changes introduced in the radical cantons. In 1832, the *Schweizerischer Republikaner*, the radicals' flagship newspaper, defined the raison d'être of the Radical movement as lying in two major objectives: the 'rational reform of the outdated order', and 'national unification'.[27] Both the secularisation of education and national unification were fiercely opposed by the Catholic Conservative cantons.

What transformed the existing tensions into the short civil war of November 1847 was a succession of events that started in 1841. A momentous incident took place in the canton of Aargau after local monks had been accused of inciting the Catholic peasantry against the Radical government.[28] In January 1841, the Radical-dominated parliament responded by deciding (by a vote of 115 to 19) to dissolve Aargau's monasteries. By virtue of this decision, the authorities were entitled to take over the monasteries and use them for schools and welfare institutions. The monks were given forty-eight hours to settle their affairs and leave. However, this decision was in open violation of the Federal Treaty of 1815, and the Confederate Diet consequently annulled the Aargau's decision at a meeting in April 1841.[29]

With the Radicals remaining adamant in their opposition to the religious activity of the monasteries, however, the conflict was bound to continue. On August 31, 1843, as more cantons turned liberal, the Diet decided to accept the abolition of four monasteries (while four covenants were allowed to stay open). The Catholic cantons regarded this decision as a grave challenge to their religious autonomy and as a sign that the Diet had been turned into a pro-liberal institution. The Great Council of Lucerne, which was firmly in the hands of Catholic Conservatives, responded swiftly by inviting the Jesuits to take up residence in the canton. In an attempt to counter the spread of secularisation, Jesuits were soon appointed to the town's theological faculty and there was to be a Jesuit-staffed church again as well. From the point of view of the Radicals and Liberals, the measures taken by the Lucerne authorities were a provocation of the first order. When in December 1844 a group of Radicals tried to overthrow Lucerne's government by use of force, this initiated a new phase of open civil war. A second attempt in March 1845, in which a militia army of 4,000 men participated, met the same fate.[30]

The conflict between Liberal and Radical circles on the one hand, and the Catholic-Conservatives on the other, had now turned into open hatred. For the Radicals at least, the Jesuits represented the incarnation of the dark forces of reactionary evil. It was in this poisoned political climate that the Zurich poet Gottfried Keller, an active supporter of republican nationalism, wrote the following tirade against the Jesuits:[31]

Hurrah, I hear the Hunting Call!
Look what's arriving, big and small,
And jumps and hops and somersaults
And, without let-up, shrieks and shouts:
THE JESUITS ARE COMING!

Look how they ride in on a sow
On little snakes, a dragon now.
God are those peppy fellows gay,
All embryos stir in dismay:
THE JESUITS ARE COMING!

Or to quote from an anonymous Zurich high school student's poem of 1844:[32]

You, Jesuits, false man of God
How come no bullet's struck you yet?
You, who's destroying Switzerland
You, villain killing liberty
You now must go, you beast from hell...

But the conflict did not stop with the Radical attempts to overthrow the government of Lucerne. On December 11, 1845, seven Catholic cantons (Uri, Schwyz, Unterwalden, Zug, Lucerne, Valais, and Fribourg) formed the *Sonderbund,* an alliance designed to contain the Radical movement. The spiritual leader of the alliance, which represented roughly one-fifth of the population of Switzerland, was Constantin Siegwart Müller. His most ambitious aims, to conclude alliances with conservative powers in an attempt to annex major areas of the Liberal cantons, did not enjoy the support of the majority of the *Sonderbund's* members. When in June 1846, the existence of the alliance became public knowledge, the majority of Liberal cantons demanded its immediate dissolution. In a speech held at the Diet of 1847, Ulrich Ochsenbein sent a warning to those foreign powers (and indirectly to the members of the *Sonderbund)* that harboured plans to interfere in Switzerland's internal affairs. Alluding to the late-medieval battles and the liberation myths, he declared that '... the world ought to be aware that Switzerland ...

will know how to sacrifice its every strength ... to safeguard the independence won for it by its forefathers in many a fierce battle'.[33]

On July 20, 1847, the Confederate Diet (in which the liberal and radical cantons were in the majority) increased the pressure by passing a resolution ordering the dissolution of the *Sonderbund*. Voting for the resolution were Aargau, Bern, Geneva, Glarus, Graubünden, St. Gallen, Schaffhausen, Solothurn, Thurgau, Ticino, Vaud, Zurich, and the two half-cantons, Appenzell-Ausserrhoden and Basle-Land. Voting against it were the *Sonderbund's* seven, plus Neuchâtel and the half-canton of Appenzell-Innerrhoden.[34] Furthermore, in September of 1847, the Diet, by the same majority, voted to expel the Jesuits from Switzerland. On separate assemblies, the Sonderbund cantons declared the Diet's decision unlawful. After several attempts at finding a peaceful solution to the conflict had failed, both sides began to mobilise their troops (95,000 men took up arms on the side of the federal army, and half as many on the side of the Catholic alliance). The war that came to be called the *Sonderbund* War broke out on November 4 and lasted until November 29 when the last member of the Sonderbund, the Valais, capitulated. Even for a war as brief as this one, the casualties were very low in view of the killing potential of mid-nineteenth century warfare: 74 soldiers had fallen on the side of the Diet, and 24 on the side of the Sonderbund, with around 500 wounded.[35]

The victory of the federal troops over the alliance of the Catholic cantons brought the breakthrough in the struggle for a modern Swiss nation-state. The task of drafting a new constitution was assigned to a special commission made up of representatives of all cantons except Appenzell Inerrhoden and Neuchâtel. The commission convened for the first time on February 17, 1848. The majority of those who participated were politicians rather than constitutional theoreticians. The draft that resulted from these consultations embodied a compromise of the centralist ideas of the Radicals and the ultra-federalism of the Conservatives. At the heart of the new constitution was a bicameral legislature, consciously modelled after the American example. The National Council *(Nationalrat)*, elected in a nation-wide popular vote, would represent the Swiss people, while the Council of States *(Ständerat)* would

express the interests and concerns of the cantons. Following the precedent of the U.S.
Senate, each canton, irrespective of its size, would send two delegates to the Council of
States, and each half-canton one delegate. Besides a new system of political
representation, the major innovation concerned the introduction of civil and economic
rights. Trade obstacles were removed; the freedom of residence was extended to all
Swiss citizens (except Jews who remained excluded from this right until the
constitutional revisions of 1866 and 1874, respectively); common tariffs, weights and
measures were set; and a federal post office was established. In September 1848, the
voters accepted the new constitution by an overwhelming majority (almost seven to
one).[36]

Conflicts, communication, and the nationalisation of the public sphere

After the previous outline of core events and processes that characterise the period
between 1798 and 1848, this section will focus on their impact on Swiss nation
formation. I shall argue that the constitutional conflicts that punctuate this fifty-year
time span provided the major impetus behind the institutionalisation of a national
public sphere. As this process unfolded, an increasing number of people were drawn
into nation-oriented activities either as part of an ever-increasing audience or as active
participants. Although short-lived and contested, the Helvetic State set the ball rolling
by creating a number of institutions designed primarily to promote national
consciousness. After two decades of conservative restoration, the 1830s and 1840s
witnessed the rise of a popular republican nationalism. In the absence of a central state,
this national revival received its major impulse from within civil society. The driving
force behind this new nationalism was the movement for constitutional reform,
embodied especially in the new national mass societies and festivals.

With the Helvetic Revolution, the modern Swiss nation-state had ceased to be the dream of a few hundred patriots and had become a tangible reality that began to leave its imprint on the lives of wider society. Most significantly, the Helvetic State made nationalism its official ideology. While state-induced nationalism did not manage to turn Switzerland into a society of consensus and stability, it nonetheless changed the nature of social conflict. Under the *ancien régime*, the cantons had served as loci of social conflict. Under the Helvetic regime, by contrast, emerging antagonisms were increasingly played out at the federal level. This was an inevitable consequence of the concentration of power at the centre, which came about at the expense of the cantons and communities. Most significantly, moreover, the Helvetic Republic created the conditions for an expansion of public communication. In particular, the freedom of the press, guaranteed by the Helvetic Constitution, led to a proliferation of newspapers. This allowed both supporters and opponents of the new state to increase their efforts to influence public opinion. This transformation was clearly recognised by contemporaries. Thus in June 1798, a newspaper reported that

> a large part of our people that hitherto merely read the Bible and the calendar
> has begun to develop a great enthusiasm for newspapers and other papers that
> report about the story of the day complete with interpretations. Thus inquiring
> into political rights and injustices, until now the concern of a few educated
> individuals, has suddenly captured the imagination of the masses.[37]

Yet the major actor in this symbolic struggle over Swiss nationhood was the Helvetic government, which placed great emphasis on nation building. As a member of the Helvetic Directory put it: 'The [national consciousness] is like a big engine. It must set the [state] machinery in motion and keep it going if the latter is not to deny its service.'[38] Strategic motives seem to have played as important a role in the considerations of the Helvetic elites as an actual enthisiasm for the traditional symbols and myths. A conversation between two of the protagonists of the Helvetic ruling class, Heinrich Zschokke and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, suggests that didactic

considerations had a crucial impact on the strategy adopted by the authorities. As Zschocke, the leading propagandist of the Helvetic Republic, wrote to the latter in 1798:

> Ordinary people are like children. Whoever wants to raise them up must first bend down to them. If I were intending to write for the ordinary people, I would envision a sensible boy of about eight or ten years of age who I wanted to get to understand my ideas.[39]

In terms of symbolic content, while often referring to the heroic past of the late-medieval period, the new regime at the same time tried to infuse the traditional ethno-historical repertoire with new elements. This is true in particular of national symbols, ceremonies and festivals, where the Helvetic élites tried to imitate French role models. In an attempt to forge a constitutional patriotism, Swiss citizens were supposed to take an annual oath on the new constitution.[40] Foremost among the newly introduced national symbols was the national flag, the Helvetic Tricolour. The colours red, yellow and green were chosen because these were considered to be the colours of Wilhelm Tell.[41] Furthermore, Helvetic legislation stipulated that all citizens (like those of the *grande nation*) had to wear a cockade in the Helvetic colours, a portable national flag as it were. This new law stirred up conflict, especially in Catholic central Switzerland. In Nidwalden, for example, people were attaching pictures of the Virgin Mary to their hats and clothes in protest against this new regulation.[42] Hence, in spite of having a centralised state bureaucracy and a reasonably efficient system of mass communication at their disposal, the Helvetic Patriots' overall success in popularising new national symbols remained quite modest.

There is another example that illustrates the potentially constraining capacity of a well-entrenched vernacular memory during the Helvetic era, namely, the inauguration of republican mass rituals. Established as an attempt to overcome particular loyalties and identities, such rituals included an annual oath on the constitution, and the commemoration of 12 April, the Day of the Helvetic Republic. Here too, strong popular resistance caused the Helvetic government to abandon its attempt to replace existing

symbolic forms and contents with French models in favour of a symbolic syncretism where emphasis was placed on the (civic) reinterpretation of traditional forms. At the root of this change, once more, lay the experience that the 'invented traditions' lacked the desired popular appeal or were seen as outright offensive.[43]

An official report on the organisation of national festivals by the Minister for Arts and Sciences, Philipp Albrecht Stapfer (1766-1840), provides us with another example. Acutely aware that for all their splendour the French revolutionary festivals had not become popular, Stapfer recommended that the Helvetic Republic draw its inspiration from traditional vernacular festivals. Among these, he singled out commemorations of medieval battles and the ceremonies held in honour of heroic and virtuous personalities (such as Arnold von Winkelried or Niklaus von der Flüe).[44] In another attempt to win over the Catholic cantons for the Helvetic state, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi alluded to the traditional mythical repertoire, arguing that the new constitution represented an attempt to 'restore old Swiss liberties and solidarity'.[45]

Plate 4-1: Four Francs Coin of the Helvetic Republic, displaying Wilhelm Tell carrying the Helvetic Tricolour.

The invention of the liberty tree corroborates the assumption that successful national symbols are often based on a fusion of traditional and novel elements. Like the Tricolour, the liberty tree gained in symbolic significance during the French Revolution and it frequently appeared in popular protests against the old authorities in Switzerland and other countries in its immediate aftermath. According to one estimate, in 1797, within less than a fortnight, supporters of the Helvetic Revolution planted around 7,000 liberty trees all over the country.[46] It is noteworthy, however, that even the most radical supporters of France, while taking up the symbol in its general form, altered its specific content. Instead of putting the French *bonnet rouge* on their liberty trees, they used green hats, since they regarded green as the colour of Wilhelm Tell. In other words, the liberty tree was nationalised by adding a symbol that was considered authentically Swiss. This practice was sanctioned, if not promoted, by the Helvetic authorities.[47]

As always, the fiercest opposition against new national customs came from the Catholic valley communities. In 1798, troops from Schwyz, Unterwalden, Zug and Glarus marches to Lucerne in protest of the towns' elites sympathetic attitude to the Helvetic order. The protesters marched under the banner 'Jesus, Joseph, Saint Martin – this is the true, legitimate liberty tree, for god and fatherland'. After a short religious service in which there was mention of Tell and the 'bloodthursty Frankish Gessler', the trooops started to fell and subsequently burn all the liberty trees they came across. [48]

The conflict over Swiss nationhood escalates

It was during the regeneration period of the 1830s that Swiss republican nationalism reached its full potential. After the conservative restoration that followed the Helvetic Republic's demise, the 1830s and 1840s brought with them an unprecedented politicisation of public life. The change in political culture was considerable. During the Old Regime and then again during the period of conservative restoration that lasted from 1815 to 1830, politics had been a clandestine affair dominated by small circles of powerful magistrates. Modern politics, by contrast, while still largely dominated by an educated elite, had nonetheless become a public affair in which a considerable

proportion of 'the people' participated. Democracy and popular sovereignty, the two central credos of republican nationalism, made the art of persuasion a vital ingredient of success. To win over the masses, political entrepreneurs needed to justify their cause. In 1833, a Zurich contemporary gave a vivid description of the debates that accompanied the era of constitutional reform of the early 1830s:

> The liberals among the town people began to fraternise with rural folk. They engaged in mutual discussions about both utilitarian and aesthetic matters. Their meetings took place in welfare societies ... and at the popular folk song festivals at which choirs of two- or three hundred voices sang songs about Liberty and the Fatherland. ... The Swiss people seemed to have rediscovered how a public life would awaken and revive all social virtues and strengths, particularly the beautiful virtue that manifests itself in the recognition of the individual and of personal achievement.[49]

Many adherents of the old order admitted to being drawn almost against their will into the political controversies over secularisation and constitutional reform that the Radicals had engendered. 'The main reason why I cannot escape from politics', the Conservative, Jeremias Gotthelf maintained, 'is because today politics is everywhere'. 'In fact', he continued, 'what characterises radicalism is that politics permeates the lives of every estate, ravaging the holy sphere of the family and decomposing Christian faith.'[50] The turning of private individuals and family members into citizens who participated in the political controversies of the day was indeed what the radical ideologues were after. The poet Gottfried Keller, for instance, while he praised the virtue of political participation, had only contempt for what he saw as the self-centred concerns and interests of individuals who kept standing aloof from modern politics. On May 2, 1848, he declared: 'The silent majority must be ... morally destroyed .... No, there must not be any private person left.'[51]

What also contributed much to the nationalisation of the public was the marked proliferation of newspapers during the regeneration period. During the course of the 1830s, Switzerland became the country with the highest density of newspapers in the world.[52] The general politicisation of public life, along with the liberalisation of public opinion, had enabled this trend. Most of the newly established newspapers were liberal

or radical in orientation, and the cantons of Zurich, Aargau, St. Gallen and the Vaud were the centres of this new founding wave. Liberal-conservative and conservative newspapers, albeit less numerous, were quick to respond to the challenge.[53] Not only did the number of newspapers increase sharply in the wake of the July Revolution in Paris, but they also became more 'national' in outlook. As a contemporary observed in 1830 concerning the changes taking place in newspaper reporting:

> Even before the events of July [1830] patriotic concerns had occupied a lot of space in the papers; ... As the movement gained momentum over the last few months, freedom of the printed press was introduced in most areas where hitherto it had been unknown. Papers that used to be insignificant became lively and colourful. With few exceptions, our newspapers have undergone profound changes.[54]

Numerous popular associations and a burgeoning festival culture contributed their part to the nationalisation of the public sphere. Well before the founding of the federal state in 1848, various national societies emerged that pursued an overtly national ideological agenda. The most important of which were the Swiss Shooting Association (founded in 1824), the Swiss Gymnastic Society (founded in 1832), and the Swiss Folk Song Association (founded in 1842). These societies emerged as the bastions of the republican nationalism of the regeneration period. Not only did these national associations provide an organisational roof for the hundreds of cantonal societies and their activities, but they also served to concentrate the minds of their members on the national cause. The Swiss Folk Song Association, for instance, stated as its purpose the 'promotion and embellishment of the folk song movement, the awakening of higher feelings for God, Liberty and Fatherland, and the bringing together of the friends of the arts and of the Fatherland'.[55] Their annual festivals amounted to huge national celebrations, attended by hundreds of active participants and thousands of visitors. [56]

The national shooting festivals in particular were mass gatherings devoted to the worshipping of Swiss nationhood. Taking place each year in the summer and lasting for one week, these festivals were the bastions of republican nationalism (which is why they were largely avoided by Switzerland's Catholic population).[57] The shooting

festivals also came to symbolise the will to defend the country against internal and external enemies. Referring to the protagonist of the liberation mythology, this argument found expression in a radical newspaper report in 1841: 'The archer Tell created the Swiss Confederation, and the Shooting Association is the Tell of our day. Switzerland's salvation therefore must come from its activities.'[58] The Jesuits became the scapegoats of the radical shooters who formed the bulk of the festival attendants. They were described as 'snakes in the heart of Switzerland', and they were held responsible for the lack of national unity, while the leaders of the *Sonderbund* were described as 'degenerated sons' and as 'degenerated Swiss'. The rhetoric against the Jesuits was particularly strong at the 1847 festival. An official speech expressed it thus:

> At the shooting festival in Glarus the Swiss people have renewed their oath of allegiance. They have made a mutual oath that they shall rather die than hand over their marvellous banner to the Jesuits, apostates and foreign reactionaries.[59]
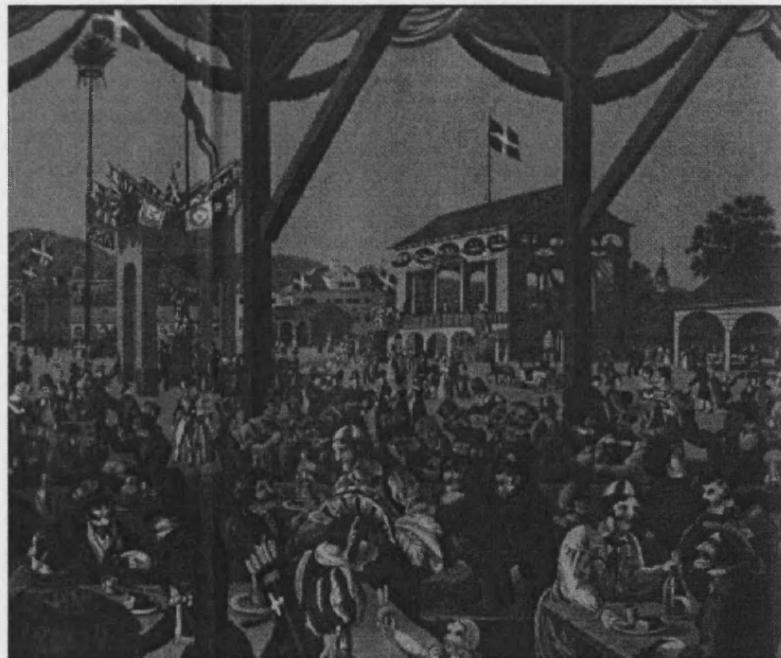
Plate 4-2: Shooting Festival in Zurich, 1834.
Schweizerische Landesbibliothek, Bern.

Once the constitutional reforms were accomplished, the re-education of the public continued in the form of a 'cultural policy in the spirit of the Enlightenment'.[60] In the school curricula of the regenerated cantons, which had made schooling compulsory, the nation became a central category. Particularly in the cantons with a radical majority, the influence of the church on popular education declined dramatically. An examination of curricula in Bern and Geneva concluded that, between 1930 and 1848, biblical instruction increasingly gave way to national history. In Geneva, a secularised national history, presented as a catalogue of moral lessons that centred on the late-medieval liberation and foundation myths, became the standard, at least in protestant primary and secondary schools. In Bern, Heinrich Zschokke's popular Swiss history (*Des Schweizerlands Geschichte für das Schweizervolk*, first published in 1822) – a text in which late-medieval battles and myths take a central role – was the text most frequently used in secondary schools.[61]

International pressure

The pressure exerted on Switzerland by foreign conservative powers both during the Helvetic Republic and then again between 1830 and 1848 contributed its part to an intensification of national discourse and a strengthening of national consciousness among the broad masses. This pressure exerted its influence mostly in an indirect fashion: because of the Swiss Confederation's role as a save haven for foreign revolutionaries who had fled from persecution. The fact that political refugees could benefit from a relatively liberal climate in Switzerland provided a principal cause of foreign interference. Prince Metternich, the Austrian Chancellor, thus complained bitterly in 1845 about the republican virus spreading form Switzerland:

> Switzerland stands alone today in Europe as a republic and serves troublemakers of every sort as a free haven. Instead of improving its situation by appropriate means, the Confederation staggers from evils into upheavals and represents for itself and for its neighbours an inexhaustible spring of unrest and disturbance.[62]

Making efficient use of the freedom of the press guaranteed in the liberal and radical cantons, foreign political dissidents polemicised against the conservative authorities of their native countries. The foreign conservative powers that were the subject of such criticism, especially Austria and Prussia, frequently responded by pressurising Switzerland to tighten its liberal laws. In the summer of 1836, for example, such pressure caused the Swiss Diet to limit the right for asylum. Swiss republican nationalists, who regarded German and Austrian Liberals as their brothers in arms, reacted with popular protest to such measures, with some demonstrations attracting up to 10,000 participants.[63]

The fact that the Diet did not take seriously the demands that were formulated at these demonstrations was water on the mill of the nationalist movement. By 1836/37 there existed as many as fourteen societies that pursued an explicitly national agenda. Messmer argues that the fact that the cantonal governments repeatedly had to give way to foreign pressure and expel political refugees accused of preparing uprisings against their governments was widely perceived as a blatant violation of Switzerland's right to self-determination, thus 'strengthening radical nationalism'.[64] The conservative *Sonderbund* alliance, moreover, had direct contacts with foreign conservative powers. Austria and France in particular supported this anti-republican movement both financially and by supplying it with weapons. All this added to the outrage on the part of the Radicals and Liberals, for whom the members of the *Sonderbund* were 'foreigners' who conspired against the 'Swiss Fatherland'.[65]

As the previous examination has shown, popular Swiss nationalism began to form between 1798 and 1848. Its potential was first revealed before and during the Helvetic Revolution, reaching its full strength during the regeneration period (1830-1848). Liberal and radical-democratic groups came to provide the major impetus behind the formation of this republican nationalism. During the regeneration era in particular, these groups gained the support of majority of the Protestant public. The engine of republican nationalism consisted of a number of civil society institutions, with newly emerging popular societies like the Swiss Shooting Associations and the Swiss Folk Song Association playing a major part. These societies and the national

rituals they organised attracted a mass audience. The regenerated cantons with their liberal constitutions and secularised education systems added an institutional component to these symbolic activities that was crucial for its success.

Thus, essentially, the republican nationalism of the period between 1798 and 1848 was a movement for constitutional reform. Drawing its central ideological lessons from the Enlightenment and its revolutionary manifestations in France, its battle cries were 'liberty', 'progress', and 'fatherland', with the radical sections of the movement placing much emphasis on 'equality'. After the movement had successfully realised its objectives in many cantons in the course of the 1830s, the 'Swiss nation' was the next logical target on the agenda of the national movement. (The development of Swiss republican nationalism is depicted in Tab. 4-1.)

Tab. 4-1:   The rise of republican nationalism (1798-1848): focus of identification, nature of ideology, institutional form

Epoch	Focus of Identification	Nature of Ideology	Driving Force / Institutional Form
Pre-1798	Canton / Swiss Nation	Civil Rights (Equality and Liberty) & Ethno-Symbolism (Liberation Myths)	Elite Societies
1798-1803 (Helvetic Republic)	Swiss Nation / Canton	Civil Rights (Equality and Liberty) & Ethno-Symbolism (Liberation Myths)	Helvetic State
1803-1830 (Mediation & Restoration)	Canton / Swiss Nation	Civil Rights (Equality and Liberty) & Ethno-Symbolism (Liberation Myths)	Elite Societies, Popular Societies, Mass Festivals
1830-1848 (Regeneration)	Swiss Nation / Canton	Civil Rights (Equality and Liberty) & Ethno-Symbolism (Liberation Myths)	Elite Societies, Popular Societies, Mass Festivals, Liberal and Radical Cantons

Competing definitions of nationhood

The insignificance of shared language

From its very outset, however, republican nationalism, with its secularising and centralising thrust, provoked strong popular resistance. What separated the republican nationalist movement and its Catholic Conservative opponents was their adherence to two rival and ultimately irreconcilable conceptions of communal organisations. Language, by contrast, frequently considered the principal agent of national divisions, did not present a divisive factor. That language was no stumbling stone to national solidarity becomes less surprising upon closer inspection of the republican movement. Daniel Frei's argument on Helvetic nationalism holds true for the entire first half of the nineteenth century as well:

> At the turn of the eighteenth century, the linguistic question did not yet have the powerful force able to determine the course of history. ... Ordinary people were hardly aware of it, and to the educated parts of the population the use of the language of the cosmopolitans, French, was nothing but natural.[66]

It was therefore with astonishment rather than outrage that the members of the Helvetic Senate discovered in 1798 that the presence of Italian-speaking representatives posed a problem of communication that required an agreeable solution. (That the members of the Helvetic parliament were able to communicate in French, the language of the Enlightenment, was taken for granted.) After a short and pragmatic debate, the Senate decided to employ an Italian translator. In a concluding speech, one member maintained that the reality of multilingualism had to be accepted 'until the Helvetians one day, as through a miracle, adopt a common language'.[67]

Of even greater importance was that the dynamics of the constitutional struggle favoured the emergence of alliances that cut across linguistic and religious boundaries. Hence, during both the Helvetic Revolution and the constitutional revolutions that punctuated the 1830s and 1840s, German-, French- and Italian-speaking cantons were

fighting for the same values and interests, resulting in a community of belief that transcended linguistic differences. For example, in the Sonderbund war of 1847 troops from the Vaud and the Ticino fought alongside their counterparts from Zurich and Bern.[68]

Republican nationalism versus Catholic communalism

If language did not prove to be a divisive factor in the formation of the modern Swiss nation-state, religion and geography did. The resistance against republican nationalism was particularly strong in Alpine, Catholic areas. Gaining strength and militancy in proportion to the success which republican nationalists enjoyed in the Protestant cantons, this conservative movement strongly opposed efforts at modern nation-state building. Essentially, therefore, the conflict between, on the one hand, the Radicals and Liberals and, on the other, the Catholic Conservative opposition that later organised itself in the *Sonderbund* alliance represents a classical struggle between a modern republican nationalism and an anti-national movement. The motives of the latter can be described as 'traditional': its major task was not progress in the sense of the Enlightenment, but to defend the autonomy of a *Gemeinschaft*-based social order that had its central organising institutions in the village, the valley, and the Church. The popular democratic assemblies, the so-called *Landsgemeinden*, was the incarnation of this traditional social order.[69]

Catholicism played a crucial part in the conservative resistance to the modern nation-state because it structured peoples' lives in an encompassing sense. It supplied these communities with a principle of social organisation and ontological wholeness that was in sharp contrast with the ideals that informed Protestant republican nationalism. The strong secularising thrust and the drive towards central regulation, the hallmarks of this civic nationalism, posed a considerable threat to this traditional way of life. The 'popular anti-centralism' to which this conservative movement adhered was tantamount to 'the rejection of the modern state'.[70]

A glance at their notions of 'liberty' can serve to bring into even sharper relief the different conceptions of community that informed republican nationalists and their conservative opponents respectively. To republican nationalists, liberty meant emancipation from traditional customs and dependencies in the name of nature and progress; it also meant that certain rights (such as freedom of speech, of association and of the printed press) and institutions (including popular sovereignty, the separation of the legislative, executive, and judiciary spheres) would become enshrined in a constitution; and, above all, it meant political unification and (a certain degree of) cultural standardisation. It this modern conception of liberty that informed the rhetoric and deeds of radical leaders like Ulrich Ochsenbein. The fact that the republican nationalists frequently employed an historicist rhetoric to legitimate their claims does not alter this. 'It is my ambition', Ochsenbein proclaimed after the failure of his failed expedition against Lucerne of 1844, 'to have contributed more than anyone else toward unifying and strengthening our Fatherland, and make it appear as one to the outside world. That is what I want to achieve, or die.'[71] These were basic credos that united republican nationalists, although Liberals tended to emphasise individual rather than collective rights, and Radicals pushed for equality.

For the (Catholic) anti-national movement, by contrast, liberty meant freedom from external interference wherever it may come from. For the adherents of this conservative conception of liberty, then, freedom was tantamount to the preservation of communal autonomy, and thus to the protection of a way of life shaped by a set of distinctive political and cultural institutions. This notion of liberty, therefore, was collective rather than individual. Forming a peculiar mixture of cantonal particularism and Catholic universalism, moreover, it ran counter to the ideals held dear by the champions of the modern nationalising state.[72] It was to this understanding of liberty that Johann ab-Yberg, the Landamann of Catholic Schwyz was alluding to in October 1847 when he addressed a 9,000 strong crowd at a popular assembly. As he put it in what was an unmistakable incitement to war: 'All right then, war, and why? Because you wish to be free as your fathers were, ... because you will not allow Catholic

institutions – which must be sacred to all true Catholics – to be robbed and pillaged, ... because you want justice.'[73]

The nationalisation of the anti-national movement

Although fuelled by rival conceptions of community, the conflict between republican nationalists and their opponents constituted in its very essence a controversy over modern nationhood. By participating in this controversy, the Catholic Conservative anti-nationalists unintentionally contributed to anchoring nationhood as a social category in the popular imagination. Two factors in particular were conducive to the nationalisation of the anti-national opposition.

The first concerns what could be termed a shared ethno-symbolic focus. Both Liberals and Radicals, who were united in their aim to create a Swiss nation-state, and the Catholic Conservatives who strongly resisted their project referred to the late-medieval liberation and foundation myths to warrant their political agendas. The historicist narrative of liberation therefore provided a common normative and cognitive focus even as the conflict had escalated and turned into a civil war in the winter of 1847. Both sides attempted to bolster their rival claims by referring to *exemple virtutis* from the allegedly heroic past of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The founding of the Old Confederation, the battles at Morgarten (1315) and Sempach (1386) against the Habsburgs, and particularly the legend about Wilhelm Tell were stock items in the rhetoric of Radicals and Conservatives alike. In a pamphlet dating from the 1840s, the Catholic cantons, Uri, Schwyz, Unterwalden and Lucerne were accused of having become 'perjurers to the Oath of the Rütli'. In a poem dating from around the same time, Tell fights with the liberals and radicals against the reactionary forces that set up the *Sonderbund* alliance.[74]

The second (and principal) factor favouring the nationalisation of the anti-republican opposition derived from the successful institutionalisation of the modern nation-state since the turn of the eighteenth century. In this respect, the Helvetic Republic, though short-lived, determined the tracks along which the future journey was

to follow. It set the stage, as it were, for future debates about Swiss nationhood. For at least in part, the Helvetic state had succeeded in creating a new political and geographical space. The concept of Swiss nationhood as an 'organic unity of state, people and territory' had for the first time found expression in the Helvetic Constitution and the social practice of the Helvetic State.[75] The impact of these transformations on the republican nationalist movement of the 1830s and 1840s were marked. While initially concentrating its efforts on constitutional reforms at the cantonal level, this movement drew inspiration from an institutional and cognitive framework created during the Helvetic Republic.[76] Even the anti-republican movement, whilst continuing to oppose the nationalisation of the state through the promotion of a *Gemeinschaft-* based rhetoric of political and cultural autonomy, was bound to operate within this very framework, thereby helping to reinforce it.[77]

Two rival definitions of nationhood

While a common ethno-symbolic focus 'united' supporters and opponents of the liberal nation-state, they also served to elaborate two distinct conceptions of nationhood. The adherents of republican nationalism tended to embrace a civic definition of national identity, as opposed to their Conservative opponents, who defined the nation in organic terms. Liberal and Radical nationalists depicted Switzerland as a voluntary nation, a *Willensnation* capable of uniting different cultural groups within a shared framework of values, norms, and institutions. This essentially civic definition of Swiss nationhood found paradigmatic expression in a play, written during the 1830s by a supporter of republican nationalism:[78]

> TREUHERZ: *It is true that the Swiss are a mixed nation,*
> *composed of Germans, Frenchmen, Italians; but despite*
> *differences in terms of language, customs and religion these*
> *different parts constitute one nation. For they possess a*
> *specific character, a nationality, which they share and by*
> *virtue of which they distinguish themselves from other*
> *European peoples.*

STADTRAT: *And this character, this nationality, what does it consist in?*
TREUHERZ: *Their love of liberty and their profound hatred of servitude. The love of liberty, and a constant worry to be deprived of it – this caused our forebears to unite into one single nation, and the same concerns must unite us today.*

Meanwhile the anti-national movement contributed an organic understanding of nationhood to the fabric of Swiss national identity. What happened was this: the Catholic Conservative opponents of republican nationalism projected their own *(Gemeinschaft*-based) conception of community onto the national level. Thus from the viewpoint of the champions of the anti-national cause the Swiss nation was determined by the same 'laws' as their much-praised ideal-type communities: the family, the village, and the canton. Consequently, in the organic conception favoured by the Catholic Conservative opposition, the Swiss nation appeared as a pre-political community based on natural similarities and shared ancestry. As the Catholic Conservative politician, Philipp Anton Segesser expressed this organic understanding of Swiss nationality in 1847: 'A people is like a family, while adoption is something that remains a matter of civil law'.[79] A Catholic newspaper report of 1846 provides an even more instructive description of Swiss nationhood as a community of shared ancestry:[80]

> The question remains: who constitutes the Fatherland, the Nation? The divided authorities, the party that breeds revolution and public outrage, or those immediate descendants of the heroic forefathers who constitute the pillars of our Fatherland's history and liberty?

These rival definitions of Swiss national identity manifested themselves in two distinct periodisations of the national past. Typically, the opponents perceived the late medieval period as the unsurpassable peak of Swiss history. From such a viewpoint, the welfare of the Confederation consequently depended on whether its members returned to the moral guideposts set by the forebears. Instead of linear time and a belief in evolutionary progress – the basic credos of republican nationalism – this organic view of community

was rooted in a cyclical conception of temporality. The Helvetic state was described as a derivation from the 'right path' set out by the heroic forefathers, which were perceived in genealogical terms. Liberals and Radicals, because they had diverged from the right path by importing foreign ideas and institutions, were therefore portrayed as archenemies of the Swiss people. The core myths – William Tell and the Oath of the Rütli – were not interpreted in terms of a breakthrough to the kind of liberty expressed in the natural-law doctrine. Instead, the emphasis was placed on national independence, with the prevention of foreign interference held to be the first duty of true patriotism.[81] What is more, the forebears were attributed the status of role models of liberty and simplicity because they are considered genealogical ancestors, resulting in a 'genealogical myth of descent'.

Republican nationalists, on the other hand, understood the national past in terms of a tripartite model of communal evolution. Its first stage being the heroic age of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries when the Swiss nation had been founded and liberty had been achieved in a succession of battles against external enemies. This glorious era had been followed by a period of steady decline. Spanning the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the demise was epitomised by internal disunity, servitude and egoism. It had eventually given way to a new age of light, which had culminated in the Helvetic Revolution of 1798. But, according to the republican narrative, the Helvetic Republic had exceeded even the medieval heroic age in its achievements by adding to the precious virtues of unity and liberty a civic state based on the principles of rationality and progress. Yet as with the Conservative periodisation of the national past, republican nationalists historicised the present. In contrast to the former group, however, they interpreted the liberation myths in ideological rather than genealogical terms:[82] as symbols of a revolutionary struggle against Austrian oppression and thus as early forerunners of the republican revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[83] In this narrative, then, the late medieval heroes appeared as champions of the civic virtues and values that lay at the heart of the modern nation-state, while the element of genealogical ancestry remained conspicuously in the background.

This ideological interpretation of the foundation and liberation myths was much more in keeping with the multicultural construction of Swiss nationhood that emerged as a constant feature of republican nationalist discourse. The way in which the French-speaking participants in the National Shooting Festival of 1847 held in Glarus illustrates this well. The various speeches reveal a semantic consensus in that the delegates of Geneva or Lausanne were described as *'nos frères par les sentiments'*, and the evidence suggests that this terminology was consensual. As a delegate from Lausanne put it: 'While in terms of our flesh and blood we are not the descendants of the Old Confederates, in terms of our spirit we clearly are.'[84] (The rival definitions of nationhood are discussed in Tab. 4-2.)

Nature

The natural environment in general and the Alps in particular retained much of the significance they had already possessed in the discourse of the Helvetic patriots (see chapter 3). However, references to Alpine nature were conspicuously more frequent in statements by republican nationalists, who, unlike many of their sworn enemies, tended to live in the towns rather than in mountainous surroundings. By contrast, those who opposed the modern nation-state were less inclined to use nature as an ideological means of forging national unity and authenticity, which was precisely the function it fulfilled in the discourse of republican nationalism. In a number of statements, the Alps were presented as protective, purifying and character-building. As one member of the Helvetic parliament described the alleged blessings of an Alpine environment for a community: 'All Alpine peoples were traditionally better mannered and more virtuous than the residents of the plains, ... and even though they may possess less money, the often dispose over more inner substance and a stronger character than those.'[85]

Overall, however, between 1798 and 1848 the salience of the Alpine theme in public discourse did not match that of the historicist and republican ones. As we shall see in subsequent chapters (chapters 5, 6, and particularly chapter 8), this was to change

from the 1870s onwards, when ethno-linguistic nationalism rose to prominence in
Europe.

Tab. 4-2: rival definitions of Swiss nationhood (1798-1848)

Type of Movement	Conception of Community	Conception of Time	Type of Historicism
Republican Nationalism (Radicals & Liberals)	Nation-oriented Voluntaristic: 'Will to Liberty' Gesellschaft-Based	Linear Discontinuous	Ideological: Ideological Myth of Descent Naturalising Alps as Seat of National Virtue
Catholic-Conservatives *(Sonderbund)*	Locality-Centred Organic: 'A Nation is Like a Family' Gemeinschaft-Based	Circular Continuous	Genealogical: Genealogical Myth of Descent

Conclusion

The socio-political conflicts that punctuated the period from 1798 to 1848 had three
major effects on Swiss nation formation. First, they engendered a communications
revolution, thereby forging a public sphere that potentially involved all geographical
areas and social segments of nineteenth-century Switzerland. The rise of the republican
nationalist movement that gathered such momentum between 1830 and 1848 would
have been inconceivable without this parallel development.

Second, within this now considerably expanded Swiss public sphere 'the nation'
became the central focus of attention. Encouraged by the constitutional reforms it had
achieved in the cantons, republican nationalism developed into a powerful movement

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aiming to create a modern nation-state. The defeat of the Catholic *Sonderbund* in the short and relatively bloodless civil war of 1847 paved the way for the Constitution of 1848 and thus for the fulfilment of the central aspiration of republican nationalists.

Third, in the course of this process the anti-national opposition (those who support the *Sonderbund* alliance) was nationalised: in defending what it regarded as its political and cultural autonomy, the Catholic leaders were bound to participate in the controversy over Swiss nationhood, thereby contributing to rooting 'the nation' as a cognitive and emotive category among their own rank and file. In ideological terms, the Catholic opposition began to apply its own ideal of community – that of the organic *Gemeinschaft*, inspired by the local community, the region, and the canton – to the national plane.

Notes

[1] From a pamphlet by the radical Caspar Schiesser of 1833. Quoted from Charbon (1998: 293).

[2] Konrad Escher in the Helvetic parliament. Quoted from Guggenbühl (1998b: 40).

[3] Tanner (1997: 127).

[4] Smith (1998: 196).

[5] Popular reactions in countries directly affected by French expansionism are discussed in Merriman (1996: 544-46).

[6] The 2nd Coalition War (1799-1800), which took place on Swiss territory, resulted in the near-emptying of the new republic's financial coffers and heavily affected the peasant population. See de Capitani (1986: 517-18).

[7] Woolf (1991: 15).

[8] 'There are no boundaries anymore between the cantons and the subject territories nor between the cantons themselves', declared Article 1 of the Helvetic Constitution. Böning (1998: 168).

[9] Böning (1998: ch. 7); de Capitani (1986: 515).

[10] Böning (1998: 223). See also Simon (1997).

[11] Böning (1998: 227)

[12] Böning (1998: 215-18).

[13] Quoted from Frei (1964: 11).

[14] Böning (1998: 163-66). See also Graber (1993b: 145).

[15] The impact of the French Revolution on certain Swiss regions was massive. In the Vaud, for example, the countryside of Schaffhausen and the Valais popular uprisings were suppressed with brutal force in 1790 and 1791 respectively. In Geneva, Graubünden and the Bistum of Basel the old order crumbled. The troops of Zurich and Bern were in a constant state of alert. On these issues, see de Capitani (1986: 511) and Böning (1998: chs. 3 and 4). See also Guggenbühl (1998b).

[16] This included many ex-members of the Helvetic Society. Seventy percent of all the members of the Society who held political office reached the peak of their careers under the old order, compared to only 10 percent for whom the Helvetic Republic meant a rise of professional status. See Im Hof and de Capitani (1983, vol. 2: 61).

[17] Uri, Schwyz, Nidwalden, Glarus and Zug resisted the Helvetic constitution, and the population of Nidwalden had fought the French invaders, with considerable loss of life, before it surrendered on May 4, 1798. By the summer of 1798 Helvetic troops, with the support from France, had managed to pacify all remaining epicentres of resistance. See Staehelin (1980: 795). For a study on the cantons of central Switzerland that opposed the Helvetic order, see in particular Guzzi (1993: 90).

[18] Böning (1998: chs. 11 and 12).

[19] Woolf (1991: 16).

[20] Steinberg (1996: 10).

[21] Messmer (1998); Simon (1997: 46); Tanner (1997a: 60-61).

[22] Messmer (1998: 24).

[23] De Capitani (1986: 623).

[24] Andrey (1986: 616-21).

[25] Tanner (1997a: 64).

[26] Tanner (1997a: 69).

[27] Quoted from Tanner (1997: 119).

[28] An uprising against the Radical constitution actually took place in the winter of 1840.

[29] For a description of this incident, see Remak (1993: ch. 1), and Luzzato (1996: ch. 5).

[30] On the conflicts in Aargau and the subsequent *Freischarenzüge,* see De Capitany (1986: 626-27); Remak (1993: 21-37).

[31] Quoted from Remak (1993: 28).

[32] Quoted from Remak (1993: 17).

[33] Remak (1993: 60).

[34] Remak (1993: 62).

[35] Remak 1993: 157-58. According to Remak (1993: 156), three factors prevented foreign interference: 'the speed with which the conflict was settled'; the inability of the Conservative powers to come to an agreement as to how to deal with the Swiss situation; and the 'steadfast opposition to intervention on the part of the British government'.

[36] Messmer (1998: 25-27).

[37] According to Boening (1998: 232), the number of newspapers rose from 27 to 84 during the reign of the Helvetic Republic.

[38] Quoted from Frei (1964: 26).

[39] Quoted from Frei (1964: 33).

[40] Ebert (1991: 132).

[41] The Old Swiss Confederation had been represented by the emblems of the 13 Confederates. According to Im Hof (1991: 18-19), it was only at the Diet that the Confederate flag, displaying the 13 cantons (*Orte*) and their associated territories *(Zugewandte Orte)*, was used to represent the alliance as a whole.

[42] Frei (1964: 155-57).

[43] Frei (1964: 175).

[44] This is discussed in de Capitani (1990). See also de Capitani (1993: 28).

[45] Quoted from Frei (1964: 42). The Helvetic Directory used the same argument to justify the conclusion of an alliance with France, dating 28 September 1798. This pact with a foreign power, the proclamation maintained, had been concluded in the spirit of the founders and was an attempt to secure ancient Swiss liberties. See Simon (1995).

[46] Ebert (1991: 103).

[47] Ebert (1991: 126).

[48] See Ebert (1991: 137).

[49] Quoted from Tanner (1997a: 63).

[50] Quoted from Charbon (1998: 9).

[51] Quoted from Charbon (1998: 9).

[52] Guggenbuehl (1998a: 225).

[53] In 1848, there were more than 110 newspapers in Switzerland. Of those, 32 (29 percent) were liberal, 31 (28 percent) radical, 10 (9 percent) belonged to the 'juste-milieu', 12 (11 percent) adhered to a Catholic Conservative and 2 (2 percent) to a socialist worldview. In addition, there were 2 (2 percent) newspapers that embraced the cause of German republicanism, while 21 papers (20 percent) did not champion a specific political creed. These figures are based on Luzzato (1996: 24).

[54] Quoted from Luzzato (1996: 22).

[55] Quoted from Guggenbühl (1998b: 39).

[56] In addition, numerous societies that appealed mainly to the educated elites were active during the first half of the nineteenth century. This included: the Helvetic Society, which resumed its activities in 1807; the *Sempacherverein* (1821), which organised patriotic journeys and national pilgrimages to significant national monuments and sites; the fraternity *Helvetia* (1832) as well as the *Nationalverein* (1835), the latter two societies having among their membership a considerable number of leading Liberal

intellectuals and politicians supportive of national unification. These societies are discussed in Tanner (1997: 118-19).

[57] For an in-depth analysis of the National Shooting Festival in Glarus of 1847, see Weishaupt (1998).

[58] Quoted from Luzzato, p. 99).

[59] Weishaupt (1998: 67).

[60] Luzzato (1996: 109).

[61] However, in the schools of most Catholic cantons, where schooling was firmly in the hand of the Church and the focus of instruction often a mixture of cantonal parochialism and papist universalism, the trend towards nationalisation clearly moved at a slower pace. On these trends in public education, see Criblez and Hofstetter (1998).

[62] Quoted from Steinberg (1996: 6).

[63] Tanner (1997: 129-30).

[64] Messmer (1997: 25).

[65] Maissen (1998: 147-49).

[66] Frei (1964: 192). Whether Switzerland would have come into being as a polyethnic entity if the liberal state-building project had failed in 1847/48 may indeed be doubted.

[67] Quoted from Frei (1964: 194). Article 109 of the Constitution of 1848 recognised German, French, and Italian as Switzerland's three national languages. See Amstutz (1996: 24-35).

[68] On these cross-cutting cleavages, see Remak (1993).

[69] By contrast, the popular protest movements encountered in the rural areas of the plains during the eighteenth century tended to pursue a different agenda. Their major demands were that the countryside be granted equal political and legal status, and that the taxation of land and production be reduced. It was the first of these demands in particular, which was acted upon by the Helvetic state, which considerably mitigated anti-republican protest within these regions. The different forms of and motives for anti-republican resistance are discussed in Guzzi (1993: 85-90).

[70] Guzzi (1993: 92).

[71] Quoted from Remak (1993: 36).

[72] As Schnitzer (1969: 98) has observed in her study of the commemoration of the battle of Morgarten (1315), the organisers of the commemoration of 1815 in Schwyz, while influenced by the enlightened patriotism of the eighteenth century, reinterpreted these enlightened values against the background of their local, more particularist traditions. The liberty celebrated at these festivals 'had nothing to do with the modern, democratic notion of liberty of the Enlightenment which manifested itself politically in bureaucratic centralisation and civil equality.'

[73] Quoted from Remak (1993: 67). Almost two decades after the defeat in the Sonderbund war, the Lucerne aristocrat and politician, Philip Anton von Segesser stated a view which would continue to resonate in Catholic Switzerland throughout the nineteenth century: 'For me Switzerland is only of

interest as long as the canton of Lucerne – my Fatherland – forms part of it. If Canton Lucerne no longer exists as a free, sovereign member of the Helvetic Confederation, then Switzerland is as irrelevant to me as the lesser of greater Tartary.' Quoted from Steinberg (1996: 48).

[74] See Charbon (1998: 545; 549-50). At times, this struggle over Wilhelm Tell resulted in utterly paradoxical situations, as an incident during the Helvetic Revolution of 1798 reveals. After being arrested early in 1798, supporters of the revolution were surprised to discover pictures of William Tell on the walls of the interrogation rooms of the old authorities. This episode is described in Ebert (1991: 111).

[75] Guzzi-Heeb (1998: 133).

[76] Guzzi-Heeb (1998: 135-36) has argued that, during the era of constitutional transformation subsequent to the demise of the Helvetic Republic, the 'majority of the population increasingly came to accept the new state as a new political space'.

[77] Guzzi-Heeb (1998: 143).

[78] Thomas Bornhauser: *Schweizerbart und Treuherz* (1834). Quoted from Charbon (1998: 377).

[79] Quoted from Remak (1993: 55).

[80] Quoted from Luzzato (1996: 120).

[81] Frei (1964: 99-104).

[82] On the difference between ideological and genealogical myths of origin, see Smith (1984: 107-17).

[83] At times, moreover, Swiss nationhood adopted a missionary and futuristic dimension, which was partly to do with Switzerland's role as a republican state surrounded by conservative powers. It found expression in an ideology of Swiss exceptionalism and in the belief that Switzerland had to fulfil a special mission as the republican frontier state in Europe. As Daniel Frei has argued concerning the Helvetic elites: 'The will to be the master of others in matters of liberty [was] at the heart of this missionary feeling.' Frei (1964: 88).

[84] Weishaupt (1998: 70). Kreis (1987) provides convincing evidence that, throughout the nineteenth century, the identification with the core myths (Wilhelm Tell and the founding legend) was stronger in the French- than in the German-speaking part, at least if we consider the educated sections of the public.

[85] Quoted from Marchal (1990: 353).

CHAPTER FIVE

'We have become a People':
Evolving into a Modern Mass Nation (1870-1900)

In 1861, the Swiss poet Gottfried Keller lamented that the state of national consciousness still left a great deal to be desired. As a measure to improve this sorry state and make the nation a focus of popular concern instead, he demanded that 'great and genuine national festivals' be organised in which 'hundreds of thousands of people should take part'. He recommended that these festivals should take the form of 'great historic commemorations which represent the sum of moral experiences or the common hopes of a people, not excluding moments of tragic self-reflection.'[1]

Keller's patriotic hopes turned out to be less far-fetched than it may have seemed to many of his contemporaries for whom the divisive experience of the civil war between Protestant-Radical and Catholic-Conservative cantons in 1847 was still in living memory. In fact, it was merely his death in early 1891 that prevented him from seeing his dream come true. During the first two days of August of the same year, only months after Keller's death, Switzerland celebrated the 600-year long existence as a nation. The central commemorative festivities, which attracted more than 20,000 people, took place in central Switzerland, particularly in Schwyz and Uri, the two cantons most strongly associated with the country's national origin.

The national festival of 1891 signalled a new national era; one in which a more efficient usage of national ritual had favoured the emergence and spread of a more inclusive identity in Switzerland. In fact, the 600th anniversary celebrations of 1891 marked the culmination in a wave of nation-oriented activities that had been gathering momentum since the 1880s, transforming Switzerland into a modern mass nation.[2] Becoming a mass nation, however, was not the same as achieving a popular consensus on the meaning of Swiss nationhood – competing conceptions of national identity persisted. What it did mean, however, was that the nation was becoming a popular reference point, increasingly cutting across cultural and class-based boundaries.[3]

This chapter comprises four sections. To help gain a familiarity with the symbolic repertoire that dominated the national discourse of the time, the first section provides a 'thick description' of key aspects of the national festival of 1891. The second section addresses the question of why Switzerland became a mass nation in the last third of the nineteenth century. This transformation is attributed to a complex interaction geopolitical and domestic factors which, mutually reinforcing each other, prompted the national revival of the 1880s and 1890s. In marked contrast to the state-elite centred model embraced by Hobsbawm and others, I explain this revival as the product of nation-oriented activities in which both the nationalising state and civil society play a significant part. The third part examines how Swiss national identity was re-defined in the context of internationalist competition.

Two days of worshipping the nation: the national festival of 1891

The official festivities started on Friday evening, August 1, when the organising committee welcomed the honorary guests and the various delegations from all parts of the country, and ended on the evening of August 2.[4] The Friday evening was filled up with singing and music performances. On Saturday morning, August 2, at five o'clock, the participants were woken up by cannon fire, and at six o'clock the music corps signalled the reveille with the national anthem. After church and sermon the representatives of the Federal government and of the *Uhrkantone* (the alleged founders of the Confederation, the cantons Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden) gave their speeches. Emil Welti, the President of the Swiss Confederation, addressed the crowd gathered in Schwyz, singling out the two issues that were to dominate the thematic agenda of the national festival – the national past and its great relevance to the country's present and future on the one hand, and Switzerland's place as a nation in a world of nation-states on the other:

Confederates! Nobody may dare interprete the thoughts and feelings the Swiss people are attaching to this day ... We are looking back with great humility over six centuries of history to the beginnings of our Confederation. We are seeking advice from our forefathers to find relief from the confusions of these days, and to be enlightened about what the future might hold. On 1st August 1291 the men of the three valleys, Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden gathered ... What began as a promise of mutual protection of their homeland subsequently came to serve as the seed from which the tree of the Confederation could grow and, by virtue of its 600-year long persistence, take its rightful place among the other nations.[5]

In the course of the afternoon an historic play – the *Festspiel für die Eidgenössische Bundesfeier* – was staged in which 960 mostly lay-actors of Schwyz and the surrounding villages, as well as 400 singers and 120 musicians took part. In the preliminary stages of the festival, some 30,000 copies of the play were sold. The exact size of the audience of the play is unknown. What we do know, however, is that the number of seats available was 11,054. However, according to a report in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (August 1, 1891), there were about as many stands, amounting to a total audience of about 20,000.

The stage had been built following classical role-models, displaying a *porta triumphalis* as well as a number of Venetian flagpoles. The play lasted for a good three hours and ended with the merging of actors and audience into a huge carnival procession. After the play some 7,000 people participated in a banquet which awaited them in the festival hall. At 7 o'clock in the evening the church bells of Schwyz (and all over the country) rang for 15 minutes. At nightfall bonfires were lit on the surrounding valleys and mountains, and musical performances on the town place of Schwyz signalled the end of the first day of the festival.

The morning of the second day resembled that of the first. After the religious service the historic play was staged for the second time. In the afternoon the official guests, along with thousands of visitors, travelled to the nearby Rutli meadow in the canton of Uri, where 600 singers sang the festival cantata based upon the text of Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell*. Speeches by representatives of the three founding cantons were

followed by a boat journey on Lake Lucerne. As the ship approached the village of Brunnen in the canton of Schwyz it was already dark, with both the shore and the mountain ranges shone brightly in the light of the bonfires.[6]

The centrepiece of the national festival in Schwyz was the historical play that was staged both on Saturday afternoon and on Sunday morning.[7] During the play the audience was presented with a *tour d'horizon* of Confederate history leading up to the present and alluding to possible scenarios for future development. In a short prologue, the settlement of the area around Lake Lucerne around 200 AD was brought to the audience's attention. The four scenes that followed, and which formed the thematic core of the play were concerned with the period from the late thirteenth to the late fifteenth centuries, paying particular attention to the Confederation's founding in 1291, the subsequent battles against the Habsburg armies, and the reconciliation in 1481 between the estranged Confederates. The concluding epilogue judged the state of contemporary Switzerland against the background of the past, pointed to the changes that had occurred in the modern era, and ended with a view into the future. It is worth noting, however, that the plot was not confined to the portrayal of significant historical events. Historical myths, particularly Wilhelm Tell ('Tell's Schuss in Altdorf') and Arnold Winkelried ('Arnold Winkelried bei Sempach') were represented in the play. These well-established national myths were portrayed in the form of *tableaux vivants*, with actors using their gestures to portray them. The respective meaning of the scenes was acoustically underlined in that particular songs were sung by a choir. Such *tableaux* found frequent usage in popular plays throughout the nineteenth century, and formed an important medium for the communication of themes of the national mythology towards a wider audience.[8]

The play's lengthy epilogue was finally devoted to the living, at least for the most part, and the play concluded with the singing of the song 'To the Fatherland' (*Dem Vaterland*), which at the time was something like the country's national anthem. The fact the audience was made a part of the overall plot at the closing stages of the play not only gave the endeavour a strong republican overtone, but it also contributed a

great deal to rendering the play a highly emotional experience for many among the audience.

The protagonists of this epilogue were: 'Helvetia,' 'The 22 Cantons of Switzerland,' 'Switzerland's youth,' and 'The Mountains'. The whole plot of this last section was centred around the symbolic figure of Helvetia, the symbol of the modern Swiss nation-state as it came into being in 1848. Within the play the figure of Helvetia was depicted as the mother of all Swiss, both past and present. Helvetia, a female figure, represented the ultimate symbol of national unity and reconciliation. She had the task of securing the peace between different religious groups, and making sure they left their conflictive past behind them. She also had the new task of safeguarding mutual tolerance and understanding within a country that comprised different linguistic groups.[9] Thus shortly before the play ended and the gathered crowd started to sing the national anthem, Helvetia reminded the audience to consider the country's cultural diversity as a strength rather than a weakness:

> You my sons, like the beautiful country,
> You too form a diverse whole;
> In language and thought, in thought and feeling
> You are shaped by mountain peaks and valleys alike.
> I love diversity,
> And love you all, my sons, the same.
> Take this country as a model:
> Everybody respect his brother
> And honour his peculiarity. [10]

Evolving into a mass nation: an explanation

The localist character of national activity until 1850

The national festival of 1891 marks the peak in a wave of nation-oriented activity that began to manifest itself in the early 1880s. In the first half of the nineteenth century

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deep-rooted religious and political divisions often prevented attempts at buttressing national identity from developing its full potential. To grasp the nature and scale of this transformation towards a modern mass nation, a brief glance at the genesis of national ritual is therefore necessary.

The divisions between Protestant and Catholic cantons were reflected, for example, in the so-called *Schlachtjahreszeiten,* the commemorations of the medieval battles, a tradition dating back to the fifteenth century.[11] In the nineteenth century these events, which were organised at the cantonal or communal level and had originally been designed as religious processions for the commemoration of the dead, adopted a more overtly national outlook. Yet, despite the fact that these commemorations were devoted to historic themes of a principally national significance, it was often a local rather than truly national sense of patriotism that was expressed on these commemorations. When Schwyz paid tribute to the fallen of Morgarten in 1815, for example, the fact that no representatives of other cantons had been invited underlined the localist character of the event.[12]

Another important upholder of national activity, the patriotic associations, was largely composed of supporters of the liberal state and thus reflected the religious and political divisions that culminated in the civil war of 1847. This partisan bias was perhaps most clearly noticeable in the Swiss Rifle Shooting Association, which had been founded in 1824 after rifle shooting had been declared a national sport in the military legislation of 1817.[13] Within a short period of time this federal organisation disposed over a dense network of associations spread all over the country. From its foundation, the Swiss Rifle Shooting Association organised annual shooting matches in different parts of the country. These shooting matches served as a political platform for the liberal and radical supporters of constitutional reform, a programme which, though opposed by most Catholic cantons, was eventually realised in 1874. It took until 1861 for the first national shooting match to take place in mostly Catholic central Switzerland, with the enthusiasm among the local population remaining rather modest.[14]

In the face of the deep-seated political and religious antagonism following in the wake of the civil war of 1847, the liberal state was restricted to a marginal role in the way of national activity. Given that the founding of the national state of 1848 was preceded by major societal conflict, the political elite who supported the new socio-political order was conspicuously hesitant in bolstering national activity prior to the 1880s. This was partly because the political constitution of 1848 had restricted the state's authority by transferring considerable autonomy to the respective cantons; but it was also due to fears among the new ruling groups that every activity on the part of the federal state, whether in the sphere of politics or culture, could potentially threaten the liberal state. In the face of the humiliation felt by many Catholics in the wake of the war of 1847, and the climate of tension and antagonism that resulted from this, such fears were by no means unfounded. In 1870 Philipp Anton von Segesser, an intellectual protagonist of the Catholic alliance which had been defeated in 1847, described the feelings prevalent among Catholics:

> Even though a return to the legal situation of before 1847 was
> inconceivable, there nonetheless remained strong feelings of distrust and
> antagonism, especially when the process of centralisation became obvious
> in the newly emerging institutions. This resistance was still very strong
> among the people we represented. Those people perceived the federal
> political bodies as conquerors and oppressors ... The building of the
> Confederation of 1848 was not yet safe from being rocked by a severe
> blow.[15]

The boost of national ritual in the last third of the nineteenth century

National festivals played an essential role in broadening the nation's appeal and in shaping a cognitive framework that would channel what henceforth could and could not be said and thought about the meaning of Swiss national identity. Looking back on the post-1848 development from the vantage point of the turn of the century, one observer singled out the contribution of national festivals to the creation and spread of a common Swiss identity:

Our national festivals are ... comparable to popular assemblies. They help us to wrap a brotherly bond around the boundary posts not only of the cantons, but also of the different tribes ... The festivals are the cults which we consecrate to our Fatherland ... If, in fact, we have become a people since the foundation of our new Confederation [in 1848] – and we have indeed – then we owe this to a large extent to the national festivals.[16]

Zurich's festival, in celebration of its 500-year long membership of the Confederation, in 1851 can be seen as a first sign on the way towards more integrative national festivals and commemorations. According to the intentions of its organising committee, the festival was to be a truly national festival. While representatives of all Catholic cantons had also been invited, with the exception of Lucerne the cantons of the former Catholic *Sonderbund* did not partake in the event.[17]
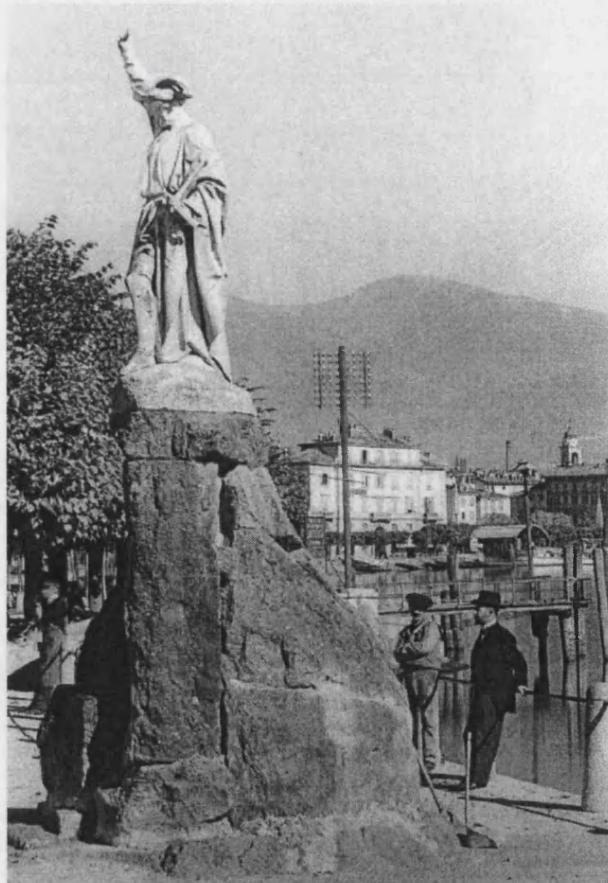
Plate 5-1: First Wilhelm Tell Monument (1852), Lugano, Riva Giocondo Albertolli (and thus important precursor of the Tell Monument in Altorf of 1895).

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But it was only from the 1880s onwards that most of the various patriotic activities and festivals held across the country finally lost their formerly localist outlook to become truly national events. This holds true of the various kinds of public festivals (harvest festivals in the French-speaking part, historical processions and plays as well as commemorations of battles in German-speaking Switzerland) acquired an increasingly national focus and began to attract larger crowds.[18] It also applies to the commemorations of the Agreement of Stans in 1881, to the battles of Sempach in 1886 and Näfels in 1888, as well as to the celebrations in honour of the 400-year anniversary of Brother Claus in 1887, and to the 700-year birthday of the city of Bern. Providing the prelude to the commemoration of the Charter of 1291 in Schwyz, these festivals managed to attract a considerable degree of public attention. Commenting on the commemorations of the battle of Sempach in 1886, the Italian-speaking Swiss newspaper 'La Libertà' reported that this event had 'far exceeded the boldest expectations' and that the '20,000 spectators were moved to tears'.[19]

The boost in national activity went hand in hand with the introduction of forms of national representation that were new although they had historical precursors of some kind. The most important of these new forms were historical plays of the sort carried out in Schwyz in 1891. The era of the historical plays came into full swing during the 1880s with the commemorations in Stans (1881), Sempach (1886), Näfels (1888) and reached their peak in the national festival in Schwyz (1891) and the celebrations in honour of Bern's 700th birthday (1891). As the above analysis of the great historical play in Schwyz has shown, these plays were monumental displays of commemorated national history, usually involving several hundred lay-actors and attracting often more than 10,000 people.[20]

Thanks to this general upsurge in national activity from the 1880s and to the invention of the historic plays which proved to be a highly appealing form of national ritual, some of its neighbours started to take notice of the Swiss public's enthusiasm for national festivals. The *Illustrierte Zeitung* of Leipzig, for instance, in an article which appeared in the last decade of the nineteenth century, called Switzerland 'the El Dorado of the national festival':

It is well recognised in Germany that there is barely another country that understands how to celebrate with such taste and enthusiasm, as does this small people, both the annual meetings and contests of its large associations (singers, gymnasts, riflemen) and the commemoration days of its liberty which often relate to events stretching far back in its history.

And even in France – arguably the leading country in the field of national ritual throughout the nineteenth century – there was praise for the Swiss history plays. As the Paris-newspaper *Le Temps,* wrote in 1889: 'La Suisse est le pays par excellence des grandes fêtes populaires.'[21]
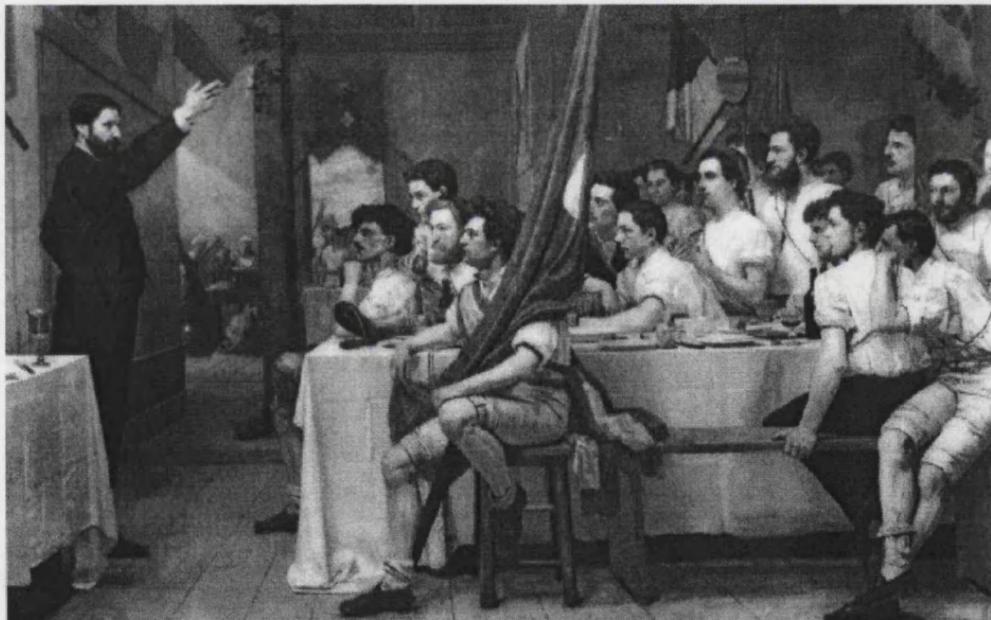
Plate 5-2: Ferdinand Hodler, *Turnerbankett* (1877/1878), Oil on Canvas, Kunsthaus Zürich.

Plate 5-3: *Das moderne Grütli* (1887/1888), Oil on Canvas, Genève, Musée d'art et d'histoire.
Switzerland may have changed, but, so Hodler's painting seems to suggest, it remained faithful to its founding principles. The painting depicts men from different cultural and social backgrounds greeting each other at a National Rifle Shooting Festival. The three men in the left corner symbolise the Oath between the three Confederates.

Explaining popular nationalism

What forces caused Switzerland to become a modern mass nation? There are two influential explanations for the increase in national ritual in the last third of the nineteenth century.[22] The first one has been put forward by Eric Hobsbawm in an article which concludes the influential collection of essays he co-edited with Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition.* In this essay, Hobsbawm links the European-wide boom in the production of national monuments and other representations of the nation to 'profound and rapid social transformations of the period' and the problems this posed to ruling classes in terms of political legitimacy.[23] Georg Kreis, in his account of

the process that led to the national festival of 1891 in Switzerland, followed this line of explanation.[24] Others – most prominently, Karl Deutsch and Ernest Gellner – have argued that the evolution of mass nations can best be explained as a result of the functional requirements of modern, industrialised societies which fostered the development of dense networks of communication and efficient means of transport.[25]

Functional explanations, whether of the socio-psychological (meaning-centred), political (elite-centred), or structuralist (economy-centred) kind, possess an intuitive (and thus alluring) plausibility. Who would doubt that accelerated social change is likely to foster the need for the symbolic restructuring of social relations via public ceremony and ritual display, or that state elites have an interest in fabricating social cohesion by promoting nationalist doctrines? In the Swiss case, the expansion of democratic rights over the last third of the century in many respects challenged ambitions to reinforce state centralisation. And who can seriously deny that modern ('capitalist' or 'industrialising') societies' need for denser communications and more efficient means of transport, as well as tourism, have encouraged to a considerable degree the emergence of mass nations in many parts of the world? In fact, railroad-building took a boost in the latter part of the nineteenth century in Switzerland, with the line through the Gotthard being opened in 1882. Besides, communication further progressed both in terms of its density and in terms of intensity thanks to an increase in the number of newspapers, private associations, and the institutionalisation of the popular referendum at the federal level.

The main weakness of these different functionalist approaches lies in their inability to explain why it was the *nation* that became such a prominent topic during those decades. Why were the festivals, celebrations and commemorations distinctly *national* in their outlook? Why, in other words, was it the nation that came to fulfil these psychological, economic, and political functions? To address these questions, my analysis places particular emphasis on the interplay of political, geopolitical and cultural factors. I shall thus proceed by identifying the domestic, political and geopolitical developments that unleashed these dynamics in the first place, in terms of

1. a *change in the relations between state and civil society* embodied in the constitutional revision of 1874, which resulted in the state's taking an increasingly active part in the production and promotion of national ritual.

2. an *increase in inter-nationalist competition*, noticeable from the 1870s (see Tab. 5-1).

Tab. 5-1: Increase in nation-oriented activity (1880-1900): a model of multiple causation

Level of Causation	Broad Starting Condition	Particular Manifestation	Outcome
Domestic Political Culture	Change in relations between state and civil society	a) Expansion of State's infrastructural power (state centralisation) b) Expansion of direct-democratic rights (legislative referendum)	Reinforcement of efforts to symbolically express
Geopolitics	Increasing Inter-Nationalist Competition	a) European-wide growth in the promotion of national ritual b) Rise of ethno-linguistic nationalism/irredentism (Italy and Germany)	the social cohesion and collective identity of the Swiss nation-state

Domestic political dynamics: the nationalising state and the cross-fertilisation of nation-oriented activity

The emergence of the nationalising State

Confronted with domestic and external challenges (the implications of the latter will be discussed in more detail in the next section), state elites, who could rely on the intellectual supply of a considerable number of scholars and artists, began to take a more active role on the national stage – by taking a more active part in the public discourse about Swiss nationhood, by initiating and co-ordinating public efforts aimed

at celebrating the nation, by passing new legislation to promote national art and national antiquities, and through the provision of funding for scholarly and artistic activities which had the nation as its central focus.

From the 1880s onwards, such efforts began to bear fruit. To begin with, the state was now conspicuously keen on marking its presence on the various kinds of festivals and commemorations all over the country. At most of these events, representatives of federal government gave speeches in which they frequently stressed the importance of reinforcing the bond of loyalty between the single cantons and the Swiss Confederation as a whole. During the commemoration of the Battle of Näfels in 1888, for example, in front of a mostly Catholic audience, Federal Councillor Hammer claimed that 'never before in its history was our Fatherland so united'.[26] It is highly indicative of this new and more inclusive sense of national identity that on the National Rifle-Shooting Day in 1891 in Lucerne, a Catholic Federal Councillor dared to urge the Catholic portion of his audience to bring sacrifices in the name of the new federal state. As the first Catholic-Conservative member of the Swiss government, Federal Councillor Zemp articulated with great confidence the nationalising state's objectives:

> The Swiss Federal State, which has developed marvellously since 1848 and 1874, seeks to realise great and novel purposes of life. This necessitates us to make sacrifices, even if this means giving up certain long-held particularisms. For only by making these sacrifices can we sharpen and nourish the national consciousness.[27]

The numerous and highly popular National Exhibitions present another field where the state became increasingly active. In the 1880s, these Exhibitions, which had traditionally adhered to a rather narrow economic focus, were for the first time given more overtly national themes. This organisers of the 1883 Exhibition in Zurich, for example, used the railway project through the Gotthard Pass as an example of the achievement of a nation that by virtue of its technical skills and economic potential had become a respected player in the world market.[28]

The Federal Council also began to commission a series of monumental scholarly works on the history of the Swiss Confederation from some of the foremost

historians of that time.[29] None of these works may ever have reached the instant

popularity enjoyed by their precursors, particularly the Swiss histories of Johannes von

Müller and Heinrich Zschokke;[30] yet the government's financial support made sure

that these books began to make an impact on future debates about the Confederation's

past that went beyond the seminar rooms of the country's universities.[31]

Cultural legislation is another area where the state's efforts to promote national

identity became increasingly visible. The year 1887 witnessed the passing of legislation

which authorised the Federal government to support 'public monumental works of art

of historical or national character'. To this end, a permanent Federal Art Commission

was set up and endowed with an annual budget of 50,000 Swiss Francs. Commenting

on the new legislation, the driving force behind the government's project of fostering

national consciousness, Federal Councillor Schenk expressed his belief that art could

help in bringing about a 'a powerful boost in patriotism'. This task could be achieved,

he argued, if historians focused on 'those events and personalities that are of great

importance to the nation's history'.[32] Moreover, in 1883 Salomon Vögelin, a member

of parliament, clergyman and professor of art history, proposed to build a national

museum in order to 'express the national idea in all possible directions'. His proposal

was not to be ignored: after a lengthy competition between various towns a protracted

period of construction, the *Landesmuseum* opened in Zurich in 1898.[33] Soon after it

had opened its gates to the general public, people from all over the country, and classes

of school children, visited the new museum in their droves (see Tab. 5-2)

Tab. 5-2: annual number of visitors to the National Museum (1898-1907)

1898	171,896
1899	142,077
1900	120,578
1901	94,713
1902	101,584
1903	105,136
1904	94,484
1905	98,501
1906	103,614
1907	104,790

Source: Schweizerisches Landesmuseum in Zürich. Jahresberichte 1898-1907.[34]

A change in state-civil-society-relations: more democracy and centralisation

What made the state become a nationalising state in the first place? A shift in the relations between the state and civil society provides the first part of my explanation. This shift was precipitated on two parallel developments:

1. the expansion of democratic rights from a primarily representative-democratic to a predominantly direct-democratic system since the 1860s;

2. the state's increased capability to expand its infrastructural power vis à vis the cantons in the wake of the constitutional revision of 1874.

The representative democratic system that had been established with the constitution of 1848 came under increasing attack in the second half of the nineteenth century. Soon after 1848, various cantons – including Basle-Country, Aargau, Lucerne, Bern, Geneva, Zurich and Thurgau – underwent constitutional reforms that set them ahead

of, and sometimes in a position of tension with, the federal political system. In practice, the democratic movement that had gained momentum in those years demanded the introduction of the legislative referendum, that is, the possibility to challenge parliamentary legislation by way of popular referenda. The more opposition grew against what was increasingly conceived as an oligarchic rule, the stronger became the call for the introduction of direct democratic rights.[35]

After having enjoyed successes in many cantons, the democratic movement started to make inroads on the federal plane from the 1870s. To accommodate the movement's demands that were popular across linguistic and religious boundaries, a constitutional change was the only viable option. For although the constitution of 1848 made certain constitutional changes dependent on the agreement of the popular sovereign, its laws favoured a representative system. Two constitutional revisions were put before the voters, one in 1874, and the other in 1874. Whereas a first draft for revision had narrowly failed in 1872, the second attempt in 1874 went through without difficulty: 340,199 voted for and 198,013 against the revision. The new constitution provided the Swiss citizenry with an exceptionally powerful instrument to challenge legislative decisions whenever they wished to do so.[36]

But the constitutional revision of 1874 did not merely reinforce political participation rights. It also resulted in a strengthening of the federal authority at the expense of the cantons. This had several potential and practical consequences. To begin with, the constitutional revision had reinforced the state's capacity to standardise civil law and to determine the content of military training. Furthermore, it enabled the state to increase its grip on the education system by making public education compulsory, free of charge and secular. In the area of professional education, the state's increased scope for regulating standards became noticeable in the 1880s with the introduction of a standardised national diploma.[37] Finally, a general paragraph in the new constitution had widened the state's capacity to make an impact on the course of social and industrial policy.[38]

Nevertheless, the fact that the constitutional arrangement of 1874 had simultaneously increased the scope for political participation and the state's authority

posed a serious predicament for liberal political elite: precisely at the time when the state had reached a position that allowed it to widen its 'infrastructural power', its legislative machinery had become more vulnerable as a result of the shift from the representative to the direct democratic system. If one follows Mann's assumption that 'the "power" of the modern state principally concerns not "state elite power" over society but a tightening state-society relation, caging relations over the national rather than the local or transnational terrain, thus politicizing and geopoliticizing far more of social life than had earlier states', then this tension becomes apparent.[39]

In the Swiss context, this meant that the dominant liberal elite's capacity to determine the relations between the state and civil society (composed of political parties, pressure groups and voting citizens), while potentially intact, was bound to remain insecure. What added to the state's general predicament was the fact that this distribution of power seriously reduced the feasibility of developing and realising long-term strategies. A look at the actual legislative development in the immediate aftermath of 1874 shows that the voters did not hesitate to use their new democratic rights to challenge unpopular legislation. This is true in particular of the period between 1875 and 1885, which saw a real wave of referenda resulting in an important portion of parliamentary decisions being rejected by the voters.[40]

Some of these referenda owed their success in large part to unholy political alliances between groups which for a long time had been excluded from the liberal-radical phalanx of power: the Catholic-Conservatives, who had suffered from the *Kulturkampf* of the 1870s and whose fierce opposition to the centralising and secularising implications of the new constitutional arrangement reflected a religio-political conflict that went back centuries; and the Social Democrats, whose influence was rising as the industrialisation of Swiss society continued to progress. Out of different motives, these groups used the institution of direct democracy to hamper the legislative machinery driven by a liberal elite whom they perceived as ignorant of their own needs.[41] Philipp Anton von Segesser (1818-1887), for example, a Lucerne patrician and Catholic-Conservative leader, as early as 1866 had discovered democratic rights as a means to weaken the nationalising state:

My firm conviction is that we of the conservative camp must put ourselves entirely onto a democratic basis. After the collapse of the old order, nothing else can provide us with a future and a justification except pure democracy. Even if democracy has its dark side, it is preferable to the quasi-bureaucratic aristocracy of the representative system.[42]

Faced with a political system that posed a constant challenge to its legislative agenda, leading politicians responded by intensifying the state's efforts to foster national identity by the various means we have discussed above. For in the perception of most of the state's leading political representatives, popular resistance against enhanced state-centralisation expressed a lack of loyalty towards the state and its constitution; and at the root of all this, they assumed, lay a lack in people's sense of national identity.

Political power versus symbolic power: the cross-fertilisation of national activity

Notwithstanding the state's crucial role, it would be simplistic to regard Switzerland's transformation into a mass nation solely in terms of a by-product of the nationalising state. Intermediate activities, deriving from either the cantonal or associational level, remained vital in furnishing wide sections of the population with a common stock of national symbols and narratives. Of particular significance was the emergence of a climate of ideological competition that fuelled public discourse about Swiss national identity. It was brought about and sustained by the parallel symbolic activities of patriotic associations (particularly the sharpshooting societies), cantons and communities, and the state (see Fig. 5-1). As applied here, the concept of ideological competition implies two things. First, that none of the major actors involved possessed the monopoly over the definition of Swiss nationhood; and second, that the actual output in national activity was greater under these conditions than it would have been in a non-competitive situation.

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Fig. 5-1: The creation of a climate of ideological competition

Actor-Group	Type of National Activity
Cantons and Communities	• Commemoration of late-medieval battles • Commemoration of entrance into the Swiss Confederation
Private Associations	• National sharpshooting festivals • National festival of the gymnasts • National folk song festivals
State	• Cultural legislation • Speeches of government-representatives • Education

In a sense, of course, ideological competition between supporters of the liberal state and its opponents can be observed throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century; but competition increased in the latter part of the nineteenth century as the patriotic associations, and particularly the shooting associations, attracted ever larger audiences. The Catholic cantons, in turn, used their own festivals and commemorations as platforms for their counter activities, singling out their own contribution to the history of the Swiss Confederation. At a festival in commemoration of the battle of Morgarten in 1863, a speaker proclaimed that without the victory at Morgarten in 1315, the bulk of the present Confederation would have remained an Austrian province. He continued his speech by alluding to the patriotic activities of the liberal associations in a way that clearly revealed a sense of wounded pride:

> At a time when from spring to autumn patriotic associations up and down the country hold their festivals, with the sharpshooting festivals playing the major part, and when from all kinds of directions we are witnessing attempts ... to elevate [people's] sentiment for Fatherland and liberty; at such a time it may well be praiseworthy making a pilgrimage to the battlefields where our fathers

rest in peace, and contemplate the value of both Fatherland and liberty in the face of their bloody example. These are popular festivals of a unique kind.[43]

A decade later, at the height of the *Kulturkampf,* the tone had become even more critical. During the commemoration of the Battle of Murten in 1876, a Conservative newspaper complained that the Catholics were 'treated like pariahs' in many parts of the country: 'But let us not forget: We have to distinguish between the Fatherland and those who are accidentally in power. Our love of the Fatherland is founded in the past centuries.'[44]

There are numerous other signs that, once created, these patriotic activities developed a dynamism of their own. As one observer described the patriotic enthusiasm that apparently reigned over the national shooting festivals in the closing decades of the nineteenth century:

> The organisers built triumphal arches and stylish halls which can take up to 5,000 persons; several Swiss towns are competing for the right to hold the festival, and the successful applicants are seeking to beat their predecessors in extravagance.[45]

The same trend can be observed with regard to national monuments. Towards the turn of the nineteenth century in particular, monuments in honour of personalities of alleged national significance were built at an accelerating rate. As the liberal politician Carl Hilty observed in 1897: 'Our time has, next to other special passions, also the passion for monuments. As soon as an important person has died, a committee of citizens inevitably suggests collections for a monument.'[46]

The prehistory of the national festival of 1891 also manifests how a dynamic interaction between various actor groups fuelled the national discourse. Initial plans which favoured the Swiss capital, Bern, as the appropriate venue for the festival came under heavy criticism. After the project had become public, a newspaper wrote: 'What has Bern to do with the eternal alliance [of 1291] which was concluded some 20 hours away in Brunnen between the *Urkantone?*[47] Apparently encouraged by these statements, the government of the canton of Schwyz inquired of the Federal Council

about the possibility of carrying out the planned festival in Schwyz, arguing that Switzerland's foundation 'could hardly be celebrated in a more dignified way than at the place where the Confederation had been won, agreed upon and subsequently secured'.[48] In June 1890, after both Schwyz and Bern had handed in their bids, the Federal Assembly decided by a unanimous vote that the festival on August 1st should take place in central Switzerland. Finally, on September 4, a commission composed of representatives of the cantons of Schwyz, Uri, Unterwalden, and the Federal Council, agreed on Schwyz as the venue for the festival.

This turn of events was significant in that it put the responsibility for the organisation of the biggest national event in Swiss history in the hands of the authorities of Schwyz. As opposed to the decades preceding the 1880s, when the Catholic leadership often combined a localist brand of patriotism with a supra-national papism, the state's new approach worked as an incentive for Catholic communities to prove that their national loyalty was no less genuine than that of their Protestant counterparts. Half a year before the national festival took place, a Catholic-conservative politician urged those of his parliamentary colleagues who were of the same faith to use this opportunity to convince the rest of the country that the Catholics, too, venerated the Swiss nation:

> The festival offers a most welcome opportunity to meet political opponents, and to reconcile old differences.... For we must prove to our opponents that we too love the Swiss Fatherland in its entirety, despite the fact that we are Catholics and thus recognise the Pope.[49]

The statement makes obvious that the moral pressure to enter the national chorus had increased during the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Geo-political developments, to which I shall now turn, were partly responsible for this increase.

Geopolitical dynamics: inter-nationalist competition and the reconstruction of Swiss nationhood

There is another, geopolitical, factor which was conducive to Switzerland's transformation into a mass nation over the last decades of the nineteenth century. I am referring to what could be termed a climate of internationalist competition. Its manifestations were a European-wide upsurge in the production of national ritual and a rise of ethno-linguistic nationalism.[50] The first variable – the mass-production of national ritual in Europe – largely determined the scale of the nationalist reaction in Switzerland, while the second variable – ethno-linguistic nationalism – shaped the ways in which Swiss nationhood was defined during those decades.

The European mass-production of national ritual

As Eric Hobsbawm and some of his collaborators have reminded us in a now famous collection of essays, all of western and central Europe witnessed a growth on an unprecedented scale in nationalist activity between 1870 and 1914.[51] Indeed, a brief glance at developments in some of Switzerland's neighbouring countries proves to be instructive.

To begin with, after the founding of the nation-state under Prussian leadership in 1871, annually held military parades and commemorations – in particular the *Sedantage* and the *Kaiserparaden* – played an important role in an overall attempt to buttress German national identity.[52] Besides these, there were the national rituals which followed a 50-year or centennial rhythm, such as the commemorative celebrations of the *Leipziger Völkerschlacht* in 1813, the battle in which Napoleon had been defeated by an alliance composed of Russia, Austria, Prussia and Sweden. All available evidence suggests that these commemorations attracted great public interest when they took place in 1863 and 1913 respectively.[53] Similar efforts were made in Germany with regard to national monuments. For instance, Kaiser Wilhelm I inaugurated a statue portraying Arminius the Cheruscan in the Teutoburg Forest in 1875 to commemorate

the Germanic victory over the Romans in 9 AD; and in the 1890s statues to Wilhelm I were erected all over Germany.

In France, too, these state-induced nationalist activities be witnessed. July 14th was declared a national holiday in 1880 in commemoration of the day in 1789 on which 80,000 Parisians had taken the Bastille in the eastern part of the city. It should also be noted that the intention behind the design of the Eiffel Tower, constructed for the Exhibition of 1889, was to *frapper le monde*. As a monument of outstanding proportions, the Eiffel Tower was to convince the rest of the world that France, a nation with a great and venerable past, was at the same time a forward-looking country with a great future. As in Germany, military symbolism played an outstanding role in French national self assertion. The German notion of *ein Volk in Waffen* corresponded with the Third Republic's *une nation en armes,* with a big military parade forming the centrepiece of the annual 14 July celebrations.[54]

A similar process can be observed in Britain. It was at the height of this inter-nationalist competition that London was provided with a single administrative authority which subsequently converted the city, in the words of David Cannadine, 'from the squalid, fog-bound city of Dickens into an imperial city'. From the 1870s onwards, Disraeli and others were relentless and eventually successful in their efforts to transform the image of the monarchy. The latter institution, 'hitherto inept, private and of limited appeal', began to attract the interest of 'a broader cross section of the public than ever before'.[55]

The Swiss could not compete with such displays of imperial grandeur, but neither could they afford to shut their eyes to the new ideological trend of internationalist competition. In its annual report of 1892, for instance, the Commission for the Swiss National Museum considered the possibility of launching a series of newspaper adverts to urge Swiss owners of antiquities of national significance not to sell their possessions at low prices to foreign buyers. Only six years later, these concerns seem to have disappeared, the commission came to a fundamentally different conclusion as it analysed the market in national antiquities. Reflecting on developments of the late 1880s and early 1890s, an executive member of the Swiss National Museum

identified a pervasive European nationalism as the prime cause of altered trade patterns in national antiquities:

> It is not least in the great art auctions that a phenomenon has become noticeable that has hitherto been confined to the sphere of politics. The trade in antiquities has become affected by a national movement insofar as every country endeavours to buy their own pieces of art. Whereas in the past the English or French used to buy anything they liked in other countries, irrespective of the origin of an object, there has been a clear shift in both England and France towards local [national] antiquities, even in those cases where these are undoubtedly of a lower artistic value than available foreign ones. The Englishmen tend to buy the English, the Frenchmen the French, the Germans the German, and the Belgians and Dutchman the Dutch old works of art. This is not true merely of historical museums but also applies to private collectors...[56]

Nationalism, in other words, had become a recognised international force in late-nineteenth century Europe. State legitimacy was largely defined in terms of its ideological premises, making the ability to display to the outside world an image of vibrant patriotism and genuine nationhood a prerequisite for getting international recognition. The Swiss government's endeavours to put in place a legal framework for a state-led cultural nationalism clearly mirrors such concerns. So, too, do the initiatives, emanating from private personalities and state-officials alike, which culminated in the national festival in Schwyz in 1891. National festivals and commemorations in particular provided a welcome opportunity to gain international prestige and recognition. The prospect of falling behind in this national competition presented a constant concern at least among the political intelligentsia; and among the latter, it was quite often the Swiss abroad who, after having gained first-hand experience of the countries in which they were then in residence, pointed to the emotive appeal and integrative force of such nation-oriented activities. The Swiss Consul in Montevideo in particular, had become a great admirer of the national holiday celebrations to which he had been exposed for years (both aspiring South American nations and the Colonial powers represented in Montevideo conducted such celebrations with great pomp). In

1892, he sent a letter to the Swiss government, lamenting the fact that Switzerland lacked its own national holiday:

> Switzerland is the only country in the world that does not possess its own national festival, nor any other day of commemoration which, once in a year, would help to reunite our hearts and elevate our patriotic sentiments ... The Republic of France celebrate the 14th July, the United States of America commemorate the 3rd of July, the Italians hold an annual festival in honour of the King, the Spaniards observe 2nd May; the Germans, Danish, Swedes, and English annually venerate their King; the republics of the South American Continent annually commemorate the birthday of their independence. We Swiss do not have anything at all.[57]

The ethno-nationalist challenge

What contributed even more directly to engendering a genuinely nationalist response, however, was a widespread perception of an external threat, both actual and ideological. In 1888 the constitutional historian, Carl Hilty, articulated a widely held view when he argued that 'the increasingly precarious state of European peace' had inevitably resulted in 'sharper emphasis being placed upon one's own [national] individuality'.[58] In the face of these challenges, demands for national unity were multiplying in a climate in which moral and emotional pressure was mounting on those who had hitherto remained indifferent to joining in the chorus of national self-assertion. '[E]verything begins to lose its alarming face', so argued Hilty in 1891, 'if we remain united and do not exhaust our resources with pointless internal quarrelling instead of keeping focussed on the external danger. For this danger is nearer than we may believe, and it considerably heightens every sign of internal weakness on the part of the Swiss Confederation.'[59] Speaking at the commemoration of the Battle of Näfels in 1888, Federal Council, Bernhard Hammer, articulated what by then had become a widespread perception in Switzerland:

Never before in its history was our Fatherland so united, never could our state dispose of such an amount of resources, and never was our military defence so large and well-ordered as today; yet neither was Switzerland at any time in its history surrounded by such a number of war-prone colossi ... To stand up to these external storms we must preserve our inherited characteristics, and cultivate whatever unites and strengthens us; and much of the things that divide and weaken us must be removed. It will be our foremost duty to treat all our fellow countrymen as brothers.[60]

While it is surely true that this perception and its consequences became most salient after the 1880s, its foundations lay in earlier times. It was a chain of collective experiences rather than a single event that had rendered this perception plausible and salient throughout much of Swiss society. An event that attracted considerable public attention shortly after the Swiss nation-state had been founded was the conflict that arose in 1856 with Prussia over the political status of Neuchâtel. Possessing strong traditional links with the Prussian aristocracy, Neuchâtel had become part of the Swiss nation-state in 1848. The conflict started when a group of 530 local royalists tried to change the small city's republican regime in an uprising. The coup failed, however, and the authorities put the rebels in jail.[61] Prussia threatened military intervention, and Switzerland responded by mobilising its army, an act that fostered a strong wave of national feeling that crossed, for a time at least, religious and linguistic borders.[62]

A wave of Italian irredentism provoked a similar response. A first significant incident occurred in 1859 when a number of Italian patriots asked the Italian-speaking Swiss population to declare their loyalty to Italy: 'Ticinesi! ... You are tied to us by ... sky, land, language, religion, customs, economic interest, historic traditions, tragedy and hopes. Hence everything that is most holy to a people ... you do not share with Switzerland but with us.'[63] In 1862, an Italian general and the Italian foreign minister Giacomo Durando, again openly directed irredentist claims towards Switzerland. In an immediate response to such claims, the president of the Swiss National Council addressed the gathered members of parliament with the following words:

The theory which led to these claims, if ever realised, would inevitably lead to Switzerland's destruction. If the canton of Ticino is to belong to Italy because its population speaks Italian, then the logical conclusion would be that Germany could claim Switzerland's German-speaking, and France its French-speaking part. Switzerland would therefore vanish from the map of Europe. We are dealing here with a matter that is vital to the existence of our Fatherland. No member of our people can be in any doubt as to how they should react to this question. This challenge will lead Swiss people of all regions, of all linguistic and religious affiliations, and of all political orientations to one single decision. This decision says: the defence of Switzerland at all costs.[64]

German unification further heightened debates about Swiss nationality. The efforts at uniting Germany under Prussian leadership in particular, apparent from the 1860s, started to arouse concern when the Prussian-French antagonism began to intensify. After press voices in southern Germany had urged the Swiss-German population to morally support Germany in its fight against France, Switzerland's leading liberal newspaper, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung,* spelled out the official political line: 'Switzerland does not consist merely of Swiss of German stock; as a matter of fact, its *raison d'être* demands that it disregards linguistic affiliation [as a criterion of nationality]'.[65] What needs to be borne in mind – and what the Swiss example so clearly demonstrates – is that Bismarck's *kleindeutsche Lösung* of 1871, while admittedly resting on a state-centred rather than an ethnic conception of nationhood, was regarded by many Germans as an incomplete nation-state. The Pan-German League certainly presented the most radical – but by no means the only – current within German nationalism prior to 1900 expressing this dissatisfaction with the Bismarckian solution on ethno-linguistic grounds.[66]

The perception of a nationalist threat not only functioned as an accelerator of nationalist activity within Switzerland in the latter part of the nineteenth century, but also shaped the ways in which Swiss national identity was defined in public discourse. Here three narratives are of particular importance: the national past, the national mission, and the nature-nation link.

Locating the nation in time: the prestige of old age

The embedding of a national community in the pre-modern past has been at the heart of nationalism ever since its inception in the late eighteenth century. In its neo-classicist version this endeavour adopted a more 'civic' outlook, with the main emphasis being placed upon continuities of value and institutions from the ancients to the contemporary. As we have seen in chapter 3, the Swiss patriots of the late eighteenth century, were keen to present the late medieval past as the source of national authenticity.

The historicist argument, rather than undergoing decline, further gained in currency as internationalist competition heightened debates on national identity all over Europe in the late nineteenth century. Some characteristics of this historicist project are familiar from the early phase of Swiss nationalism: the ideological implementation of the past as a broad role-model for the present and future course of action; the pedagogic structure of the narrative, starting with the glorious age, followed by a period of decline and the subsequent resumption of old virtues in the modern era. The historical play that was conducted at the national festival of 1891, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, presented us with a most elaborate manifestation of this historicist project. Each of the play's scenes sent a clear moral message to the public, drawing on the historical narrative and myths to demonstrate the virtues of liberty, independence, sacrifice, and unity.

In the face of internationalist competition, however, the new brand of national historicism began to place strong emphasis upon the prestige of old age and historical continuity as an asset in itself. Preserving that asset, and the lessons it provided, was increasingly regarded as a matter of survival rather than of mere choice. As a newspaper account put it: 'The history of all states and of all times teaches us that a people who firmly holds on to its past, ... and who possesses a deep sense for the peculiarity of its development, that such a people will always have a future'.[67] As nationalism had finally spread outwards from its intellectual interlocutors to affect ever wider portions of the public, being able to claim a venerable and continuous past came

to be seen as one of the chief assets in the ideological struggle for national recognition. This seems to be true of polyethnic states like Switzerland in particular, where focusing on putative ethnic or actual linguistic homogeneity had to be ruled out as a viable option. A long historical trajectory became all the more relevant under these conditions, since it could be put to use as a counter-weight against irredentist propaganda coming from post-unification Germany and Italy. Reporting on the national festival of 1891, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* reminded its readership that in terms of old age, historical continuity, and faithfulness to the republican ideal the Swiss nation had few if any rivals:

> The Confederation has existed for six-hundred years; consequently, Switzerland may rank among the oldest states in Europe. There may be states of far more venerable age, but only few have remained so constant throughout their history in their aims and tasks, and few can connect so easily their present with their past as Switzerland; members of only a few states possess such a lively sense of their past as do the Swiss ... What does today's German Empire have in common with the old Holy Roman Empire! A massive bloodstream separates modern France from the Old French Kingdom. Italy, furthermore, is a state of most recent origin, and Austria's tasks and political aims have completely changed since it was deprived of the Holy Roman Empire and later of its leading role in Germany.
>
> By contrast, Switzerland has continually evolved out of itself, first in the struggle against the Habsburgs, and subsequently against the German Empire itself. Two centuries after it had been founded, the Swiss Confederation achieved full independence. In the three centuries that followed, Switzerland almost consumed itself in internal struggles reaching a point of stagnation. It is only in this century that the country again became fully conscious of its actual task: to build a federal state, based upon democratic-republican principles, which encompasses a population which is diverse in terms of language, customs and religion, and to grant a considerable degree of autonomy to each of these different parts. What is more, this federal state has been able to keep up with other states in their efforts to secure peace, civility and human progress, and has even taken a leading role in some of these activities.[68]

The belief in fulfilling a special mission in a world of national states is another idea that came to great prominence in the last decades of the nineteenth century. There is, of course, nothing peculiarly Swiss in this concept. It played an important role in most national movements, both in Europe and elsewhere. Nor does the concept only emerge with the advent of modern nationalism. In the Swiss case, we encounter it first in the late medieval myth of ethnic election, expressed in the belief that the Confederates' battle victories against the superior Habsburg armies were a sign of having been chosen by God.[69] A secularised version of this myth with strong republican overtones became highly popular among the emerging patriotic movement in the late eighteenth century.[70]

Over the last decades of the nineteenth century, as the doctrine of ethno-linguistic nationalism started to reverberate all over Europe, the belief in having a special mission gained further currency. The fact of forming a polyethnic nation-state now came to accompany the notion of republican exceptionalism, thereby further buttressing the concept of national mission. In 1884, the eminent liberal historian, Karl Dändliker, warned of the challenge posed by ethnic nationalism when he declared that 'the Swiss people did not enjoy the same advantage as their neighbours: being a nation in the true and literal sense of the word, that is to say, being an entity uniform in terms of linguistic and ethnic composition.'[71]

Dändliker's statement is a clear sign that it was feelings of insecurity about one's own conception of nationality rather than outpourings of collective complacency that gave rise to the belief in Switzerland's possessing a peculiar mission in the world. In other words, a virtue was made out of necessity. In contrast to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, when the dualism between democratic republicanism and monarchical despotism formed its ideological backbone, the new belief in Switzerland's mission rested on a distinction between ethnic plurality and ethnic homogeneity. In this new conception, Switzerland's ethnic plurality was conceived of as a source of pride and as the ultimate expression of the progressive civic

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nation-state of the modern era. This idea was perhaps first expressed by Carl Hilty, who in 1875 asserted that

> what holds Switzerland together vis à vis its [linguistically more homogeneous] neighbours is an ideal, namely the consciousness of being part of a state that in many ways represents a more civilised community; of constituting a nationality which stands head and shoulder above mere affiliations of blood or language.[72]

Plate 5-4: Ferdinand Hodler, *Wilhelm Tell* (1897).

To secure Switzerland's national mission 'to represent the idea of a sharply distinctive historical-political nationality', Hilty argued almost two decades later, a certain degree of isolation from the outside world was necessary. As he concluded: 'Even abroad the attitude begins to take root that the Swiss must remain a distinct people with a particular ... character.... We must retain this character at any price; we must remain an independent, peculiar state which exists in isolation from the outside world. Therein consists our first duty.'[73]

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Through statements like this, the symbolic boundary that constituted Swiss nationhood was fortified. Ideologically, the fact that Switzerland was composed of different linguistic groups helped to buttress this symbolic boundary rather than weaken it, since polyethnicity was sharply distinguished from cosmopolitanism. As the president of the city of Bern exhorted in an address to the gathered citizenry in 1891: 'It is not the striving for a boundary-blurring cosmopolitanism that has brought us the sympathies of our neighbours; what compels the foreigner's admiration is the fact that all the differences fall silent when the Fatherland is calling.'[74]

'We all gaze upon the same mountains': naturalising the nation

The symbolic use of alpine landscape was a third aspect that played a considerable role in the reconstruction of national identity in the late nineteenth century. Again, what was new here was not invoking the alpine landscape as such – this had been seen since the eighteenth century – but the particular ways in which alpine nature was symbolically linked with the nation. Up until the mid-nineteenth century, conceptualisations of the relationship between nation and Alpine landscape prevailed. The first was metaphorical in nature. That is to say, popular historical myths, memories and supposed national virtues were projected into a significant landscape in an attempt to lend more continuity and distinctiveness to Swiss national identity. Alpine landscape, in other words, was conceived of as reflecting national characteristics. As the writer Gottfried Keller put it in 1854: 'With the thoughtlessness of youth and childish age, I believed that the natural beauty of Switzerland was a reflection of historical and political merit and of the patriotism of the Swiss people: an equivalent of freedom itself.'[75]

However, the late nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of yet another conceptualisation between nature and national identity. Thus in a context in which Swiss nationhood was increasingly experienced as underdetermined vis-à-vis the ideal type of ethno-linguistic nationalism, Alpine nature became a stock item in national discourse. According to this conceptualisation between nature and nationhood, the Alps did more than express national virtues or form an organic link between past and

present; in this instance the Alps appeared as a unifying principle, even as a force capable of creating a national character which superimposed itself on existing linguistic and religious differences. This argumentative pattern began to take root in the 1870s and continued to resonate until the end of the Second World War, cutting across social and linguistic boundaries. The French-speaking intellectual, Ernest Bovet, for example, wrote a number of articles in which he rejected the intellectual and moral validity of racial theories and ethnic conceptions of nationhood. Not ethnic homogeneity, he maintained, but the Alps were responsible for the creation of a Swiss character. In an essay entitled, *Nationalité* (1909), Bovet resumed this theme, linking the alpine narrative with the two other cornerstones of Swiss national identity – its marked historicism and its emphasis on liberty and independence:

> A mysterious force has kept us together for 600 years and has given to us our democratic institutions. A good spirit watches our liberty. A spirit fills our souls, directs our actions and creates a hymn on the one ideal our of our different languages. It is the spirit that blows from the summits, the genius of the Alps and the glaciers.[76]

The part played by natural symbolism in the construction of Swiss national identity in the period from 1870 to 1945 was indeed significant but will not be discussed further at this point. However, a more detailed discussion of the phenomenon follows in chapter 8, which provides a comparative analysis of the significance of landscape symbolism in polyethnic nation-states.

Conclusion

Switzerland, like the rest of western and central Europe, witnessed a proliferation of nation-oriented activity in the last third of the nineteenth century. Many students of nineteenth-century Swiss nationalism have therefore adopted Hobsbawm's presentist position. In keeping with his premises, the Swiss case is seen in these accounts as part and parcel of the European-wide late-nineteenth century enthusiasm for 'invented

traditions', embodied in public rituals and national ceremonies; as a project in symbolic politics initiated by a few power holders keen to secure legitimacy for themselves in the face of rapid social change.[77]

It is indeed tempting to regard the definition of Swiss nationhood in the late nineteenth century in terms of an 'invention of tradition': as a national ideology and allied ritual practice that was in fact very recent but, once introduced, soon came to be seen as a well-established and indeed ancient 'tradition'. As we have seen, not only does the Swiss case loosely fit Hobsbawm's empirical observation concerning the proliferation of national ritual in late-nineteenth century Europe but there is also ample evidence to suggest that the preoccupation with national identity was even more intense in polyethnic Switzerland than in other European countries. This is particularly true from the 1870s onwards, when rising ethno-linguistic nationalism in much of Europe posed a serious ideological challenge to the Swiss conception of nationality. Faced with the centrifugal pull of ethno-linguistic nationalism, a good portion of Switzerland's political and cultural elite began to embark on efforts at fortifying Swiss national identity. While the Swiss nation-state, founded in 1848, surely played an important part in this development, the national revival of the 1880s and 1890s cannot be attributed to state-induced nationalism alone. (And my suspicion is that this holds true for other European cases as well.) Instead, I have identified the catalyst of this national revival in a complex interplay of geopolitical (inter-nationalist competition) and domestic factors (a climate of ideological competition between the nationalising state and portions of civil society).

At the symbolic level, too, an over-emphasis on the present can be misguiding. While it surely would be naïve to embrace the cultural determinism that tends to inform perennialist accounts, it would be equally flawed to explain processes of identity construction without systematically taking into account antecedent cultural structures. The challenge posed by ethno-linguistic nationalism favoured the view that Swiss nationhood was somewhat underdetermined. This perspective gained currency from the 1870s onwards, prompting a re-definition of Swiss national identity, which is notable in three respects. First, the prevailing historical narrative now focused on the prestige

deriving from a long national pedigree (rather than the virtuous deeds of the founders of

1291). This narrative, which maintained that Switzerland was an old nation that had

continuously developed over six centuries, put the stamp on the national festival of

1891. Second, polyethnic exceptionalism was now added to the older republican

exceptionalism as a justification for upholding the concept of a national mission and to

render Switzerland distinctive vis-à-vis its culturally more homogenous neighbours.

Yet pointing out those factors that rendered Swiss nationhood distinctive was merely

one side of the coin. The other side consisted in proclamations that Switzerland, too,

was a natural nation, rooted in and determined by the national homeland. Hence, the

third important feature of the national discourse of the era consisted in a narrative that

portrayed the Alps as a force that determined (rather than merely reflected)

Switzerland's national character. Thus emerged a reconstructed national narrative that

could serve as a cognitive framework for the next generation.

Notes

[1] Quoted from Stern (1987: 316).

[2] Smith (1995: 54) defines those nations as 'mass nations' which generally appeal 'to the whole people' and 'theoretically include[d] all strata of the designated population in the sovereign nation'.

[3] Ruckstuhl (1991: 135) observes the start of a new boom in national manifestations of various kinds in the 1880s, reaching its peak of this development in the last decade of the century.

[4] The course of events during the festival is described in *Die eidgenössische Bundesfeier in Schwyz vom 1. und 2. August 1891. Bericht des Organisationskomites:* 41-64.

[5] Quoted from Widmer (1992: 653–54).

[6] See *Die Eidgenössische Bundesfeier in Schwyz.*

[7] The following explorations are based upon the official text of the play: *Festspiel für die Eidgenössische Bundesfeier in Schwyz vom 1. und 2. August 1891.* Schwyz: Gebrüder M. und B. Triner.

[8] On the significance of these tableaux in popular plays, see, for instance, Koslowski (1997).

[9] Notwithstanding the fact that, as an allegoric figure, the Helvetia is considerably older than the nineteenth century, it became a popular national symbol only in the late nineteenth century. The most comprehensive study on the figure of Helvetia has been done by Kreis (1991), who give a good account of the difficulties in establishing Helvetia as a popular national symbol.

[10] *Festspiel für die Eidgenössische Bundesfeier in Schwyz* (1891: 60-61).

[11] Santschi (1991: 24).

[12] Schnitzer (1969: 87).

[13] Santschi (1991: 40).

[14] For a discussion of the significance of the national shooting matches, see Bühler (1900: 353-63) and Santschi (1991: 40).

[15] Quoted from Frei (1964: 212).

[16] Bühler (1900: 352).

[17] Schnitzer (1969: 93).

[18] For evidence, see Schnitzer (1969), Stadler (1988), and Bühler (1900). The salience of the core myths in the French-speaking cantons is emphasised by Kreis (1987).

[19] Quoted from Widmer (1992: 642).

[20] According to Marchal (1990: 364-5), the novelty of the historic plays consists in the fact that they present commemorated history 'in the form of an episodic *tour d'horizon* and are performed by the people for the people'.

[21] Both quotations are taken from Stadler (1988: 112).

[22] The sheer volume of work in this area precludes a complete list. A good starting point is certainly the reader edited by Hobsbawm (1983). On Germany, see Mosse (1964) and (1975); Vogel (1997) on military parades in Germany and France; Nora (1996) on various aspects of French national identity during and after the Second Republic. For a recent comparative study that also deals with the centenaries in the United States and Australia, see Spillman (1997). For a near-encyclopaedic study on the United States, see Kammen (1991).

[23] Hobsbawm (1983a: 4).

[24] Kreis (1991).

[25] See Deutsch (1966) and (1976); Gellner (1983).

[26] Vaterland. April 6, 1888. Quoted from Landolt (1995: 75).

[27] Quoted from Bühler (1900: 363).

[28] On the history of the national exhibitions, see Bächtiger (1987).

[29] To name but the most influential of these works: Karl Dändliker's *Geschichte der Schweiz mit besonderer Berücksichtigung auf die Entwicklung des Verfassungs- und Kulturlebens von den ältesten Zeiten bis zur Gegenwart* (three volumes, 1883-88); Johann Dierauer's *Geschichte der Schweizerischen Eidgenossenschaft* (five volumes, 1887-1917); Wilhelm Oechsli's *Quellenbuch zur Schweizergeschichte* (1886). The following two works were especially commissioned by the Federal Council in the face of the 600-year celebrations of the Swiss Confederations in 1891 in Schwyz: Carl Hilty's *Die Bundesverfassungen der Schweizerischen Eidgenossenschaf* (1891); and Wilhelm Oechsli's *Die Anfänge der Schweizerischen Eidgenossenschaft* (1891).

[30] Von Müller's five volume opus entitled *Geschichten Schweizerischer Eidgenossenschaft* was first published in the 1780s, but subsequently went through various editions. Heinrich Zschokke's work – in many ways a popularization of Müller's lengthy and detailed narrative – first appeared in 1824. See Von Müller (1824) and Zschokke (1824).

[31] Wilhelm Oechsli in particular, the author of the official Swiss history for the national festival of 1891, became an author of textbooks on Swiss history for secondary education. Many of the latter went through various editions and were translated into French and Italian. See Oechsli (1889) and (1891).

[32] Quoted from Widmer (1992: 623).

[33] See *Botschaft des Bundesrathes an die Bundesversammlung über die Frage betreffend Gründung eines schweizerischen Nationalmuseums*. May 31st 1889. See also the *Jahresberichte Schweizerisches Landesmuseum Zürich*.

[34] The size of the Swiss population in 1900 was around 3,3 million. See Gilg and Hablützel (1986: 878-79).

[35] Schaffner (1982: 193) and Ruffieux (1986: 666-668). The driving force behind the expansion of direct-democratic rights on the cantonal level were the radical Democrats, while considerable segments of the Conservatives and Liberals, for quite different reasons, tended to be sceptical if not outright hostile to this trend. Within the Protestant cantons, the dividing line often went between towns and surrounding countryside, particularly in the cases of Basle and Zurich. The strongholds of the representative system were the towns of Zurich and Basle with their powerful economic elites, as well as the cantons of Schaffhausen, Thurgau, Geneva and Neuchâtel.

[36] Ruffieux (1986: 672).

[37] On the influence of the nationalising state on professional education, see Surdez (1998).

[38] The substantial changes brought about by the constitutional revision of 1874 are discussed in some detail in Von Greyerz (1980: especially 1072-73), and Ruffieux (1983: 135-42).

[39] Mann (1993: 61).

[40] For a detailed treatment of this wave of popular referenda, see Ruffieux (1986: 676-78).

[41] The first trade-union-like organisations came into being during the 1870s, and in 1888 the Swiss Social-Democratic Party was founded. For an exploration of these developments, see Ruffieux (1986: 678-85).

[42] Quoted from Steinberg (1996: 50). Two events mark the beginning of a closer integration of Catholic Conservatives into the federal state: the election of Jakob Zemp as the first Catholic Conservative Federal Councillor in 1891, and the founding of the *Katholische Volkspartei* in 1894. On the history of Catholic Conservatism, see Stadler (1987), Altermatt (1989) and (1995), and Ruffieux (1986: 672-73).

[43] Quoted from Schnitzer (1967: 100).

[44] *Vaterland*. June 23, 1876. Quoted from Landolt (1994: 64).

[45] Such competition was apparently partly responsible for pushing the number of visitors to such events, as well as the number of associations and their members, to unprecedented heights. At the National Shooting Festival of 1885 in Bern, for example, 230,000 visitors attended. Furthermore, by the turn of the century the *Schweizerischer Schützenverband* counted about 1,348 regional sections, with a total active membership of 68,765. Here I draw on Bühler (1900: 360-63).

[46] *Politisches Jahrbuch der Schweizerischen Eidgenossenschaft.* Vol. XI (1897: 733).

[47] Thurgauer Wochen-Zeitung. December 27, 1889. Quoted from Kreis (1991: 41). Kreis (1991: 41-45) provides evidence that this point of view was shared by many newspapers of cantonal and national significance.

[48] Quoted from Kreis (1991: 52).

[49] Quoted from Kreis (1991: 76). Despite a marked improvement in the general political climate, however, the festival of 1891 did not herald the beginning of a harmonious era between the liberal state and Catholicism. A strong historicist and religious orientation, combined with a deep-rooted belief in the value of local autonomy, were at the heart of Catholic patriotism, with the secularizing and nationalizing state and its protagonists often still viewed with some suspicion. As the Catholic «Liberté» wrote on August 2, 1891: 'L'Eglise, il est vrai, peut-être en contradiction avec le gouvernement d'un pays; mais le gouvernement d'un pays n'est pas la nation, biens moins encore la patrie...' Quoted from Merki (1995: 89).

[50] Eric Hobsbawm provides evidence for both arguments: see Hobsbawm (1983b) and (1993). For two contributions to the study of national identity that take systematic account of geo-political factors, see Greenfeld (1992), and Colley (1992).

[51] I am referring in particular to Cannadine (1983) and Hobsbawm (1983b). For similar developments in the United States and Australia, see Spillman (1997), and Kammen (1991).

[52] The important role of military parades as a national ritual in Germany after 1871 has been analysed by Vogel (1997).

[53] For the most recent account of these commemorations, see Hoffmann (1995).

[54] See Vogel (1995: 204) for differences in national representation in Germany and France.

[55] Cannadine (1983: 120, 123, 127).

[56] *Schweizrisches Landesmuseum. Jahresbericht* (1896: 143).

[57] Quoted from Junker (1975: 24). It was not until 1899 that August 1 was eventually institutionalised as Switzerland's national holiday.

[58] *Politisches Jahrbuch der Schweizerischen Eidgenossenschaft* (1889: 473).

[59] *Politisches Jahrbuch der Schweiz* (1891: 311).

[60] *Vaterland.* April 6, 1888. Quoted from Landolt (1994: 75).

[61] Neuchâtel had officially been a part of Prussia when on March 5, 1848 the republicans solemnly declared 'the existence of the Republic of Neuchâtel' and its 'inclusion into the great Swiss family'. For an analysis of the conflict, see Andrey (1986: 595).

[62] Von Greyerz (1980: 1045).

[63] Quoted from Hunziker (1970: 80). Italian *risorgimento* nationalism often contained a strong element of irredentism. When Mazzini presented his map of an 'ideal Europe' in 1857, the ethno-linguistic rationale behind it was obvious. According to Mazzini's logic, Switzerland did not form a nation in the true sense, nor did Ireland. On Mazzini's conception of nationality, and on Italian *risorgimento* nationalism more broadly, see Alter (1985: 35 and 60-80).

[64] Quoted from Hunziker (1970: 103-4). Italian irredentism provoked strong patriotic sentiment across political and cultural boundaries. In the canton of Ticino, people expressed their loyalty to Switzerland in a number of mass-demonstrations and sent a petition to the Federal Council. In the French- and German-speaking parts, too, the response was unanimous. For a survey of these reactions, see Hunziker (1970: 84-117).

[65] *Neue Zürcher Zeitung.* August 23, 1870. Hunziker (1970: 136) argues that the majority of the Swiss had been on the French side in the Franco-German war, all the more so because strong Pan-German overtones accompanied the annexation of the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine.

[66] On German 'homeland nationalism' and its institutional manifestations, see Brubaker (1992: especially chapters 3 and 6) and (1996: especially 114-17). On the emergence and spread of völkisch nationalism in Germany, see Mosse (1964) and Greenfeld (1992: ch. 4). On European ethno-linguistic nationalism more broadly, see also Alter (1985: 112), Hobsbawm (1993: ch. 4), and Woolf (1996: 16-25). On Italy, see Alter (1985), and Schieder (1991: 329-46).

[67] *Neue Zürcher Zeitung.* August 2, 1891.

[68] *Neue Zürcher Zeitung.* August 1, 1891. The Catholic-Conservative *Vaterland* argued in a similar vein on August 1, 1891: 'Of all the European republics that in the medieval period could rightly claim a glorious history, only one remained: The Swiss Confederation. The states of Genoa, Florence and Venice, all of which were superior to Switzerland in terms of affluence and power, underwent a degree of change which resulted in new types of state; and of the antique republics only the Greek Confederation has lived to a greater age than Switzerland.'

[69] See chapter 2. On the role of ethnic election in nationalism, see Smith (1986).

[70] See chapter 3.

[71] Quoted im Im Hof (1991: 172).

[72] Hilty (1875: 29). Other important representatives of this view were Johann Caspar Bluntschli and Max Huber. On the evolution of the belief in Switzerland's national mission, see Frei (1967: 42-45).

[73] *Politisches Jahrbuch der Schweiz* (1889: 474). This view was not confined to some German-speaking intellectuals. Henri Secrétan, for example, a minister from Lausanne, asserted in a speech held at the

national festival in Schwyz in 1891, that while Switzerland had to remain open to developments abroad, 'nous devons avant tout rester nous-mêmes.' Quoted from Widmer (1992: 619).

[74] *Die 700jährige Gründungsfeier der Stadt Bern 1191-1891. Festbericht herausgegeben vom Organisations-Komite* (1891: 145).

[75] Quoted from Jost (1988: 18-19).

[76] Bovet (1909b: 441).

[77] Kreis (1991).

CHAPTER SIX

Geistige Landesverteidigung, 1933-1939:
Forging a Swiss *Volksgemeinschaft*

With the National Exhibition we want to convince other nations that we
Swiss constitute not merely a community of interests, but a true Volk
united by virtue of its common will and special mission.
<div align="center">Catalogue for the National Exhibition of 1939[1]</div>

Two of the trends that we identified in the last chapter – the significance of the
geopolitical, and the related tendency to depict Swiss nationhood as organically rooted
in history, culture and geography – considerably intensified in the 1930s. This
aggravation is relatively clearly discernible from the evidence considered. In the late
nineteenth century, when significant sections of the Swiss public had felt that Swiss
nationhood was somewhat underdetermined, they began to search for stabilising
principles. These they had found in a reinforced historicism and in the natural
environment. The generation of the 1930s, facing a much more dramatic situation than
their late-nineteenth century predecessors, concluded that Swiss nationhood was
seriously underdetermined. This further reinforced the existing disposition to depict
Swiss identity as externally determined and natural rather than constructed and
contingent.

In this chapter, I explain the 1930s national revival as a process by which
nationhood was redefined in the face of the challenge to Swiss nationhood posed by the
volkish nationalism of the Nazis.[2] This challenge reinforced sentiments of inclusion and
exclusion, engendering a wave of popular nationalism on an unprecedented scale.
There was no monolithic response to this authoritarian/volkish threat, but the metaphor
of a chorus of many voices perhaps best describes the nationalism that it provoked.
This chorus was composed of different groups, reacting in different ways to this

challenge in accordance with their own political orientations and ideological preferences.

From about 1935 onwards, however, 'Swiss culture' took pride of place in public discourse about nationhood. What is significant in this regard is that civic nationalists contributed the most to the placing of culture at the heart of Swiss national identity. While references to the national past and to political institutions and values retained their significance throughout the decade, in public manifestations of nationalism – whether state-induced or emanating from civil society – culture gained centre stage. The demotic character of Swiss public culture, a distinct brand of Protestantism and enlightened humanism, a unique way of thinking, feeling and behaving, and cultural diversity – these features were identified as authentic expressions of Swiss nationhood. They were presented as evidence that Switzerland was a natural cultural community rather than a community merely brought together by history and shared political institutions. Such a *kulturelle Wesensgemeinschaft* was perceived as more likely to be capable of standing up to Nazi authoritarianism and irredentism than a mere *Willensnation*.

This new cultural nationalism provided the framework within which civic and organic understandings of Swiss nationhood could be fused into a highly popular Swiss nationalism: in the second part of the 1930s, there occurred a synthesis of *Willensgemeinschaft* and *Wesensgemeinschaft*. Its overall message – that the Swiss nation was simultaneously man-made and organically determined – encompassed the political spectrum from the Conservative right to the moderate left. The initial impetus for this particular brand of nationalism came from civil society rather than the state. It emerged in debates about Swiss national identity in newspapers and periodicals, and within private associations and political parties. It was only in the late 1930s that the state began to take a more active role, lending added weight to the overall project.

This chapter comprises five parts. I wish to open with a vivid illustration of the potency of Swiss nationalism in the late 1930s, and the first section therefore provides a description of the National Exhibition of 1939. I then go back in time to explore the political and ideological context in which the cultural nationalism of the era developed.

In the third and fourth sections of the chapter, I examine the different definitions of national identity advanced by civic and organic nationalists, respectively. The final section provides an account of the fusion of the civic and organic conceptions of nationhood that occurred in the later part of the decade.

Swiss nationhood as a communal experience: the National Exhibition of 1939

In the summer of 1939, a visitor to the National Exhibition in Zurich described the enthusiasm the event generated among the general public:

> This great feeling ... has suddenly captured the Swiss, while hitherto they have been content merely to pursue their philistine pleasures. And finally they dare ... to show it: a feeling of joy and admiration and pride....All of a sudden, the Swiss are experiencing the meaning of *Heimat*. In other words, they are experiencing something at home, in their own country, which normally one only experiences abroad. And that is the great feeling.[3]

The above observation, however exaggerated it may appear to the present-day observer, appears to reflect quite accurately the popular mood during the national revival of the late 1930s. The National Exhibition in Zurich transformed the nationalism of the era into a popular experience.[4] It opened on May 15, 1939, and closed its doors on October 29 of the same year. During those 174 days, the organisers registered 10,506,735 visits, with 130,000 people entering the Exhibition gates on the first two days. Even considering the fact that many visitors (especially those living in and around Zurich) bought tickets that entitled them to multiple entries, there can be little doubt that this was an event of huge proportions. It is likely that the total number of visitors far exceeded 1 million. Given that the total Swiss population at the time was roughly 4 million, this is a remarkable figure. The average number of visitors per day was 60,384, and the highest daily figure was 163,567.[5]

Although the idea of organising a large National Exhibition had first been expressed in 1929, it was only in 1935, after the organisers had received financial backing from the Federal Council, that serious planning could begin. Private associations and other champions of the idea of *Kulturwahrung und Kulturwerbung* (cultural preservation and cultural propaganda) had lobbied for a National Exhibition to be held in the latter half of the 1930s.[6] In February 1936 an organising committee was set up, and within two months it had hired an architect as Managing Director of the Exhibition. Over the subsequent weeks and months, 13 advisory committees and 12 executive departments were set up, and a permanent staff of several hundred ensured that the Exhibition could open on time.

Although it had emerged from the tradition of nineteenth-century commercial exhibitions, in terms of its scale and purpose the National Exhibition of 1939 was distinct from its predecessors.[7] Apart from its remarkable proportions (more than 4,000 single exhibitors were admitted following a rigorous selection process), the major innovation of the Zurich Exhibition was its emphatically patriotic message. The organising committee endeavoured to make the Exhibition the focal point of a moral rather than commercial discourse. The technological dimension of the Exhibition, manifest in the prominent place attributed to Switzerland's manufacturing industries, was not an end it itself, but served the purpose of reinforcing a greater patriotic narrative. Hence the organisers portrayed these industries as testimonies to Switzerland's strengths as a nation, and the high-quality products that they produced were depicted as manifestations *par excellence* of Swiss national character. In the official Exhibition brochure, the purpose of the section *Heimat und Volk* ('Homeland and People') was described as being to provide visitors 'with an idea of the cultural and intellectual wealth of the Swiss people', and to make them aware 'that this country and its people, its survival and future, is worth any sacrifice'.[8]

The thematic structure of the Exhibition reflected and reinforced this moral message. Thus, unlike its precursors, the Zurich Exhibition was not built around a core of individual commercial exhibitors with their products. Instead, the organisers

attempted to realise an ideal of thematic coherence by dividing the Exhibition site into thematic sections. The site along the left shore of Lake Zurich, stretching a distance of about one kilometer, was devoted to the theme of technology. The pavilions that covered this site housed the pride of Switzerland's manufacturing industries: machinery, watches, and furniture. The exhibition site along the right shore of the lake, stretching an equal distance, was dedicated to the theme of agriculture. The visitors could cross the lake either by ship or by using a cable railway built especially for the occasion.

Thus when contemporary observers compared the Swiss Exhibition with foreign examples, they often expressed pride at the innovative conception of the former. As a report in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* on the World Exhibition in New York, which took place the same year, revealed the chauvinistic tone that occasionally accompanied expressions of national pride during this era:

> New York presents itself ... as an Exhibition in the old style, as a trade fair and global department store. Zurich, in contrast, with its communal concept, has successfully realised a modern idea.... It is certainly no accident that in Switzerland, the home of an exemplary school system, the educational element has come to the fore, while New York has placed the main weight on creating an impression of enormous, overwhelming size.[9]

Beyond an imagined community: nationhood as a tangible and sacred experience

All commentators, irrespective of political affiliation, acknowledged that the Exhibition was an overwhelming popular success. Most importantly, however, the widespread enthusiasm it aroused was not confined to the German-speaking section of the population. People from all over the country visited the Exhibition, with an efficient rail system and reduced fares apparently serving as an incentive to travel to Zurich. A French-speaking contemporary maintained that the 'National Exhibition marks a novel date in the annals of our country: the year in which the French-speaking Swiss went to Zurich'.[10] In an equally rejoicing tone, a Zurich newspaper praised the Exhibition for

providing a display of national unity: 'The fact that the French-speaking Swiss have welcomed the National Exhibition with such enthusiasm is a source of special satisfaction for those responsible.'[11]

Why did people from all parts of the country flock to Zurich to see the Exhibition with their own eyes, and why was the prevalent response so enthusiastic? Without doubt, there was widespread awareness that these were difficult and potentially dangerous times (the Second World War broke out before the Exhibition closed on October 29). As the ultimate expression of a 'united Switzerland', the National Exhibition was bound to be a source of consolation to many who were fearful of what was to come. Together with the wider national revival in evidence from the middle of the decade, this was certainly conducive to making the Exhibition a popular success.

Perhaps a more significant cause of its appeal lay in what I would call its symbolic density. I am referring here to the capacity of the Exhibition to render Swiss nationhood – in all its various dimensions: political, cultural, historical, and geographical – a tangible and holistic experience. As a mass ritual for the nation, the Exhibition succeeded in converting patriotism from an abstract concept to a social practice in which everybody could participate. 'What counts at times of turmoil', a newspaper editorial asserted shortly after the Exhibition had opened, are not just 'commendable deeds for country and people, nor the enactment of parliamentary legislation and government bills'. 'Such times', the author concluded, 'demand that we reach out to men and touch their hearts'.[12]

Among the aspects of the Exhibition that were most frequently praised was its capacity to represent Swiss nationhood in its totality. As a Social Democrat newspaper concluded: 'Never before has such a comprehensive picture of the Swiss people and economy been created'.[13] A Liberal Party publication argued along similar lines, stating that the Exhibition 'teaches us to see our land and our people and displays before our very eyes what would be at stake should we be called upon to defend our borders'.[14] And, in a comment on the impact of the Exhibition's opening ceremony, at which all the cantons had been represented by their traditional colours, it was argued that: 'Switzerland's federalist structure has become visible at the opening festival. The state

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came into view. The feeling of love of one's country became irresistible and could not be undermined by critical reasoning.'[15]

In addition to fortifying their sense of *Gemeinschaft*, the Exhibition provided visitors with a semi-religious experience. This applies particularly to what was know as the *Höhenweg*, a footpath of learning that provided visitors with lessons in national history, geography and folk culture. Terminating in the Hall of Honour *(Ehrenhalle)*, where pictures of famous Swiss personalities were displayed, this linked past, present and future to propagate the belief that Switzerland possessed a distinct national mission. 'The *Höhenweg*', concluded a Catholic newspaper, 'has become, and will remain in our memories, the embodiment of the Swiss idea'.[16] Others, the Catholic-Conservative Federal Councillor Philip Etter among them, explicitly associated attendance at the National Exhibition with a religious experience. So did a French-speaking National Councillor who likened the Exhibition to 'an altar' and the *Höhenweg* to 'a cathedral devoted to the Fatherland'.[17]

The context of *Geistige Landesverteidigung*

The heightened public concern with national identity that characterises the period between 1933 and 1939 did not arise spontaneously but must be understood in terms of a particular socio-political context. Whereas the rise of Swiss nationalism in the closing decades of the nineteenth century resulted from a complex coincidence of domestic and external factors, the major cause of the national revival of the 1930s was first and foremost geopolitical. In particular, the rise of National Socialism and its ideological companion, volkish nationalism, was the catalyst for a national revival that soon captured the public imagination. The popular nationalism that emerged under the banner of *Geistige Landesverteidigung* ('the spiritual defence of the nation') was, in essence, directed both against the external threat of Nazism, and an internal process of right-wing mobilisation sparked by the success of the Nazis.[18]

When National Socialism rose to power in 1933, its ideological and political impact on Switzerland was twofold. First, its radical 'homeland nationalism' directly undermined Switzerland's conception of nationality. Secondly, according to official Nazi doctrine, Germany was the national homeland not only of the Austrians, the Sudeten Germans and the Germans in Poland, but also of the German-speaking Swiss.[19] The fact that the National Socialists had to moderate their irredentist propaganda in view of international opinion did not prevent such activities from taking place. In addition to its dissemination via official channels, volkish propaganda emanated from a network of officially private and voluntary associations, which in reality were under the control of the Nazi state. In 1932, the *Landesgruppe Schweiz der NSDAP*, which opened its headquarters in Davos, served as the bridgehead for Nazi propaganda in Switzerland. After the assassination of its leader, Wilhelm Gustloff, in 1936, the Federal Council, faced with sustained public criticism over its cautious approach to foreign fascist organisations, eventually prohibited this organisation.[20]

This kind of aggressive Pan-German nationalism had gained momentum in the late nineteenth century as a movement that was principally opposed to the small-German, state-centred nationalism that had informed the unification of 1871. As Wehler argues: 'Greater-German and Pan-German ideas basically questioned the 1871 solution to the German question, thus embodying a fundamental challenge to the European state system.'[21] This perspective was furnished ideologically by Fichte's dictum (which was subsequently reiterated by scores of German nationalists), namely, that language represents the natural embodiment of true and authentic nationhood; and that 'it is not because men dwell between certain mountains and rivers that they are a people, but ... men dwell together ... because they were a people already by a law of nature which is much higher.'[22] This doctrine holds that language is an expression and constant reminder of the potency of this 'law of nature', which works irrespective of a people's awareness of it.

In the wake of the First World War, and particularly with the rise of National Socialism, this credo was racialised. What made the Nazi variety considerably more threatening than its nineteenth-century precursor, moreover, was that it formed the official doctrine of a powerful and increasingly aggressive state. In this context, volkish nationalism was bound to emerge as a geopolitical force on the European Continent. Combining a geopolitical drive for *Lebensraum* with a racist ideology, this particular brand of nationalism found its programmatic expression in concepts like *Einheit von Volk und Rasse, Volkstumspolitik* or *Deutschtumspflege.* The threat that German homeland nationalism posed to Switzerland's polyethnic concept of nationality had been clearly recognised ever since the National Socialists had come to power. An editorial in the left-liberal *Nation,* for example, concluded that while the 'Swiss *Volksgemeinschaft'* was 'rooted in history and political principles', the Nazi ideal of a *Volksgemeinschaft* was inspired by a 'naturalistic, volkish, and racist' worldview.[23]

Nazi homeland nationalism was more successful in some parts of Europe than in others. It exerted much influence in Austria, where a considerable part of the population responded favourably to Hitler's *Heim ins Reich.* In the Swiss case, however, Nazi homeland nationalism did not capture the masses, with an overwhelming majority of the German-speaking Swiss openly opposing Germany's demands to join the Reich. To be sure, Nazi doctrines provided inspiration for a few fascist movements within Switzerland, as we will see below. Nevertheless, among the wider Swiss public Nazi sympathies carried a stigma. The reluctance of Germans nationals living in Switzerland to join the National Socialist Party, or to subscribe to a German newspaper adhering to the official party line, strongly suggest that there was a general anti-Nazi mood among the Swiss public. Of the 120,000 Germans who resided in Switzerland in 1937, only 1,364 were members of the NSDAP. Of the German newspapers available in Switzerland, the *Reichsdeutsche* achieved a readership of 4,000, as did the *Deutsche Zeitung in der Schweiz.* When in 1938 the editor of the latter publication contemplated the reasons for his paper's lack of appeal to German nationals in Switzerland, he mentioned the prevailing anti-German climate as the major cause.

This climate, he argued, discouraged the bulk of the Germans from reading any National Socialist newspapers.[24]

The movement for National Renewal

Nevertheless, the ascendancy of the Nazis encouraged right-wing mobilisation within Switzerland and thereby had an additional destabilising influence on the country's political landscape. The coincidence of Nazi ascendancy with the economic depression of 1932 onwards produced a mushrooming of various political protest groups, most of which followed a radical right-wing agenda. While drawing extensively on the organicist ideological resources that had emerged in elite circles during the 1920s, the radical groups attracted considerable support among the lower middle classes.[25]

The political mobilisation of 1933 did not result in a political movement with a unified ideological agenda. Two kinds of movements played a significant role. The first fit the essential criteria of Eley's definition of fascist organisations. They displayed an 'aggressively plebeian style', a 'crude and violent egalitarianism', and the use of 'new propagandist forms and a general invasion of the cultural sphere' to realise their aims.[26] This applies in particular to both the *Nationale Front* and the *Neue Front*. Founded in 1930, the two movements fused in April 1933 to become the most popular fascist organisation in Switzerland. Possessing strongholds in Zurich, Schaffhausen, Aargau and St. Gallen (with branches in Neuchâtel, Geneva and Lausane), it had an anti-liberal, anti-democratic, anti-socialist and anti-Semitic worldview.[27] In French- and Italian-speaking Switzerland, too, radical right-wing movements made some inroads. All these organisations borrowed ideologically from Italian and German fascism.[28] Allied to fascist beliefs were millennial hopes of a glorious national future. The leader of the *Nationale Front* provides us with a typical statement in this regard. 'The belief in shallow internationalism', he declared in 1933, had given way to 'a reinforced emphasis upon one's own people and a return to the soil'. While hitherto, democratically elected parliaments had set the political agenda, the new era would see the rise of the 'gifted leader' and of a 'new esteem for the irrational'.[29]

A number of middle-class protest movements constituted the second significant current in the right-wing mobilisation of the early 1930s. Groups such as the *Neue Schweiz* declared as their aim Switzerland's 'spiritual and economic renewal'.[30] Like other organisations pursuing a similar ideological programme, its following included self-employed small traders and manufacturers, shopkeepers and craftsmen, as well as the lower ranks of the civil service. The political rhetoric was decidedly anti-internationalist and anti-liberal, with attacks on *laissez faire* capitalism being a leitmotif.

What provided overtly fascist groups and middle-class protest movements with some common ideological ground was the belief in the superiority of the corporatist order. In Switzerland, corporatist ideology gained in strength when it provided the platform for a political initiative aiming at the total revision of the Swiss constitution. The initiative demanded that proportional representation be abolished and power transferred from Parliament to professional organisations and a tiny group of state leaders. While the initiative's appeal went beyond the fascist right to include the Young Liberals and most supporters of Catholic Conservatism, the bulk of the Swiss public opposed it.[31] This was a severe blow to the corporatist movement. Some of the radical protest movements survived this political defeat, but the event nonetheless marked a turning point. By the end of 1935, the right-wing movement for national renewal had run out of steam, with its most radical exponents finding themselves increasingly stigmatised.[32]

The formation of *Geistige Landesverteidigung*

The decline of the right-wing movement for national renewal by the mid-1930s was due, in large measure, to the parallel rise of a rival ideological movement that turned out to be far more inclusive. Using terms such as *geistige Landesverteidigung* and *Volksgemeinschaft* to express their ambitions, its proponents set out to redraw the

boundaries of Swiss nationhood in the light of domestic and international developments. This popular nationalism reached its peak between 1936 and the outbreak of the Second World War. During this period, German volkish nationalism created a heightened national awareness among the wider public, and provided the major legitimisation for the increasingly popular Swiss nationalism. In this context, the argument that the national revival was defensive in character made intuitive sense to many. The term *geistige Landesverteidigung* ('the spiritual defence of the nation') in particular reflected the widely held conviction that the Swiss were fostering a genuinely patriotic response to the nationalistic excesses in evidence in Germany and Italy. 'We are not nationalists' was the headline of a newspaper report on the National Exhibition of 1939, responding to German and Italian Press allegations that the Zurich Exhibition was a hotbed of Swiss nationalism directed against the new authoritarian regimes. The Exhibition, the report's author continued, was 'not nationalistic', but represented a 'national event, an act of self-reflection and inner strengthening'.[33]

While the distinction between a benign patriotism and an aggressive nationalism may have seemed plausible at the time, it does not stand up to subsequent analysis. The kind of nationalism that rose to prominence in the 1930s was 'hot' rather than 'banal', to use Michael Billig's terms: active and public rather than passive. Many were well aware of living in a climate that was highly charged with patriotic emotion. As Social Democrat Ernst Nobs commented in 1938, after Austria had been annexed to the German Reich: 'Under the pressure of recent European developments, the will to defend the country by both military and spiritual means has asserted itself with a degree of unanimity, vigour and passion that is unprecedented in our history.'[34] In a joint statement issued immediately after the German invasion of Austria, the political parties declared that 'the entire Swiss people, irrespective of language, religion or political affiliation' were determined to 'sacrifice their lives in order to defend the integrity of their Fatherland'.[35]

The import of foreign textbooks for Swiss primary and secondary schools decreased dramatically in the latter half of the 1930s. Criblez therefore argues that the *geistige Landesverteidigung* went hand in hand with a 'nationalisation of teaching

material', a development that was primarily directed against books from Germany. To a greater extent than ever before, Swiss education authorities encouraged Swiss academics and other experts to produce learning materials for schools at all levels (for the import of foreign teaching materials between 1933 and 1945, see Tab. 6-1).

Tab. 6-1: Import of foreign teaching material for Swiss primary and secondary schools

	1933	1937	1945
All countries	10,25%	7%	1,46%
Germany	8,91%	6%	0,26%
France	1,01%	0,92%	0,78%

Source: Criblez (1995: 194-5)

The construction of Swiss national identity proceeded along two dimensions. The one was a civic, the other an organic conception of nationhood. The following two sections of this chapter demonstrate how these two conceptions informed public discourse about Swiss nationhood, and how the four symbolic core resources – political values and institutions, history, geography, and culture – were put to use. The section that follows examines the fusion of the civic and organic conceptions in the cultural nationalism of the late 1930s.

The civic discourse: reasserting the Swiss *Willensnation*

The civic conception of nationhood was the dominant current within liberal-minded and left-of-centre groups. Locating the essence of Swiss nationhood in a voluntary commitment to a set of institutions and values, it portrayed the nation as a man-made product.[36]

'Switzerland's national essence is based in the mind'

Political values and institutions were the key symbolic resources in the civic discourse of nationhood. Civic nationalists pointed to the contrast between Switzerland's democratic political system and that of their autocratic neighbours, thus emphasising the constitutive role of liberal values and democratic institutions in the Swiss polity. The view that Switzerland, to a greater degree than most European nations, depended for its very existence on these values pervaded the discourse of civic nationalists. We encounter it in the assertion that the survival of the Swiss nation is contingent on the will of its citizens to preserve it as a distinct political, historical and cultural community. The historian Herman Weilenmann encapsulated this doctrine in 1938:

> Switzerland's national essence is based in the mind, because it lacks both the tangibility of physical features and the mythical dream of an *Urvater* [racial forefather]: the will to preserve this state unites this people and secures its alliance.[37]

The Social Democrats, while sharing the liberal belief in the crucial role of the state and its democratic institutions, attempted to reconcile patriotism with internationalism. Thus, in the view of their leadership, there was no doubt that 'The love of one's country and internationalism do not contradict each other...'.[38] However, the 'nation' had a strong boost both within the Social Democratic Party and among its rank and file in the second half of the 1930s, as becomes apparent from a glance at the Mayday celebrations of the 1930s. Until 1936, an internationalist agenda had prevailed at this celebration of the socialist Left, which, in terms of its emotive appeal, clearly outweighed Switzerland's national holiday on August 1. This was to change from about 1936, however, as the wave of national enthusiasm reached its peak, thereby increasing the moral pressure to place the 'nation' first. The national Mayday celebrations of 1938 marked a watershed: for the first time in the history of the event, the Social Democrats carried the national flag alongside the traditional red flag.[39]

Hand-in-hand with this growth of patriotism within the Left in the mid-1930s came a rapprochement between the Social Democratic movement (including the trade unions) and the ruling coalition of Liberals and Conservatives. In 1935, the Swiss Social Democratic Party abolished from their statutes the paragraph calling for the dictatorship of the proletariat, and in the same year a majority of their supporters voted in favour of a programme designed to strengthen the Swiss military defence. Representatives of the Social Democrats and the trade unions were now regularly consulted on economic and social legislation. An agreement between the Swiss Metalworkers' and Watchmakers' Union and the Federation of Metal and Machine Industries further improved relations between workers and employers.[40]

The indications are that in the French-speaking Swiss cantons, too, the civic conception tended to prevail even as the *geistige Landesverteidigung* reached its peak around 1938. In that year, the historian David Lasserre wrote that, 'in contrast to his fellow compatriots of the German-speaking cantons, to the *Romand* Switzerland represents a matter of the mind and will rather than a material reality'. Yet it would be wrong, Lasserre continued, to conclude from this that the latter was therefore less fervent in his patriotic attachment: 'What it means, however, is that his patriotism is perhaps more abstract than that of his German-speaking counterpart.'[41] An important reason for this apparent discrepancy seems to be that in the French-speaking cantons (and to some extent in the Italian-speaking South as well) the Nazi threat was perceived less in cultural than in political terms. In December 1938, for instance, the *Gazette de Lausanne* observed: 'Neither the *Romandie* nor the *Ticino* display the extreme nervousness which we discover, with some astonishment, in the public statements of our fellow Confederates of the German-speaking cantons...'[42]

Civic historicism: the political achievements of the founders

Historicism was not absent from civic nationalism. References to the 'national past' supplied the civic discourse of nationhood with didactic narratives that helped to foster a moral narrative based on apparently timeless values and virtues. The moral lessons

supposedly offered by the past, moreover, were a source of pride and inspiration. The civic nationalists' approach to history, as to political values and institutions, was markedly different from that of those who argued along organic lines. As a broad rule, liberal and left-of-centre groups associated the country's historical origins primarily with the revolutions and reforms of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. 1789, 1798, and 1848 were the dates most frequently mentioned in references to Switzerland's putative national origins. 'Our culture goes back to the bourgeois revolutions of the late-eighteenth century',[43] was a typical comment from this perspective on the historical dimension of Swiss nationhood.

Although not doubting that 1798 and 1848 were landmark dates in the evolution of modern Switzerland, some adherents to the civic conception of nationhood nevertheless perceived a longer historical trajectory. The Confederate Alliance of 1291, in particular, was regarded as significant. However, unlike Conservatives who subscribed to an organic view of Swiss nationhood, civic nationalists put the same interpretation on 1291 as on the republican revolutions of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. To a similar degree to these revolutions, they argued, 1291 stood for 'emancipation and unification'. At the symbolic level, this projection of the modern process of nation-building back to the middle ages resulted in what Smith has called an 'ideological myth of descent'. Its manifestation is a narrative that portrays the supposed founders of the nation as moral role models rather than genealogical ancestors.[44]

The civic manner of accommodating the pre-modern past, therefore, was abstract rather than concrete. Attempts to bring the founders to life with the help of detailed descriptions of their 'heroic' deeds are largely absent from accounts that are inspired by the civic viewpoint. Where allusions to medieval figures are made, they are usually to the three Confederates; but we seek in vain for mentions of Wilhelm Tell, the key myth of liberation. A statement by the French-speaking intellectual William Rappard provides us with a typical example of this point of view. Rather than associating the historic alliance of 1291 with the founding of the Swiss nation, Rappard emphasised the inspiration it provided in the face of the Nazi challenge. The moral

lesson to be drawn from 1291, Rappard insisted, concerned the need 'to defend [our] individual and collective existence against a foreign oppressive power'.[45]

The organic discourse: forging the national *Wesensgemeinschaft*

Seen through the organic prism, the nation – embodied in culture, political institutions, history, and geography – appears as a social whole that develops in accordance with the laws of natural growth. Such an organic view of national identity was prevalent in the discourse of right-of-centre groups, which ranged from Catholic Conservatives to circles on the radical right. If the concept of the *Willensnation* was the leitmotif of civic nationalism, *Wesensgemeinschaft* was the term that organic nationalists used to describe their ideal of community. Insofar as organic nationalists referred to political values and state institutions, it was in their efforts to promote the project of a corporatist state. This was the form of socio-political organisation that they considered best suited to the task of reinstating within society 'the feeling of family unity that got lost'.[46] But the favourite symbolic resources of organic nationalists were history, culture, and geography.

'There are no deliberate new beginnings in history' – The historicist vision of organic nationalism

According to the organic vision, the national past is a force in its own right: a force which can only be accepted, not interfered with at will. As was asserted in 1939 in a comment confronting visitors of the National Exhibition in Zurich: 'There are no deliberate new beginnings in history ... only a hopelessly confused or deceived individual wants to be in charge of his own fate...'[47]

A glance at the national discourse of the Catholic Conservatives provides insight into the way in which organic nationalism made use of the past. Two features are notable. First, the pre-modern past played the key role, with the late medieval past and central Switzerland (the putative birthplace of the nation) providing the focus. In

order to secure the nation's 'vitality, health and strength', the Conservative Federal Councillor Philip Etter maintained, the Swiss had 'first and foremost to detect the heartbeat of the *Urschweiz*'.[48] By contrast, the revolutionary transformations that marked the rise of the modern era had a marginal place in the organic narrative. Where they entered the picture they were usually discussed in negative terms, as events that interrupted the 'organic evolution of the old democratic forms and ideas'.[49]

The second feature that distinguished the organic view of the national past from its civic rival was the significance of genealogy. Genealogical descent, which was of little interest to liberal and left-of-centre groups, was strongly emphasised by the historicism embraced by organic nationalists. This found expression in a 'genealogical myth of descent'. Unlike civic nationalists, who depicted the medieval 'founders' as early representatives of republican ideals, organic nationalists emphasised physical descent rather than a moral-ideological connection. The voice of Catholic Conservatism provides us with an exemplary statement of this genealogy-centred historicism, bringing out with great clarity the contrast with the civic view of a historical community:

> We talk a great deal about the Fatherland, but many of us have lost the true
> meaning of this word: the land of the forefathers. The Fatherland has become a
> mere subject of patriotic festivals. In our daily lives, a lively patriotism has
> given way to a mere belief in the state. This is effectively an impoverishment of
> our cultural life.... The homesickness, which haunts the Swiss abroad, is not
> rooted in the state, but in the Fatherland, the land of the forefathers.[50]

'There is finally a great awakening of our people' – the nation's cultural essence

Swiss organic nationalists, even when they embraced genealogical descent, did not subscribe to notions of ethnic purity. Like those who subscribed to the civic creed, its adherents missed no opportunity to emphasise that Switzerland was ethnically and culturally distinct from Germany. Complaining about a misconception deemed to be 'particularly widespread in France, England, and the United States', namely that the

German-speaking Swiss were ethnically Germans, a Catholic newspaper report came to this conclusion: 'We are a mixture of Celts, Romans and Germans..., with the Nordic element being the weakest of all.'[51]

However, this did not prevent the organic nationalists from claiming that Switzerland possessed a single cultural core. Culture, to organic nationalists, was an essence or potentiality that embodied the nation's spirit and character. Civic nationalists, in contrast, tended to focus on political culture, which was seen as a product of the human will. They did not treat culture as a phenomenon in its own right, but referred to it in stressing their ideal of the *Willensnation*. In the organic discourse, in sharp contrast, culture and politics were quite separate spheres.

It is revealing to look at the different meanings attributed by organic and civic nationalists to the key terms of this era's national discourse. Whereas in civic usage, the terms *geistige Landesverteidigung* ('spiritual defence of the nation') and *Schweizergeist* ('Swiss spirit') underscored the voluntary nature of Swiss nationhood, organic nationalists perceived them in Herderian terms. Thus *Geist,* from an organic nationalist's point of view, stood for the trans-historical essence of Swiss nationhood. 'The significance of *geistige Landesverteidigung',* as one representative of this viewpoint put it, 'lies in the fact that national self-assertion derives not from the will of an authority, but from the spirit of the nation. There is finally a great awakening of our people'.[52]

Geography and Nationhood

Geography is a further symbolic resource that can be drawn upon in depictions of the nation as a natural community, which explains its prominent role in organic nationalism. An organic nationalist may typically proclaim that aspects of the natural environment will have shaped a national community that is unique in terms of its culture and character. The geographical theme was especially appealing in the Swiss case because it provided scope for promoting a sense of national unity in the absence of ethno-cultural homogeneity. In this context, organic nationalists accentuated the

identity-forming role of the Alps in particular. As one commentator asserted in a newspaper read widely by the middle classes:

> We understand by Swissness a certain spiritual and physical heritage which has characterised the people of the Alps to the Jura through the centuries of our history to the present day.... We are the only truly alpine state in Europe.... The Alps are our strength, for it is in the alpine human being that we find common ground.[53]

During the National Exhibition of 1939, also, the natural environment was depicted as a character-shaping force. In a three-volume publication that appeared in 1940 on the Exhibition, Gonzague de Reynold argued that 'in order to germinate and grow a people needs a natural environment'.[54] De Reynold was supported by the geographer Charles Burky, who maintained that 'The physical milieu, the natural context, determines a people. This is an axiom. Evidently, the Swiss are incapable of escaping this imperative.'[55]

The fusion of *Willensnation* and *Wesensgemeinschaft* in the cultural nationalism of the late 1930s

The irresistible rise of Swiss culture

The available evidence leaves little doubt that 'culture', from about 1935 onwards, gained centre stage as a symbolic resource for the construction of Swiss nationhood. The temporal aspect is crucial here: whereas references to political institutions and values had multiplied immediately after the Nazi take-over of 1933 and remained relevant for the rest of the decade, it was during the latter half of the 1930s that allusions to Swiss national culture gathered momentum. As a liberal periodical observed: 'Today, Switzerland's cultural life ... is under threat. As a result of this threat

to our spiritual independence, emanating from Italian and German nationalism, even the most trusting Confederate has had his eyes opened.'[56]

'We Swiss form a distinct race': a digression

A brief digression on the subject of race can help to set in sharper relief the Swiss predicament of the 1930s, and the context of the development of a cultural nationalism in the latter half of the decade. In 1936, the *Thurgauer Zeitung* published a special pull-out section entitled *Die Herkunft des Schweizervolkes* ('The Origins of the Swiss People'). The author of the report, Karl Keller-Tarnuzzer, began by stating that the questions of 'race' and of *'Volkstum'* (ethnic origin) had come to occupy the minds of a great many people and that, as a result, it was necessary to probe more deeply into 'the essence of the Swiss *Volkstum'*. In a subsequent exposition, he distinguished between five successive waves of settlement on Swiss territory – *Pfahlbauer,*[57] Rhaeto-Romance, Helveto-Romance, Alemannic, and Burgundian.

Keller-Tarnuzzer's argument continued in a relatively straightforward manner. As the Swiss Confederation developed over the centuries and millennia, 'Swiss blood' resulted from the intermingling of these different groups. As early as 1800 BC, he argued, the intermingling of Rhaeto-Romans, Helvetians and *Pfahlbauer,* had led to a 'volkish unity' within 'original population'. The stock of this original population underwent another mutation when, between the second and seventh centuries AD, Alemannic tribes and Burgundians started to settle on Swiss territory. But the *Pfahlbauer,* we learn from Keller-Tarnuzzer, had an advantage over those who arrived later because they had been living on Swiss territory since 3,000 BC. To begin with, the *Pfahlbauer* were more numerous than the newcomers. More importantly, however, by the time the Alemanni and Burgundians arrived, the *Pfahlbauer* had developed the physical resilience necessary for survival in the harsh alpine climate. Consequently, their blood was to become the vital ingredient in the evolution of the 'Swiss race'.

Applying his evolutionary argument to the present, the author concluded that it was primarily due to the fact of racial commonality among the Swiss that the German-

speaking Swiss had so little sympathy for the developments in Germany. Shared history, belief in particular moral and political values, or loyalty towards the state and its institutions would not in themselves have cultivated a national consciousness capable of encompassing different linguistic groups. In Keller-Tarnuzzer's words: 'Historical events and developments cannot be the sole basis of a nation's survival. Historical precedents can be overturned if other factors necessitate it. What cannot be superseded, however, are ties of blood.' He therefore concluded: 'It is high time ... that the widely held theory that we are nothing but Alemanni, Frenchmen and Italians give way to a consciousness that we Swiss form a distinct race based upon the original population of this country, the *Pfahlbauer.*'[58]

Beyond a purely imagined community: in search of the cultural 'Wesensgemeinschaft'

The above example is instructive *not* because references to 'race' or 'blood' played an important role in attempts at fashioning Swiss national identity during the 1930s. None of the chief protagonists of the national discourse, for example, openly argued along such lines; besides, by the mid-1930s, those groups that had publicly expressed sympathies for volkish notions of national purity carried the stigma of association with National Socialism. Other symbolic resources – particularly culture, but also political institutions and values, the national past, and geography – were far more significant than race or ethnic descent in public definitions of Swiss nationhood.

Nevertheless, while the example outlined above does not represent a dominant mode of thought, it nonetheless illustrates a tendency which was increasingly apparent in the latter half of the 1930s, namely to define Swiss national identity in a more essentialist way. This tendency manifested itself in a proliferation of efforts to demonstrate that the Swiss nation was a natural community, determined by history, culture and geography. That it was, in other words, more than a social construction depending for its survival on the daily plebiscite of the population.

The way in which the flagship newspaper of Swiss liberalism responded to Keller-Tarnuzzer's analysis is instructive in this regard. Certainly, the liberal Zurich

newspaper, like the liberal intelligentsia as a whole, did not abandon its traditional

conception of Switzerland as a voluntary nation – a *Willensnation*. Commenting on the

'irrational myths' that functioned as secular religions and proved so effective in

mobilising the masses in Germany, this newspaper concluded that Switzerland's

popular myth was embodied in the principle of the 'voluntary alliance'. An article on

the front page of its August 1st edition, entitled *'Der Bund – unser Mythos'* ('The

Confederation – our Myth'), expressed this as follows: 'Everybody ... is a member of

this Confederation, and everybody has the obligation to risk his life in defending this

Confederation.'[59]

Yet the very same newspaper simultaneously began to fashion a more tangible

concept of Swiss nationhood. While its editors expressed serious doubts about the

scholarly validity of Keller-Tarnuzzer's argument, they understood and appreciated his

motives. In particular, they shared the view that Swiss nationality was in need of a

conceptualisation that went beyond locating the essence of Swiss nationhood in its

population's civic commitment to abstract values and state institutions. This led the

newspaper to argue that the goal of asserting Swiss nationhood in the face of the ethno-

nationalist challenge from Nazi Germany justified the adoption of more essentialist

categories. A key statement illustrating these dynamics of the late 1930s cultural

nationalism is the following:

> Whether we trace our *Schweizertum* back to an original population or regard it
> as the outcome of historical experiences or shared struggles for liberty, what
> will be decisive for our people is that the centrifugal forces resulting from our
> having been constituted by three different nations are outweighed by the
> converging forces of a *Wesensgemeinschaft* that is not simply imagined but
> actually exists.[60]

In other words, the centrifugal pull of integral nationalism – whether of the German

volkish or Italian ethno-linguistic variety – was widely perceived as a threat to Swiss

'national culture', to the belief, that is, that such a culture did indeed exist. This

perception impacted upon the public discourse on Swiss nationhood in two important

ways. First, it increased general interest in the cultural dimension of Swiss national

identity. Second, it enhanced tendencies to portray 'Swiss culture' in more essentialist ways. The civic notion of a *Willensnation*, grounded as it was on voluntarism and the institutions of the modern state, was increasingly perceived as inadequate in view of the challenge at hand.

Yet rather than simply causing a swing of the pendulum in the 'organic' direction, this cultural shift led to an amalgamation of civic and organic narratives; to a fusion of the notions of *Willensnation* and *Wesensgemeinschaft*. What is interesting is that the groups that were the driving force behind this change were the ones that had hitherto shown a clear preference for the civic (voluntary) conception of the nation. It was civic nationalists in search of a *Wesensgemeinschaft* who contributed the most to elevation of culture to such a prominent place in the endeavours to strengthen Swiss nationhood. In fact, the shift could not have occurred without the ideological contributions of liberal groups in particular.

The notion that Switzerland was a cultural *Wesensgemeinschaft* had its most vocal support from a coalition of liberal associations and newspapers, with left-of-centre groups, the trade unions and the Social Democrats soon joining their efforts. One of the most vigorous calls for a common cultural policy came from the liberal-minded The New Helvetic Society. In 1936, the editors of its periodical published a collection of articles devoted exclusively to the 'spiritual and cultural values' deemed constitutive of Swiss nationhood. In 1937 and 1938, the periodical was largely concerned with the question of a 'common cultural policy'. In addition to the New Helvetic Society and a number of prominent politicians and intellectual circles, the following organisations joined the call for a cultural policy: the *Schweizerischer Lehrerverein* (Association of Swiss Teachers) and the *Schweizerischer Schriftstellerverein* (Association of Swiss Writers); the liberal *Neue Zürcher Zeitung;* and the left-liberal movement around the newspaper *Die Nation.*[61] While Conservatives maintained their organic conception of the nation, civic nationalists started to imagine the Swiss nation as a community that was based on more than free will and political institutions.[62]

The argument that Switzerland possessed a national culture that transcended ethno-cultural differences figured prominently in the cultural nationalism that took off in 1936. The champions of this narrative of cultural unity were liberal-minded groups that up until 1935 had for the most part promoted a purely voluntary conception of nationhood. Their efforts were aimed at educating the public both at home and abroad about the existence of 'a common Swiss way of behaving with regard to thoughts, feelings and will', irrespective of differences in terms of 'language, mentality, ways of life and customs'.[63] Not only did such a 'Swiss uniqueness' exist, one leading liberal periodical maintained, but, more importantly, this 'frame of mind is uniquely Swiss' was 'not purely determined by shared political experience'.[64]

Quite frequently, the search for Switzerland's cultural essence led to journeys into the past. What was distinctly Swiss, some argued, was the demotic character of its culture. The latter had its roots in the peculiarities of the Confederation's state-building process from early modern times; in the fact that, as Werner Ammann put it, 'the people, not the court of the monarch' had been the 'upholders of cultural life'.[65] Other liberal writers pointed to the fact that the great cultural movements – Christianity, Gothicism, and the Renaissance – had come to Switzerland directly, not via Germany, and that this had produced distinctive results. The only great cultural movement that had originated in Germany, the Reformation, had been reshaped after arriving in Switzerland. Zwingli and Calvin, some argued, were democratic humanists, which inevitably had brought them into conflict with Luther, who had not questioned the authority of the German princes. This was why, a prominent public intellectual concluded, 'a Zurich Protestant feels much closer to his brothers in faith from Neuchâtel or Geneva than to a German Lutheran'. He continued:

> In other words, there emerged, in the sphere of religious faith as in many other domains, a Swiss cultural bond *[schweizerische Kulturverbindung]* that transcends ethnic groups and shapes our way of life – that is, living culture – in a much more profound way than does language.[66]

The supporters of a Swiss cultural policy created a second narrative, within which the emphasis was on the country's cultural diversity. The complex variety of cultural idioms and groups was depicted as a virtue rather than a weakness, and as a factor that helped to strengthen Switzerland's symbolic boundaries against the aggressive nationalisms of both Germany and Italy. A special emphasis was placed upon the importance of linguistic diversity. The Swiss-German dialect was singled out as a symbolic marker which highlighted the cultural uniqueness of the Swiss nation. The following statement typifies a widely held opinion:

> There is no doubt that our dialect is a strong bulwark against spiritual infiltration from abroad. ... Maintaining our dialect is thus tantamount to undertaking a spiritual *Grenzschutz* (protection of the border). In view of the political developments that our southern and northern neighbours are currently undergoing, one might add: protection of the Swiss democratic state.[67]

In the wake of this new enthusiasm for Switzerland's cultural diversity, Rhaeto-Romansch, a language spoken by no more than 20,000 souls in the canton of Graubünden, was elevated to a national language. Calls to recognise Rhaeto-Romansch as a fourth national language were aired for the first time in 1935 both in public debates and in Parliament.[68] The initiators of a parliamentary bill that emanated from these activities justified their demands by pointing to the national significance of Swiss multilingualism in the face of ethnic nationalism: 'In contrast to those states which achieve unity through shared language, ... we see in the unification of those languages that are rooted in Switzerland's soil ... the guiding principle of our civic order.'[69] A few years later these demands were met: in 1938, an appropriate constitutional amendment passed both chambers without encountering the slightest opposition; and in February 1938, the Swiss voters accepted the new law with an overwhelming majority.[70] Numerous commentators recognised the symbolic significance of this political act. One intellectual and supporter of Swiss cultural policy, for example,

described it as a clear sign that 'Switzerland is well aware of her peculiarity as a nation'.[71]

An increasing interest in regional diversity also served to buttress the new cultural nationalism. Like its linguistic diversity, Switzerland's complex patchwork of regional cultures was portrayed as an aspect of Swiss nationhood that rendered it distinct and authentic. The argument was that Switzerland, to a far greater extent than other countries, comprised a rich mosaic of regional and local cultures and customs. As a liberal intellectual put it:

> There are not merely German, French, and Italian Swiss, as today's nationalism would have us believe – nor are there merely Catholic and Protestant Swiss ... What is more, the citizens of every canton, every town and every region have been shaped and made distinct by the historic individuality of these entities.[72]

The Government's 1938 White Paper on cultural policy

The 1938 White Paper on cultural policy, the so-called *Kulturbotschaft,* was the most significant official articulation of Swiss nationalism barring the National Exhibition of 1939. Drafted under the direction of the Catholic Conservative Federal Councillor Philip Etter and subsequently passed by Parliament, the report soon came to be seen as the Magna Carta of Swiss cultural policy. It stated as its purpose 'constructive reflection upon the cultural bases of the Swiss uniqueness, character and state, as they are articulated within our history and national traditions, our spirit and our institutions'.[73]

The White Paper's general line of argument reproduced the subtle fusion of civic and organic understandings of nationhood that had characterised the earlier national discourse. Paragraph IV of the report, entitled *Sinn und Sendung der Schweiz* ('Switzerland's meaning and mission'), encapsulates this paradoxical synthesis. 'Every state lives by virtue of the cultural forces that gave birth to it, and which, in the course of its history, were organically developed'. This explicitly 'organic' statement is

followed, in the next sentence, by the rather 'civic' supposition that 'The [Swiss] state is founded on a community of common will and spirit, on an idea that supersedes all efforts to divide and separate'.[74]

The complex amalgam of civic and organic elements is also notable in a subsequent section of the report, which identifies three principles as being central to Switzerland's special 'national mission'. The first is her close affiliation with 'three great European cultures'. It is only in Switzerland, it is argued, that the 'idea of a spiritual community of the peoples and cultures of Europe' has been realised to the full. The second principle relates to the cellular character of Swiss society and the decentralised structure of its political institutions, embodied in the confederate system of cantons and their representation on the Council of States (*Ständerat*). The 'essence of Swiss democracy', the report asserts, is based upon its 'organic composition from the bottom to the top'. The third and final universal described as constitutive of Swiss nationhood is a deeply held 'reverence for man's dignity and liberty'. These three values, it is argued, have informed a constitutional arrangement which recognises that the existing cultural and religious differences are worth preserving.[75]

According to the report, moreover, *geistige Landesverteidigung* must have as its chief aims the preservation and promotion of these principles.[76] The Swiss Government proposed to make available an extra 500,000 Swiss Francs per annum to support these efforts.[77] In accordance with the general aim of the cultural policy, this sum was to be spent, in equal parts, on the preservation of national culture at home – *Kulturwahrung* – and the promotion of Swiss culture abroad – *Kulturwerbung*. Among the domestic cultural projects that were to benefit from the new funds, literature, periodicals devoted to cultural debates, theatre, film, art exhibitions, and a cultural exchange programme for pupils at secondary school level were specifically mentioned. There was also a proposal to have important contemporary and historical works of Swiss literature translated into all the national languages.[78]

While most foreigners knew of the 'beauty of our landscape' and 'our economic capability', 'our country's culture and cultural achievements are generally less well

known'. So ran the Government's justification for its *Kulturwerbung,* the plan to promote Swiss culture abroad.[79] This declaration of intention was again followed by an enumeration of possible steps to be taken. In addition to a proposition to improve the technical capacity of Swiss Radio so that its programmes could be widely received abroad, these steps included the promotion of lectures, presentations and exhibitions in foreign countries; improving communications with the roughly 400,000 Swiss abroad; and the setting up of courses on Swiss history and cultural traditions at overseas Swiss schools.

The Government's White Paper on cultural policy was undoubtedly significant in that it strengthened existing demands to bolster Swiss culture both at home and abroad. Overall, however, it did not set a new ideological agenda. Rather, the White Paper fell within the symbolic and ideological parameters that had been set by the national discourse of civil society between 1933 and 1935. This included, above all, the contributions of newspapers and periodicals, radio broadcasts and parliamentary debates, or the teachers associations who organised conferences on patriotic education. It was these agencies of civil society that had set the tone for an increasingly pervasive discourse of cultural nationalism. From the mid-1930s onwards, moreover, various Swiss universities organised lecture series on topics such as *Schweizerisches Staatswesen und schweizerische Kulturgeschichte* ('Swiss civic order and Swiss cultural history', Basle 1939), *Geistige Aufrüstung* ('Spiritual arming', Bern 1939). In 1936, the Federal Technical High School in Zurich organised a series of lectures on *geistige Landesverteidigung.*[80]

In addition, the cantonal education authorities made various efforts at intensifying national education: in Zurich the Education Ministry selected three patriotic songs for every age group of pupils and recommended that they be sung at regular intervals in both primary and secondary schools. The same canton organised prize competitions for its teachers on topics related to civic education and, again, on *geistige Landesverteidigung.* Meanwhile, the education authorities of the canton of Aargau introduced *Heimat- und Gedenktage.* These were days of national commemoration, which sometimes took the form of patriotic excursions, and

sometimes were used for the discussion of national history and geography. On the initiative of the Swiss Teachers Association, school halls and corridors across the country were decorated with wall paintings portraying themes of Swiss history and geography as well as military images.[81]

It is fair to say, therefore, that the Federal Council's *Kulturbotschaft* was essentially a (belated) response to calls for a state-led cultural policy that had rapidly grown more vocal since the mid-1930s.[82] Such calls had multiplied in the wake of the Nazi annexation of Austria in March 1938, thereby increasing the pressure on the Federal Government to become more active in the sphere of cultural politics.[83]

Nevertheless, additional weight was lent to the state's cultural policy by its use of national radio to disseminate its message. In the immediate aftermath of Austria's *Anschluss*, for example, the Director of Switzerland's national broadcasting company, the *Schweizerische Rundspruchsgesellschaft*, asked broadcasting studios throughout the country to pay more attention to core national values. He justified his request by claiming that such measures would help to advance the mutual understanding between Switzerland's different linguistic regions. Thus Federal Councillor Philip Etter could conclude in 1938 that 'over the past decade' the radio had become 'the most important and powerful instrument of cultural propaganda'.[84]

The foreign section of the New Helvetic Society played a particularly important role in putting some of these proposals into practice: for example, carrying out a number of propagandistic activities in various parts of the world in 1938. Its annual report of 1938 concludes:

> In 1938, Switzerland has launched a forceful assault: in view of the preparation
> for the National Exhibition in 1939, Switzerland has been advertised all over the
> world. ... In one way or another, Swiss colonies almost everywhere are contri-
> buting to this promotion of our country.[85]

The natural and the man-made in harmony: 'Willensnation' and 'Wesensgemeinschaft'
at the 1939 Exhibition

The message to the nation that was constantly conveyed by the National Exhibition
rested on the same combination of voluntarism and cultural determinism that
characterised the discourse in newspapers and periodicals and the Government's White
Paper. The civic theme was articulated in the claim that Switzerland was a voluntary
nation – modern, dynamic, and future-oriented. This political discourse was seamlessly
interwoven, however, into a narrative that portrayed Swiss nationhood as organically
rooted in history and geography. Indeed, a brief look at the various articulations of
'Swissness' by the Exhibition reveals that the civic conception, with its rhetoric of the
human deed, was balanced by proclamations in the vocabulary of organic growth. One
newspaper report gave expression to this perception in a striking manner:

> The National Exhibition rests on a unique fusion of the natural and the man-
> made... In the midst of the natural world we find the products of human
> creativity ... There is indeed a contrast, but this contrast does not represent a
> loss but, quite to the contrary, brings reassurance.[86]

The same dualism of civic and organic nationhood was given expression in the
Höhenweg. Thus the visitors, as they made their way along the one-kilometer patriotic
foot path, passed the following thematic sections: *unser Land* ('our country'); *unser
Volk* ('our people'); *soziale Arbeit* ('social work'); *lebendiger Bund* ('a vibrant
confederation'); *Wehrwille* ('the willingness to take up arms'); *Arbeit und Wirtschaft*
('work and economy'); *Ehrung* ('honour'); *Gelöbnis* ('the vow').[87] In this way, the
national past was made to interact with the nation's present and future, and the
'historic' and 'organic' was juxtaposed with the 'modern' and 'functional'.[88] Didactic
considerations had inspired the drawing of this contrast. The basic message to the
visitors was this: take pride in present achievements and future capabilities, but be
aware also of what was achieved in the past, and how this past determines the present
and the future. Max Huber captured the spirit of the Exhibition's didacticism:

[It] … brings unity to the varied life of the present in terms of temporality, continuity, and historical depth; from primeval times to the present day. The present … acquires its meaning and is evaluated in the light of what the people of this country have achieved to date, and are yet to achieve.[89]

For Huber, therefore, the Exhibition presented a most skilful synthesis of the two core dimensions of the Swiss character: an 'attachment to nature conceived of as the unity of man, earth, plants and animals in the silent rhythm of the seasons'; and a great fascination with 'the overwhelming wealth and agility of humanity's genius for invention'.[90] But while liberal intellectuals like Max Huber struck a delicate balance between the past and the present, between a civic and an organic understanding of Swiss nationhood, others developed a narrative in which an organicist-historicist vision was dominant. The official Exhibition brochure, for example, taught visitors that the view which held that 'a people is made up of individuals' was a delusion. 'A people' the text continued, 'is made up of families and kinship groups, and of generations. Hence more than ever before we feel that every single individual is connected with the past and has obligations to the future by virtue of belonging to such groups.'[91]

It is evident that the concept of cultural diversity, a key theme of the 1939 Exhibition, lent itself particularly well to the promotion of the civic-organic synthesis that was the hallmark of the Swiss nationalism of the era. The public enthusiasm for this diversity was most evident from the staging of the *Trachtenfest,* the Swiss folk costume festival, which took place in August and was widely perceived as the highlight of the Exhibition.[92] Another strategy designed to promote the concept of cultural diversity was the organisation of the so-called *Kantonaltage,* days devoted to particular cantons or regions. During each of these, representatives and folk groups from a given canton paraded in the streets of Zurich.

On the one hand, therefore, the public emphasis on Switzerland's ethnic and cultural diversity helped to buttress a civic conception of nationhood. The will of the diverse groups to form an alliance, so the argument went, allowed Switzerland to exist as a nation. Switzerland, in other words, was a voluntary nation, a *Willensnation.*

On the other hand, however, the concept of cultural diversity served to furnish an organic view of Swiss nationhood. The country's ethnic and cultural diversity was perceived as more than a symbolic marker – an element that distinguished Switzerland from her neighbours – though this function was important. Even more importantly, this diversity provided evidence that the Swiss nation, while lacking in cultural homogeneity, nonetheless had an organic core.

Plate 6-1: The National Exhibition of 1939 – Nation, Cantons, Communities ('Gemeinden): the 'Hall of Flags' formed part of the *Höhenweg*.

Swiss national identity, according to a frequently expressed opinion, was organically rooted in its culturally and ethnically diverse segments: the communities, cantons, and regions whose representatives paraded the streets of Zurich during the Exhibition. These segments had a concrete existence, and were internally homogenous in themselves. The logic at work here is obvious: Herder's preferred expression of organic nationhood – language – had to be ruled out in the Swiss case. Thus, given that there was a profoundly felt need to promote the Swiss nation as an organic rather than simply abstract, voluntary community, a symbolic resource other than language had to fulfil this function. The elements that constituted Switzerland as a political and cultural entity

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– the cantons, regions, and communities – offered to take this role. These elements were thereby portrayed as the source of organic Swiss nationhood. This was the central message of the National Exhibition, which was widely perceived as the most 'impressive manifestation of the Swiss character'.[93]

Conclusion

Why did 'culture' come to represent the key symbolic resource in the Swiss nationalism of the late 1930s? One reason is to do with the fact that although history and political institutions – traditionally the core resources in the civic discourse on nationhood – retained significance, they were insufficient bases for nationhood in the light of the challenges now being faced. At the same time, however, the search for ethnic or racial commonalities was confined to a small segment on the right wing of the political spectrum; and by 1935 this segment had acquired the stigma of a fifth column. Culture was attractive, moreover, because of its considerable versatility as a symbolic resource. That is to say, culture could be portrayed as an achievement, a notion that was fully in accordance with the concept of a *Willensnation*. Alternatively, culture could be regarded as a heritage that had evolved over the *longue durée,* comprising a set of symbolic codes, a repertoire of distinct customs, practices and ways of thinking.

The fact that the cultural nationalism of the *geistige Landesverteidigung* simultaneously emphasised Switzerland's cultural unity and diversity may be a contradiction at the level of logic. In practice, however, both perspectives combined to reinforce the belief in the existence of a Swiss nation that was not simply imagined but actually existed. The most vocal champions of linguistic diversity, for instance, while they did not conceive Swiss nationhood in romantic terms, nonetheless subscribed to an organic understanding of language. There could be no doubt in their view that each living language revealed the 'spirit' and 'soul' of its speakers.[94] The message, of course, was that Switzerland was composed of diverse yet organic cultures and that the

whole, Swiss nationhood, was therefore organic too – a *Wesensgemeinschaft* that could stand up to the challenge of ethno-linguistic nationalism.

Finally, the amalgamation of the civic and organic narratives in the cultural nationalism of the 1930s enabled its proponents to portray the nation as an entity that was distinctive and tangible. It was distinctive because it was the product of specific cultural and historical processes, which had supplied it with a unique character; and because of its apparent internal diversity, embodied in a multitude of languages and regional dialects. And it was tangible because the cultural patterns that constituted Swiss nationhood were not mere abstractions but – as many commentators pointed out – manifestations of a 'living culture'.

Notes

[1] Quoted from Criblez (1995: 327).

[2] While there is widespread agreement that in the period between 1933 and 1939 Switzerland witnessed a proliferation of nation-oriented activity, there is little consensus as to the nature and causes of this development. For a good recent summary of the literature on Swiss nationalism in the 1930s, see Mooser (1997). For an instrumentalist account that explains the nationalism of the 1930s as a conservative reaction against the Left and the liberal intelligentsia, see Jost (1986: 740). See also Jost (1987). For a similar line of argument, see also Linsmayer (1983), and Scheiben (1987). Shifting the empirical focus from official sources to a systematic analysis of party-bound newspapers, a number of recent contributions have attempted to strike a balance between geopolitical and domestic factors in explaining the nationalism of the 1930s. This line of argument is represented by the following contributions: Imhof (1993 and 1996); Morandi (1995); Zimmer (1993; 1996). See also Eisner (1991).

[3] Quoted from Linsmayer (1983: 455-56).

[4] Von Greyerz (1980: 1166); Linsmayer (1983: 488). On the cultural nationalism manifested in the 1939 Exhibition, see also Möckli (1973).

[5] The total cost of the exhibition amounted to more than 47.8 million Swiss Francs. See *Die Schweiz im Spiegel der Landesausstellung* (Zurich, 1940), Statistical Appendix.

[6] In keeping with federalist custom, the state's role was confined, in large part, to financial matters, while the business of planning and organisation was left to the cantons and a large number of private bodies and associations.

[7] The first National Exhibition took place in Bern in 1857. Subsequent exhibitions followed at irregular intervals: Zurich (1883), Geneva (1896), Bern (1914). See *Die Schweiz im Spiegel der Landesausstellung* (Zurich, 1940, vol. I: 54).

[8] *Katalog Schweizerische Landesausstellung 1939 in Zürich* (Zurich, 1939: 30).

[9] *Neue Zürcher Zeitung.* August 8, 1939.

[10] Quoted from Amstutz (1996: 147).

[11] *Neue Zürcher Zeitung.* May 18, 1939.

[12] *Neue Zürcher Zeitung.* May 18, 1939.

[13] *Tagwacht.* May 6, 1939.

[14] *Neue Zürcher Zeitung.* September 17, 1939.

[15] *Die Schweiz im Spiegel der Landesausstellung* (Zurich, 1940, vol. II: 765).

[16] *Vaterland.* October 31, 1939.

[17] *Die Schweiz im Spiegel der Landesausstellung* (Zurich, 1940, vol. I: 157).

[18] On the nature and the causes of this right-wing mobilisation in Switzerland, see Gilg and Gruner (1966); Jost (1986); Glaus (1969). For an analysis of the printed Press and its attitude towards these developments, see Zollinger (1991).

[19] Brubaker (1996: chs. 3 and 6) has coined the term 'homeland nationalism' to refer to a particular brand of irredentist nationalism. He writes (1996: 5): 'Homeland nationalisms assert states' right – indeed their obligation – to monitor the condition, promote the welfare, support the activities and institutions, assert the rights, and protect the interests of 'their' ethnonational kin in other states. Such claims are typically made when the ethnonational kin in question are seen as threatened by the nationalizing (and thereby, from the point of view of the ethnonational kin, de-nationalizing) policies and practices of the state in which they live.'

[20] As Humbel (1976:33) has argued, however, the German embassy in Bern took over the role of coordinating Nazi propaganda after the Swiss government had prohibited the *NSDAP landesgruppe*.

[21] Wehler (1995: 1067). For the continuities in terms of ideology and organisational structure between Nazism and Weimar homeland nationalism, see Brubaker (1996: 133-34).

[22] Quoted from Kedourie (1993: 63-64).

[23] *Die Nation.* October 27, 1933.

[24] On the effects of Nazi propaganda in Switzerland, see Humbel (1976: 32-42).

[25] Gilg and Gruner (1966).

[26] Eley (1992a: 270). For a general survey of the right-wing political movements in Switzerland between 1925 and 1940, see Gilg and Gruner (1966).

[27] See Glaus (1969: 71, 359).

[28] Glaus (1969: 41).

[29] *Die Schweiz. Ein nationales Jahrbuch* (1933, vol. IV: 35-6). At its peak in the summer of 1933, the *Nationale Front* had around 10,000 members nation-wide and an estimated total of between 15,000 and 20,000 supporters. (By comparison, in 1933 the SPS [Swiss Social Democratic Party] had about 57,000 party members nation-wide and several hundred thousand supporters.) At the 1933 elections for the town parliament of Zurich, for instance, the organisation took 7.7% of the vote.

[30] The movement's newspaper had a circulation of around 30,000 in 1933. On middle-class protest in Switzerland in the first half of the 1930s, see Gilg and Gruner (1966); Angst (1992); Zimmer (1996); Gebert (1981).

[31] On September 8, 1935, Swiss voters (only the male citizens, that is)decided overwhelmingly against the constitutional changes that the initiative had demanded. See Sigg (1978), Zimmer (1996), and Imhof (1993). On the movement for the total revision of the Swiss Constitution, see Stadler (1969).

[32] For an analysis of this process, see Imhof (1993); Zimmer (1996); and Jost (1986: 787).

[33] *Der Landbote.* July 1, 1939. The rise of the term *Volksgemeinschaft* between 1933 and 1935 is examined in Zimmer (1996). See also Imhof (1996).

[34] *Rote Revue.* March 18, 1938.

[35] However, this declaration by Parliament contrasts sharply with the diplomatic and cautious language of the Federal Council, which, in its official response, pointed out that the 'will to unite the German and Austrian peoples had been apparent for some time'. *Neue Zürcher Zeitung.* March 12, 1938.

[36] Civic nationalism had its most vocal proponents in the following newspapers and periodicals: the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* and *Die Schweiz: Ein nationales Jahrbuch,* which represented liberal views; the left-liberal *Nation* and the party organ of the Social Democrats, the *Tagwacht.*

[37] *Neue Zürcher Zeitung.* May 12, 1938. For the views of another prominent intellectual who argued along these lines, see the essay by William Ernest Rappart, *L'Individu et l'Etat Suisse ou La Suisse et les idéologies contemporaines* (Zurich, 1938).

[38] *Tagwacht.* October 13, 1934.

[39] Notwithstanding this significant ideological reorientation, the leadership of the Social Democrats was keen to emphasise that in their view the nation was a transitory phenomenon, while the red flag remained socialism's 'most sacred' group symbol. See *Tagwacht.* May 1, 1938. See also the December issue of the *Rote Revue* on this transformation.

[40] Steinberg (1996: 60-61). For a detailed account of this rapprochement, see Degen (1991); Scheiben (1986); Imhof (1993).

[41] Quoted from Amstutz (1996: book cover).

[42] Quoted from Amstutz (1996: 103).

[43] *Die Nation.* March 15, 1935.

[44] Smith (1984).

[45] Rappard, *L'Individu et l'Etat Suisse ou La Suisse et les idéologies contemporaines* (Zurich, 1938). It is obvious that the liberal-minded segments of the public, along with the Left and its supporters, had accepted the lessons of the critical school of Swiss historiography, which had made big inroads since the late nineteenth century. On the impact of liberal historiography on national discourse, see Kreis (1991), and Zimmer (forthcoming). Nevertheless, in more everyday settings, like the National Exhibition of 1939, the mythical repertoire went unchallenged and was often interpreted in genealogical terms.

[46] *Neue Schweiz.* November 17, 1933. The Catholic People's Party and its official voice, the newspaper *Vaterland,* as well as the other organisations that supported the call for a total revision of the Swiss Constitution, all adhered to an organic conception of nationhood.

[47] Quoted from Möckli (1973: 8).

[48] Etter, *Die schweizerische Demokratie* (Olten and Konstanz, 1934: 4).

[49] Etter, *Die schweizerische Demokratie* (Olten and Konstanz, 1934: 4).

[50] *Vaterland.* August 1, 1934.

[51] *Vaterland,* November 4, 1938.

[52] *Vaterland.* November 4, 1938.

[53] *Neue Schweiz.* October 11, 1935. The role of geographical determinism in the discourse of professional geographers is discussed in Kreis (1991: 175-77).

[54] *Die Schweiz im Spiegel der Landesausstellung* (Zurich, 1940, vol. I: 108).

[55] *Die Schweiz im Spiegel der Landesausstellung* (Zurich, 1940, vol. I: 67).

[56] *Die Schweiz – ein nationales Jahrbuch* (1936, vol. VII: 50).

[57] The term *Pfahlbauer* refers to a form of settlement dating from the Neolithic period. Excavations indicate that houses that rested on foundations of wooden poles – *Pfahl* means pole – were built near lakes and small rivers. The view that these settlers, the *Pfahlbauer,* were the original population of Switzerland had a number of proponents in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On this subject, see Ducrey (1986).

[58] Karl Keller-Tarnuzzer, *Die Herkunft des Schweizervolkes. Sonderdruck aus der 'Thurgauer Zeitung'* (Frauenfeld, 1936: 34).

[59] *Neue Zürcher Zeitung.* August 1, 1936.

[60] *Neue Zürcher Zeitung.* August 23, 1936 (emphasis added).

[61] For the parliamentary proposals and interpellations in support of a common cultural policy that were put before the government between 1935 and 1937, see the account in *Botschaft des Bundesrates an die Bundesversammlung über die Organisation und die Aufgaben der schweizerischan Kulturwahrung und Kulturwerbung,* Bundesblatt vol. 90, no. 50, vol. II (Bern, December 14, 1938: 985-90).

[62] Mattioli (1995: 18) argues that the nationalist wave of the late 1930s went hand-in-hand with a rise in the influence of the Conservatives, while he pays virtually no attention to the cultural nationalism of the liberal centre. There is little doubt, in my view, that the fusion of the civic and organic discourses of

nationhood characterised a more inclusive nationalism that spanned the moderate left and the conservative right

[63] *Die Schweiz. Ein nationales Jahrbuch* (1936, vol. VII: 36).

[64] This is the view expressed in the preface of the 1936 issue of the New Helvetic Society's annual *Die Schweiz.*

[65] *Die Schweiz. Ein nationales Jahrbuch* (1936, vol. VII: 48).

[66] *Die Schweiz. Ein nationales Jahrbuch* (1936, vol. VII: 48). For another attempt to trace the emergence of a separate Swiss culture over history's *longue durée,* see Gottfried Bohnenblust's essay in *Die Schweiz. Ein nationales Jahrbuch* (1936, vol. VIII). Romano (1996) has examined the role of this historicist-cultural brand of Swiss nationalism in the controversy over *Überfremdung* before and after the First World War.

[67] *Die Schweiz. Ein nationales Jahrbuch* (1936, vol. VII: 79).

[68] See, for example, E. Piguet-Lansel's article in *Die Schweiz. Ein nationales Jahrbuch* (1936, vol. VII: 98-99).

[69] Quoted from Criblez (1995: 282).

[70] On this issue, see, for example, Lasserre (1992: chapter 1), Weibel (1986), and Bickel and Schläpfer (1994).

[71] *Neue Zürcher Zeitung.* February 20, 1938.

[72] *Die Schweiz. Ein nationales Jahrbuch* (1936, vol. VII: 49). A tone of self-criticism was by no means absent from this rapidly prospering discourse about cultural diversity. Some intellectual voices called upon the Swiss public to take a stronger interest in the cultures of those fellow Swiss who happened to speak other languages. See, for example, Charly Clerk's essay in *Die Schweiz. Ein nationales Jahrbuch* (1937, vol. VIII: 41).

[73] *Botschaft des Bundesrates an die Bundesversammlung über die Organisation und die Aufgaben der schweizerischen Kulturwahrung und Kulturwerbung* (Bern, December 1938: 996).

[74] *Botschaft des Bundesrates* (Bern, December 1938: 997).

[75] *Botschaft des Bundesrates* (Bern, December 1938: 998-99).

[76] *Botschaft des Bundesrates* (Bern, December 1938: 996).

[77] This was in addition to the approximately 4,500,000 Swiss Francs that the Federal government spent in 1938 on cultural projects. See *Botschaft des Bundes*rates (Bern, December 1938: 992).

[78] The domestic dimension of cultural policy is spelled out in *Botschaft des Bundesrates* (Bern, December 1938: 1001-1010).

[79] See *Botschaft des Bundesrates* (Bern, December 1938: 1010-20).

[80] See Criblez (1995: 93).

[81] See Criblez (1995: 157-62; 204-11).

[82] In the *Botschaft des Bundesrates an die Bundesversammlung über die Organisation und die Aufgaben der schweizerischen Kulturwahrung und Kulturwerbung* (Bern, December 1938: 985-990), the Federal Council praises the efforts of the various private associations and groups and of the public at large in support of *geistige Landesverteidigung,* and describes the numerous calls for a state-led cultural policy since the early 1930s as the major inspiration behind its report.

[83] *Botschaft des Bundesrates Bundesrates an die Bundesversammlung über die Organisation und die Aufgaben der schweizerischen Kulturwahrung und Kulturwerbung* (Bern, December 1938: 1005).

[84] See Lasserre (1992: 24). Criblez (1995:222) estimates the total number of radio licenses in Switzerland in 1938 at more than half a million (which amounts to around 150 licences per 1000 households), and the total number of listeners at roughly two millions.

[85] *Auslandschweizerwerk. Zwantigster Jahresbericht des Auslandschweizer-Sekretariats der Neuen Helvetischen Gesellschaft* (1938: 9). Among the topics on which lectures were held for the Swiss abroad, the report mentions: *Vom Wesen der Schweiz* ('on the Swiss national character'); *der schweizerische Staatsgedanke* ('Switzerland's political principle'); *eine romantische Vision der Schweiz* ('a romantic vision of Switzerland'); *die Landsgemeinde* ('the popular assembly'); *Comme la Suisse est née* ('how Switzerland emerged'); *premières luttes* ('the first battles'); *le secret de sa vitalité* ('the secret of Swiss vitality'); *Terra e gente elvetica* ('Switzerland: land and people').

[86] *Der Landbote.* May 20, 1939.

[87] See *Die Schweiz im Spiegel der Landesausstellung.*

[88] This synthesis of the 'organic' and the 'functional' also found expression in the Exhibition's furniture and home décor. The average piece of furniture was made from 'native' material – preferably wood, which underscored the organic dimension of the national narrative – while its outward appearance was that of functional simplicity (portrayed as an embodiment of Swiss republicanism). See Gisler (1991: 317-30).

[89] *Die Schweiz im Spiegel der Landesausstellung* (Zurich, 1940, vol. I: 63).

[90] *Die Schweiz im Spiegel der Landesausstellung* (Zurich, 1940, vol. I: 63).

[91] *Katalog Schweizerische Landesausstellung* (Zurich, 1939: 35).

[92] See, for example, the report in the Social Democrat newspaper *Volksrecht* of August 21, 1939. The *Trachtenfest* (folk costume festival) is also described in the essay by Karl Naef, 'Feste und Feiern', in: *Die Schweiz im Spiegel der Landesausstellung 1939 in Zürich,* vol. II.

[93] *Der Landbote.* October 30, 1939.

[94] This is perceptively analised in Criblez (1995: 322-23).

PART III:

COMPARISON

CHAPTER SEVEN

Memory, Events, and Nation Formation: Switzerland and Germany Compared

Three questions have guided the analysis in the previous chapters. First, under what conditions does 'the nation' become a subject of public debate? Second, to what extent can nationhood be invented or constructed during periods of heightened concern about national identity, and what brings about changes in the definition of national identity? And, third, how are 'civic' and 'organic' conceptions of nationhood related to each other in this process of national reconstruction, and how do shifts in the balance between them occur?

The first question has been addressed in the foregoing substantive chapters (particularly in chapters 5 and 6) and will not concern us here. The answer that has been proposed is that national revivals are most likely to occur when inter-nationalist competition coincides with domestic political conflict. More specifically, what the Swiss example suggests is that when modern nation-states feel threatened from outside (whether that threat is actual or ideological, real or imagined is of little importance), rallying around 'the nation' becomes a moral imperative. Such instances of national revival multiplied from the mid-nineteenth century on when nationalism became an international force, engendering a process of inter-nationalist competition between existing nation-states. Political and cultural elites keen to secure legitimacy for their respective nations were the first to respond to these challenges. In so doing, they provoked struggles over the definition of nationhood between rival domestic groups, thus unleashing a process that I have called the cross-fertilisation of nation-centred activity. In short, public debates over national identity tend to be most intense when a perceived external challenge engenders competing views on the 'nation' among a given population. Such an perspective differs from top-down approaches, which attribute changes in the intensity of national discourse to the legitimacy concerns of state elites and intellectuals; it also contradicts those accounts which conceive of debates over

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nationhood as spontaneous national revivals, and rooted in psychology rather than politics.

This final part of the thesis addresses the second and third questions outlined above by way of a comparison. Taking up the second question, this chapter contrasts the formation of nationhood in Switzerland and Germany in the nineteenth century. Its main concern is the role of ethno-symbolic memory in modern nation formation. My argument is that on-going historical events provided the major impetus behind the evolution of popular German nationhood, while a well-entrenched ethno-symbolic memory shaped the construction of national identity during the same period in Switzerland.

The present in the past versus the past in the present: ethno-historical memory and modern nation formation

Are nations built or do they grow? Some thirty years ago, Carl J. Friedrich asked this question in an influential reader on nation-building edited by Karl W. Deutsch and William J. Foltz. His answer was that we must distinguish between, on the one hand, the 'old' nations of the West (especially France and England), which developed more or less continuously out of medieval kingdoms into modern nations, and, on the other, the nations that sprang up in the post-colonial world, which were deliberate constructions.[1] The leading representative of the modernist position among the theorists of nationalism, Ernest Gellner, in a public address he made shortly before his death in November 1995, asked a similar question: 'Do nations have navels?' His answer: 'Some nations have it and some don't and in any case it's inessential.'[2]

Essentially, the discussion outlined above centres on the relevance of pre-modern ethnicity to modern nation formation, an issues that is still controversially debated among nationalism scholars. As indicated in chapter 1, the host of approaches to understanding nation formation and national identity can be grouped into two major families. The first comprises the 'perennialist' perspective. Put simply, its adherents

maintain that the past determines the present; that national identities form slowly and organically; and thus that the scope for the voluntary construction of national identity is strictly limited. When explaining this limited scope for invention, perennialists point to the determining role of cultural or political antecedents, while the somehow related primordialist approach tends to stress the impact of psychological givens.

The second grouping encompasses 'presentist' and 'instrumentalist' approaches, which, overall, have been more prominent in the field. In sharp contrast to the primordialists and perennialists, scholars adhering to either of these perspectives maintain that the present determines perceptions of the past; that discourses about national identity are thus either a function of modern power struggles and/or the consequence of a collective search for meaning at times of rapid social change.

Little can be gained, it seems to me, by employing the two approaches as analytical a priori, although this strategy is widespread. Obviously, some empirical cases are likely to correspond more to the 'perennialist' scenario, while others (perhaps the majority of cases) will approximate the 'presentist' one. The important question, then, is to identify the conditions that favour either of the two scenarios. In an attempt to advance the theoretical debate concerning the construction of national identities, this chapter adopts a typological and comparative approach. Instead of asking whether nationhood is culturally predetermined or constructed by elites, I examine the two distinct types of ethno-symbolic memory that by the late eighteenth century had developed in the Swiss Confederation and the German Reich, respectively, and the two different ways to nation formation paved by these legacies. In the Swiss case, a 'master narrative' was embodied in a highly structured set of symbols, myths, and political values, and cut across social, cultural and political boundaries. German ethno-symbolic memory, on the other hand, took the form a 'symbolic tool-kit'. The symbols, myths and values that constituted this tool-kit did not form a highly structured whole, and their salience was restricted to a highly educated section of German society.

Two distinct processes of modern nation formation resulted from these divergent symbolic frameworks. To illuminate the differences, I shall focus on the interaction between current events and ethno-symbolic memory. This will reveal that in

Switzerland, the political conflicts of 1798-1803 and 1847/48 did not lead to a transformation of the prevailing ethno-symbolic memory. Rather, the public re-definition of Swiss nationhood during the nineteenth century was shaped by this memory, since it provided the focus of ideas about what it was to be Swiss.

Germany presents an altogether different picture. Here, a rich but fragmented and largely elite-centred ethno-historical memory could not serve as a common frame of reference; and, instead, a sequence of events provided the catalyst for the formation of modern nationhood. In this regard, the wars of 1806/13 and 1870/71 were particularly influential. They had the effect of reinforcing a Franco-German antagonism that determined the construction of modern German nationhood throughout the century. It was due to the mass mobilising effects of these wars that concepts like *Kulturnation* and historic myths like the legends of Arminius the Cheruscan, hitherto of concern to a small but vocal elite, began to be diffused among the public at large, thereby serving as symbolic fortifications of German nationhood. Finally, in the wake of German unification, new myths, glorifying Bismarck as a national hero, and new public rituals, especially the annual military parades that were conducted all over the Reich, were added to the existing stock.

This chapter has two major sections. The first traces the evolution of an early modern ethno-symbolic memory in Switzerland and its impact on modern nation formation. This account will combine a summary of issues raised by previous chapters with new material on the role of critical historiography on national discourse. The second part of the chapter provides a similar but more extensive account of the German case. An extended conclusion discusses the interaction between collective memory, historical events, and modern nation formation in Switzerland and Germany.

Memory and nation formation in Switzerland

The formation of an ethno-symbolic memory

Common political institutions

The alliance of 1291 between the three forest cantons provided the institutional core for the forging, elaboration and subsequently reconstruction of the Confederate memory. Although between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries this original pact gradually evolved into a coalition of thirteen rural communities and city-states, its basic institutional structure remained largely unchanged. From the outset, the Confederation's institutional framework had three pillars.

The first consisted of a written contract, confirmed on a regular basis by the swearing of a communal oath. This oath of allegiance was crucial in that it supplied the community with a common ritual that helped to remind the members of the community of the purpose of their alliance, as well as of their rights and duties. The ritual did not impose uniform attitudes, but helped to reproduce the belief among the members that they formed a *Gemeinschaft* despite having different values and interests.[3]

A set of rules and agreements for regulating internal peace formed the second pillar of the Old Swiss Confederation. The rules were spelled out in the Confederate concordats, especially the *Pfaffenbrief* (1370), the *Sempacherbrief* (1393), and the *Stanser Verkommnis* (1481). These concerned mutual aid against violence from inside and outside, common action against feuds and robbery, the prohibition of foreign judges, and a common strategy on relations with external powers. Along with its success in warfare, the ability to secure internal peace was a decisive factor in enabling the Swiss Confederation to gain de facto autonomy from the Holy Roman Empire at least two centuries before autonomy was officially recognised by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648.

The third pillar in the Confederation's institutional framework was its common decision-making body, the Confederate Diet (*Tagsatzung*). Although the Diet faced a

serious challenge during the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it survived into the eighteenth century as an important forum for social interaction and communication. It seems unlikely that, in the absence of the institutional framework, Confederate ethno-symbolic memory would have become as significant a basis of Confederate identity as it did from the fifteenth century onwards.

The Confederate wars

If the Confederation's political and legal institutions provided a framework within which common loyalties could develop in a reasonably continuous fashion, successful warfare played an equally important part. To begin with, the Confederation's successes on the battle field quite simply secured its survival as a distinctive political and cultural community. What is of special interest in the context of this discussion, however, is that the collective experiences of the victories over the Habsburgs in 1315 and 1386, the Burgundians under Karl the Bold in 1476, and the Swabian League in 1499-1500 served as a communal *mythomoteur* for the creation of a Confederate repertoire of myths and narratives.

Moreover, these victories provoked fear among feudal lords that Confederate defiance could have a demonstration effect on their subjects. As my summary in chapter 2 of Thomas Brady's book on German peasant revolts demonstrates, such concerns were anything but unfounded. Peasant populations in the German South in particular began to draw inspiration from the Confederate resistance against the Habsburg overlords. At the same time, such fears, together with the general resentment caused by military defeat, induced Austrian and Swabian nobles to launch a vitriolic attack on the Swiss Confederation. The conflict between the upholders of the feudal principle and the Confederates, which reached its peak in the closing decades of the fifteenth century, helped to foster an ethno-symbolic boundary predicated on the opposition between feudalism and communalism. The nobles declared the Confederates a disgrace to humanity and accused them of having violated the pre-ordained status hierarchy – the cornerstone of feudalism as a socio-political order. Citing the battle

victories as their evidence and referring to Old Testament narratives, the Confederates responded by claiming that God had chosen them as his favoured people, while abandoning the nobility.

This opposition found expression in the myths and communal narratives that we first witness in a number of chronicles of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. Here, the myths of the Rütli alliance and of Wilhelm Tell take pride of place. These dramatic narratives based on actual historical events and processes – the wars against the Habsburgs had taken place, and the alliance between the three forest cantons had been concluded in the late thirteenth century – were conveyed to a wider audience through historic folk songs, folk plays and pamphlets over the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. By the mid-seventeenth century, they had developed into a vernacular narrative, as the Swiss peasant war of 1653 underscores.

The myths were subsequently nationalised around the turn of the eighteenth century (see chapter 3). Two generations of Helvetic Patriots were the driving force behind this transformation. Although concentrated in the Protestant, German-speaking areas of the Swiss Confederation, in terms of its ideological appeal the rapidly expanding network of Helvetic patriotism cut across linguistic and religious boundaries. In this way, an early Swiss nationalism began to spread outwards from the drawing rooms of closely-knit circles to a rapidly growing number of patriotic associations, and eventually to wider sections of the educated public. Although by the turn of the eighteenth century the myths had formed part of a vernacular communal narrative, Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* (first published in 1804) undoubtedly further advanced their appeal. The play was read and performed throughout the nineteenth century and quickly became part of the literary canon taught in Swiss primary schools.[4]

Swiss nation formation: the constraints imposed by ethno-historical memory

Although we can hardly speak of a popular Swiss nationalism before the turn of the nineteenth century, the narratives, myths and symbols that constituted the Confederate memory had achieved considerable resonance by this time. And it was precisely the

fact that this memory was popular rather than elite-centred, 'vernacular' rather than 'official', that made it a significant factor in modern Swiss nation formation. In addition to shaping the public discourse concerning Swiss nationhood from the late eighteenth century onwards, it also placed constraints on the public construction of national identity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Claiming the past in the struggle for national unity (1798-1848)

The constraints imposed by the myths have been conspicuous ever since debates on Swiss nationhood entered the public realm. This first occurred in 1798, when Switzerland became one of France's so-called 'sister republics' (see chapter 4). The political conflict that rocked the Helvetic Republic (1798-1803) from the day of its inauguration had its counterpart in a struggle over definitions of symbols and myths. Each of the two rival factions – the movement of republican nationalism and its opponents – embraced the myths of foundation and of liberation to bolster the legitimacy of its cause. This developed into a fierce controversy in which each side accused the other of tyranny and declared itself the true inheritor of ancient liberties.

The supporters of the Helvetic Republic (1798-1803) likened their opponents to the Habsburg nobility of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Worse even than the Habsburg overlords who had tried to oppress the forefathers' right to determine their own affairs, the enemies of the Helvetic Republic had sought to deny the rights and liberties of their own fellow countrymen. Given that Austria spearheaded the conservative coalition that opposed the republican movements on the European Continent, this particular analogy must have appeared all the more plausible to the supporters of the new regime. However, the strategy of alluding to the liberation myths to bolster their cause was not confined to the champions of the republican project. Drawing on the same mythical repertoire as the supporters of the Helvetic Republic, its fiercest opponents portrayed the Helvetic leaders as traitors of the ancestors' struggle against foreign interference. In seeking help from revolutionary France to wipe out the

traditional order, the opponents of the Republic frequently reiterated, the adherents of the republican cause had desecrated the Confederation's glorious heritage.

Once in power, the Helvetic elites took an active part in the initiation and promotion of national festivals and rituals between 1798 and 1803. In attempting to propagate national symbols, the new regime sought to fuse traditional myths and symbols with new elements and practices that had been elaborated in the context of the French Revolution. This syncretistic strategy to some degree reflected the worldview of the Helvetic leaders, but it also indicated their limited room for manoeuvre. When the Helvetic propagandists diverged too overtly from this approach, conflicts would often ensue, underlying the constraints imposed by the mythical repertoire. The various attempts to inaugurate republican mass rituals similar to those of revolutionary France are a case in point. These were established in an effort to overcome particularist loyalties and to forge an identity that would reflect the new concept of *une nation une et indivisible*. Examples of such novel rituals include the annual oath on the constitution, and the annual commemoration of April 12, the Day of the Declaration of the Helvetic Republic. In both cases, a mixture of popular resistance and apathy caused the Helvetic government to abandon its attempt to initiate new customs in favour of a syncretism which placed the stress on a (civic) reinterpretation of traditional symbolic forms and contents.

The fundamental political conflict between the Protestant Liberal and Catholic Conservative cantons that dominated the 1840s confirms the basic patterns we encountered in our analysis of the Helvetic Republic (see chapter 4). Even in the vitriolic verbal polemics that accompanied the civil war of 1847, the traditional historicist narrative, based on the foundation and liberation myths, provided the focus for both Radicals and Liberals and Catholics alike. Although the two camps rallied behind opposing conceptions of community and interpreted the core myths differently, both referred to the same constitutive narratives in seeking to advance their claims. The foundation and liberation myths, along with those relating to the late-medieval battles, formed the stock items of their respective rhetoric. It is worth noting that the controversy over Swiss nationhood that accompanied the hostilities left the basic ethno-

historical memory as good as unchanged. Together with the institutionalisation of the modern nation-state after the turn of the nineteenth century (and particularly after 1848), this shared ethno-symbolic focus facilitated the piecemeal nationalisation of the Catholic Conservative cantons and was conducive to their eventual integration into a nation-state they had initially fiercely opposed.

Competing memories of nationhood: liberal historiography and the reconstruction of the Swiss past (1870-1900)

Another group bound to face the constraints of ethno-historical memory were the professional historians of the late nineteenth century. In 1889, for instance, Wilhelm Oechsli, a prominent liberal historian and one of the leading critics of the traditional narrative, lamented that the late-medieval myths 'have become second nature to our people and, by and large, are regarded as true history even today'.[5] From the 1870s onwards, many of Switzerland's most prominent historians had begun to question the founding and liberation myths. The date of 1307, they demanded, had to be replaced with 1291.[6] The reason for this was that 1307 derived from a repertoire of myths (with the legends about Wilhelm Tell and about the Oath of the Rütli forming the core), while there existed a document which testified to the conclusion of an alliance in 1291 between representatives of the three forest cantons. For the liberal historians, who followed the new methodological directives introduced by the German historian Leopold von Ranke, this was ample reason to get rid of 1307 and declare 1291 the nation's founding date. Thus Oechsli spoke for most of his professional colleagues when he stated that the 'much-loved imaginings do not correspond with the existing body of primary sources. What is more, these imaginings are frankly contradicted by the available evidence.'[7]

The historians' 'revisionist' project provides us with two illustrations of how the existing ethno-historical memory shaped the construction of Swiss national identity in the late nineteenth century. The first concerns their own attitude towards the national past, thereby revealing the constitutive role of collective memory. What is most notable

in this respect is the fact that they did not abandon the basic temporal and geographical parameters traditionally associated with Switzerland's national origins. On the contrary, they explicitly accepted the parameters embodied in the core myths: the dating of the nation in the late medieval period and the locating of the nation's origins in central Switzerland remained unchallenged.[8] The historians' aim was a more modest one: the replacement of a myth-based narrative about Switzerland's national origins with an historical account that met the scientific standards of late-nineteenth century historiography.

This fact, though remarkable, has provoked little interest among Swiss historians of the post-war era. Why did neither the critical historians nor the leading politicians of the late nineteenth century opt for 1798 or 1848 as Switzerland's founding date? After all, the modern Swiss nation-state was a product of the revolutions of 1798 and 1848. It had little in common with the Swiss Confederation of the *ancien régime*. Nor had it emerged in organic fashion out of the late-medieval alliances of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The liberal historians were well aware of this. Why is it, then, that none of them gave any serious thought to the possibility of shifting the nation's founding date to the nineteenth century? The evidence suggests that this was because historians took the late medieval framework largely for granted. Switzerland had been founded at the turn of the thirteenth century, and central Switzerland was the geographic heartland of the emerging Swiss nation – this is what the late-nineteenth century historians (and those of the next two generations) had been taught at school; and even later, as they became graduate students in Swiss history departments, these 'facts' were hardly questioned.

The same is true of the liberal political elite of the late nineteenth century. Statements from any leading Swiss politician of the period championed 1848 as the nation's founding date are hard to find. The same cannot be said of proclamations that locate Switzerland's origins in the late medieval period. A parliamentary report in 1890, for example, stated that 'the Eternal Alliance of 1291 was and is the Magna Carta not only of our Confederate Law but also of our civic order, national independence and liberty.'[9] To be sure, the fact that the date of 1848 would have been controversial due to

its association with the Liberal victory in the civil war of 1847 provides a partial explanation for the politicians' reluctance to promote it as year of the nation's foundation. It is also true, of course, that nationalism attributes much prestige to a long historical pedigree. But these factors do not in themselves account for the almost complete failure to question the temporal and geographical parameters of the traditional national narrative – a failure which says much about the resilience and resonance of the traditional communal memory.

The second example illustrates how a given collective memory shapes the construction of national identity by posing constraints on the actors involved. This is made evident by the fact that the shift in public opinion that the historians did seek to bring about (the shift from viewing 1307 to viewing 1291 as the date of the nation's foundation) was only partially successful. Although in terms of its aims the historians' revisionist project was anything but revolutionary, it provoked a public controversy of some proportion. The defence of the myths and legends took different forms. Some argued that in forming a kind of poetic super-structure of historical events, the myths comprised an important or indeed indispensable part of Swiss national identity. One of the earliest and most vocal individuals to have argued along such lines was Zurich poet and fierce supporter of the liberal state, Gottfried Keller. In 1861 he argued that the possession of foundation legends was an asset to be welcomed rather than a weakness to be lamented. These legends, Keller maintained, should be cherished and kept alive because they strengthened national cohesion. 'If there existed no legend about the emergence of the Swiss Confederation', Keller proclaimed at one point in his *Grüner Heinrich,* 'we would be bound to invent one'. And, Keller's concerns went even further. He feared that the debunking of the core myths would merely be the first step of a greater project of rewriting Swiss history, which would eventually lead to the complete abandonment of the medieval framework in favour of the nineteenth century. It was because of such concerns that, in the 1860s, he exhorted: 'May the scholars continue to fulfil their duty; as long as they do not completely deny what is feasible and necessary in order to replace it with what is unfeasible: our having emerged from scratch.'[10]

Many teachers in primary and secondary schools throughout the country shared Keller's anxieties. When in 1873 a school director openly demanded that, in light of recent progress in historical research, the legends be removed from the school curricula altogether, it provoked a fierce reaction among sections of the teaching profession. An article in the *Schweizerische Lehrerzeitung,* the official publication of Swiss school teachers – while conceding that legends should be identified as such – argued that 'as long as Greek, Roman and Germanic mythologies' were taught in secondary schools it was 'irreverent to hold a knife to the throat of our national hero, Wilhelm Tell'.[11]

Others directed their criticism more openly towards the historical profession itself. They argued that instead of highlighting the grounded nature of the myths – particularly their close relationship with significant historical events of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries – historians confined themselves to the dry business of distinguishing between fact and fiction. To quote from the report of a Liberal newspaper of 1886:

> Patriotism need not mourn, even if [science] also strips it of its heroes. Whether Tell in fact shot the apple off his son's head, and whether Winkelried embraced the enemies' pikes, or whether these are mere inventions of an epoch that was both imaginative and in need of heroic figures: the valley-cantons liberated themselves, the knights' army was defeated at Sempach, and both were achieved by heroes.[12]

In a speech delivered at the national festival in Schwyz in 1891, moreover, Adrien Lachental of Geneva, the then president of the National Council, adopted an openly populist tone when he juxtaposed scholarship and popular perceptions. Contrary to the critical historians, he proclaimed, 'the people at large' regarded Tell and the Oath of the Rütli as symbolic embodiments of republican virtue and true patriotism.[13] Lachental was seconded by the prominent legal historian Carl Hilty, who noted that the bulk of the Swiss population did 'not like the dry bones of scientifically prepared history', but preferred 'the powerful narrative of the chroniclers which is still suffused with the air of the original deeds'.[14]

Overall, however, neither wholehearted rejection nor full endorsement was predominant among the many responses to the liberal conception of the national past. More often, the struggle between competing conceptions of the national past led to a synthesis of the new historical narrative (linked to 1291) with its mythical precursor (based on 1307). The trend towards synthesising 'history' and 'memory' – to use Pierre Nora's terms – was already in evidence in the build-up to the national festival of 1891. Nevertheless, during the 600-year celebrations of 1891, as at the numerous local and medium-sized patriotic festivities that punctuated the nineteenth century, the ethno-historical memory and the myths and symbols that constituted it were the main focus of attention.

To sum up the Swiss scenario: a well-entrenched ethno-symbolic memory played a significant part in the construction of national identity in the nineteenth century (and beyond) – either by furnishing, in a self-evident manner, the worldviews of those who contributed to national discourse, or by constraining the scope for alternative ideological projects. Where ethno-symbolic memory was fragmented and lacked in resonance, a different pattern of modern nation formation can be observed. This leads me to the German example.

Memory and nation formation in Germany

Explaining German nationalism

The *Sonderweg* paradigm

The course of German nationalism has often been portrayed in terms of its departure from an ideal western model, resulting in a depiction of the German nation-state as a deficient stepchild, as it were, of such countries as France, England, and Holland. Within this research paradigm, two issues have received specific attention. The first is the question of why, in comparison to some of its neighbours, German statehood was

such a late arrival.[15] Harold James, in a relatively recent contribution, has attributed Germany's belatedness to its lack of two vital ingredients for successful nation-building: a set of symbols and myths that were sufficiently distinctive and well-known to command the support of the German masses; and a framework of political institutions that could serve as a focal point of civic loyalty. Consequently, James argues, 'Germans found it much more difficult [than the members of other nations] to work out what the pattern for national life should be'. In addition, the split between the Protestant North and the mainly Catholic South, along with the strength of small-state particularism, were major impediments to the emergence of an overarching identity among the populations of the different German lands.[16]

A second group of scholars working within the *Sonderweg* paradigm has placed the main emphasis not on the protracted nature of German state-building but on the *qualitative* difference between the German conception of nationhood and that of her western neighbours. Put simply, the argument is this: whereas in France and England (and other 'western' nations) a political conception of nationality emerged as a consequence of early and successful state-building, Germany's political and territorial fragmentation was conducive to an ethnic understanding of nationhood. Those adopting this viewpoint have tended to stress the part played by cultural elites in standardising and popularising an ethno-cultural ideology of German nationhood in the nineteenth century. In some accounts, the origins of German national identity are traced back as far as Luther and his emphasis on German culture and language, while most have attributed a decisive role to German Romanticism.[17]

No German nationalism before 1871?

Other studies of nineteenth-century Germany have denied altogether that there was a popular German nationalism prior to unification. John Breuilly, perhaps the foremost representative of this position among English-speaking historians, has argued that 'a unified Germany was created long before nationalism was a strong and active political sentiment, certainly before it was a widespread and popular feeling.'[18] According to

Breuilly, a process of territorial and political integration began between 1800 and 1848 among the various German states (most notably, he argues, in the collaborator states of the *Rheinbund,* which were modernised along Napoleonic lines). Yet it was only during the Second Empire, he argues, that a sense of national identity emerged, engendered by the formation of a 'powerful set of imperial institutions' (including social welfare provision, the construction of railways, a navy, and legal codification) and more clearly defined state boundaries.[19]

About two things, it seems to me, there can be little doubt: that nationalism was *not the major* driving force behind the establishment of the German nation-state of 1871 (although it was not completely marginal as an influence, as Breuilly seems to suggest); and that the state in 1871 contributed to the emergence of German national identity. Yet to conclude from this that popular German nationalism was the product of political unification flies in the face of a considerable amount of evidence, as I shall try to demonstrate below. It is one thing to argue that German unification did not result from an increasingly powerful sense of German national identity; quite another to maintain that there was no such thing as a popular German nationalism between, say, 1800 and the unification of Germany under Prussian leadership. What makes Breuilly come to the latter conclusion is his overtly restrictive definition of national identity, which he equates with loyalty to the state and its institutions. On the basis of this definition, nationalism is more-or-less inconceivable as long as nationhood does not find expression in the political institutions conferred on a people by the modern state (above all popular representation and citizenship rights). This becomes plain in Breuilly's interpretation of public reactions to the Napoleonic wars in various countries (including Germany). It would be misleading, he maintains, to interpret the hostile reactions to the French occupiers as expressions of popular nationalism when they were (merely) manifestations of 'populism stimulated by very traditional institutions and sentiments'. A genuinely nationalist response, he argues, was hardly possible 'without the prior internal changes of the kind that had taken place in France'.[20]

The preponderance of the research agendas discussed above has left little scope for assessment of the respective impacts on the formation of German nationhood of

ethno-symbolic memory and historical events. In the remainder of this chapter, I will try to fill this gap.

The Formation of an Ethno-Symbolic Memory

The Institutional Framework of the Holy Roman Empire

What can be perceived as the contours of an evolving German ethno-symbolic memory are largely the product of a particular regnal and feudal organisation and, as such, this memory lacks a strong core. Susan Reynolds has observed that when thirteenth-century England and France were witnessing a revival of royal authority at the expense of lordships and princes, developments in Germany 'were just then beginning to go in the opposite direction'. Thus unlike in the former two cases, in Germany the great duchies managed to strengthen their position at the expense of the King.[21] The *Reichsreform* of 1491 and, subsequently, the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, as the German Reich came to be called in 1512, continued and cemented this trend.

The outcome of the Thirty Years War further diminished the prospect of tighter territorial and political consolidation. Especially in the western part of the Reich, the War had left many territorial questions and disputes unresolved. The Treaty of Westphalia of 1648, for example, allocated Alsace a somewhat ambiguous status between France and the Empire, thus creating the potential for future conflicts between France and Germany.[22] Sweden's intervention, in particular, brought an end to 'the prospect of a Habsburg imperial state in Germany' and thus of a 'territorial centre in the traditional lands of the *Reich*'. Instead, Austrian absolutism 'shifted its whole centre of gravity eastwards', paving the way for the multiethnic Austrian-Hungarian Empire.[23]

What is more, in strengthening (once again) the princes at the expense of the King, the War had produced in Germany the opposite effect to that it had produced in France, where the centre had emerged invigorated. Individual territorial rulers – the Reich of 1648 comprised more than three hundred estates, princedoms, and duchies of various sizes – enjoyed the freedom to conclude treaties with each other and with

foreign powers.[24] In the immediate aftermath of the Thirty Years War, numerous alliances and coalitions sprang up all over the Reich. Although most of these coalitions were short-lived, they nonetheless formed a strong bulwark against attempts at territorial consolidation. The vacuum that resulted from the lack of an absolutist regime along French or Spanish lines was filled by powerful individual states that pursued a successful territorial policy. Prussia and Austria in particular emerged as the driving forces behind absolutist rule within their respective spheres of influence. These two dynasties became fierce competitors for power and influence within the Reich over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, hindering the formation of overarching political institutions.[25]

The logistical inability of the Reich's exercising control over its territories undoubtedly posed an obstacle to the emergence of a shared sense of German identity of the kind that evolved in early modern France or England. At least at the popular level, identification with one's Land (known as *Landespatriotismus*) tended to reign supreme, whereas loyalty to the German Reich (*Reichspatriotismus*) remained weak. As late as 1773, for example, the German poet Wieland used the term 'nations' to refer to the constituent states of Germany, such as Bavaria, Prussia, and Saxony. In his words: 'The nation is actually not One Nation, but an aggregate of numerous nations'.[26] Daniel Jenisch came to the same conclusion in the second volume of his *Geist und Charakter des 18. Jahrhunderts* (published in Berlin between 1799 and 1801): 'We may be Brandenburgers, Austrians, Bavarians, Saxons: but we are not Germans.'[27] The cultural elite's despair at the preponderance of political and cultural particularism led them to favour cosmopolitan ideals. As Schiller and Goethe jointly wrote: 'Forget, O Germans, your hopes of becoming a *nation*. Educate yourselves instead ...to be human beings'.[28]

But while the institutional weakness of the Holy Roman Empire inhibited the formation of a German identity, it did not prevent German-speaking elites from fostering an ethno-symbolic memory aimed at inspiring a sense of German nationhood. Such efforts were discernible from the late fifteenth century onwards, with an increasing number of Humanist scholars providing the major intellectual impetus.

These learned men began to perceive as paradoxical the fact that the 'German nation' –
a term cultural elites now began to use with great frequency when referring to the
populations of the Holy Roman Empire – was divided between several states.[29] In
Germany as elsewhere, historians, philologists, students of folk culture, printers, poets
and moral philosophers were in the vanguard of this early modern movement of
cultural nation-building. In Germany, their efforts produced two important national
narratives.[30] In the first – the narrative of the *Kulturnation* – Germany was portrayed as
a nation whose essence was located in its cultural properties. In the second – the
mythical narrative – Germans were depicted as the descendants of a victorious tribal
warlord, Arminius the Cheruscan (see Tab. 7-1).

The narrative of *Kulturnation*.

Responding to and competing with early national movements in England, France,
Holland and Spain, German civic humanists created the narrative of the German
Kulturnation as the basis of an early modern patriotism. The core elements of this
concept of nationhood were *Sprache* (language as both a medium of communication
and an expression of the national character) and *Bildung* (education of both the formal
and moral kind). As early as 1492, the Humanist scholar Konrad Celtis argued that
there was a need to strengthen German unity, power and culture in order to create a
climate in which effective and good government could operate. Thus Celtis demanded
that increased scholarly effort be made in the examination of German geography and in
the German past. In particular, he considered historical knowledge to be crucial if the
general population was to be made of the glorious deeds of their nation.[31]

From the sixteenth century onwards, the language dimension of the narrative of
Kulturnation was accorded increasing significance. Here, Luther's contribution was
significant. His translation of the Bible emerged as the essential textbook of the
German Protestants. Furthermore, his pamphlet *An den christlichen Adel deutscher
Nation* ('To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation') sold 4,000 copies within
eighteen days, leading to the printing of a second edition only one week later.[32] In 1578

a German grammar was published by Johannes Claj,[33] which greatly advanced the standardisation of the German language. Over the course of the seventeenth century there was a proliferation of language societies throughout the Reich, which aimed at elevating the German language to a status that would allow it to compete successfully with the national languages of France and England. Moreover, the numerous literary societies and associations that mushroomed during the reading revolution of the eighteenth century often combined historical, linguistic and geographical interests, making them the focal points of patriotism.[34]

Nevertheless, until the middle of the nineteenth century the concept of the *Kulturnation* held little appeal beyond the confines of the German educated elite. According to Giesen, as late as the 1770s no more than about fifteen percent of the German population were literate, but a mere one percent (roughly 200,000 people) actively participated in the reading revolution.[35]

Most importantly, however – as Norbert Elias was able to show – *Kultur* rose to prominence as a status-bound concept in Germany over the course of the eighteenth century, reflecting the hierarchical structure and social rigidity of German society. Hence according to Elias, *Bildung* became a marker of status for the German educated middle classes, distinguishing them from the German nobility who until (at least) the end of the eighteenth century acted as the standard bearers of French culture. They aspired to the cultural rules and etiquette of France that had reached their maturation under French absolutism. Frederick the Great's distaste for the German language and German literature is legendary.[36] But the German educated classes' admiration for French civilisation received a blow when it became increasingly clear that the nobility was unwilling to accommodate newcomers from their ranks.[37] The *Bildungsbürgertum* responded to this humiliation by constructing a social boundary predicated on the juxtaposition of German *Kultur* and French *Zivilisation*. Yet it soon became plain that the concept of *Kultur* served the bourgeoisie as a dual marker of identity: as well as distinguishing them from the nobility, with their love of French civilisation, it marked them off from the lower and petit bourgeoisie, who in their view lacked both *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*.[38]

Indeed, during the eighteenth century, Germany's educated classes became fervently preoccupied with culture, particularly in the sense of *Bildung*. This preoccupation was epitomised by the establishment of the classical *Gymnasium* and the founding of a number of Humanist universities.[39] By the late eighteenth century, the educated Germans' embrace of *Kultur* and *Bildung* had not only defined them as a distinct social group, but also enabled them to perceive themselves as bearing the essence of German nationhood. Nevertheless, and as Breuilly has argued with regard to the eighteenth century: 'The construction of a German national culture, focused on such ideas as a national language and national theatre, was highly elitist.'[40]

The mythical narrative: Arminius the Cheruscan

The second pillar of German national memory before 1800 was built on a myth of ethnic origin, contained in the legend of *Hermann der Cherusker* (Arminius the Cheruscan). As with the concept of *Kulturnation*, German humanists provided the major impetus behind the elaboration of this myth. The increased interest in myths of national origin, apparent from the turn of the fifteenth century, was by no means a German peculiarity but formed part of a European-wide trend.[41] The German case testified to the competitive nature of European myth-making in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which was also under way in Switzerland, France, and Holland, to name but a few examples. In his *Epitome Germanorum* (1505), for example, Jakob Wimpfeling ridiculed the claim, made by French scholars that Charlemagne had been French. In truth, Wimpfeling maintained, Charlemagne had been a German king ruling over French subjects. Wimpfeling even went so far as to say that the explanation of why no Frenchman had ever been king of the Holy Roman Empire lay in the superiority of the Germans over their French rivals.[42] Of the several elements that made up the German mythical narrative, the myth of Arminius the Cheruscan had the greatest resonance for the German Humanists. By contrast, the two other myths – the historical legend of Barbarossa and the *Nibelungenlied* – tend to be overestimated in terms of their popular appeal. Although both subsequently acquired significance for the early

romantics, they were not meaningful for the wider population until after the Wars of Liberation.[43]

Two historical sources furnished the elaboration of the Arminius myth and supplied it with the necessary legitimacy despite its nebulous content: Tacitus' *De origine et situ Germaniae liber,* and the Roman History by Velleius Paterculus. The latter work contains a brief description of the course of the battle which in 9 AD ended with the victory of the Germanic tribes under Arminius over the Romans led by Varus. Velleius portrays Arminius and his troops as virtuous and as shrewd strategists, while he depicts the Roman commander Varus as vacillating and weak. Tacitus' account of Arminius, discovered in 1455 in Italy, is concerned with events after the battle and is more complex than that of Velleius. His focus is on Arminius and his entourage, whose manners and actions he describes as rude and primitive; he also reports on the rebellion that ensued against an increasingly power-hungry Arminius.[44]

Humanist thinkers such as Conrad Celtis, Jakob Wimpfeling, Ulrich von Hutten and Heinrich Bebel used these two sources selectively in their various attempts to foster a German myth of national origins. What made both sources attractive was that they lent themselves well to the elaboration of profound differences between the character of the Romans and that of their Germanic adversaries. Further accentuating a tendency already present in these sources, the Humanists described the Romans as decadent and weak; as frivolous and prone to extravagance. In the eyes of the Humanist myth-makers, these character traits rendered them inferior to the physically resilient Germanic tribes with their authentic culture. This – or so it was suggested – derived from their organic rootedness and ethnic purity.[45]

Over the course of the eighteenth century, the myth of Arminius became popular with the early romantics, and so inspired a considerable number of dramatic wors. These included compositions by J. E. Schlegel (1743), Justus Moeser (1749), and Friedrich Gottlieb Kloppstock (1769, 1784, and 1787). Significantly, in all these plays Arminius and his followers are presented self-evidently as German. From the late eighteenth century, moreover, several German Encyclopedia included references to the myth of Arminius the Cheruscan.[46]

The secondary importance of ethno-symbolism

Yet whatever the salience of the narratives concerning the *Kulturnation* and the myth of Arminius for Germany's cultural elite, they did not capture the popular imagination until well into the nineteenth century (see Tab. 7-1). Nor did they ever develop the kind of constraining capacity that I have attributed to the ethno-symbolic memory of the Swiss Confederation. Even in the nineteenth century, the first of the two narratives – that which emphasised the cultural essence of the German nation – remained the preserve of the educated sections of the German public, for whom it acquired further significance as a symbolic weapon against the claims of superiority of French imperial nationalism.

The myth of Arminius, on the other hand rapidly gained ground during the Wars of Liberation and the war of 1870/71 against France. Containing a communal narrative that was vernacular rather than elite-centred like that of the German *Kulturnation*, the Arminius myth was more conducive to promoting popular notions of German nationhood. The content of its dramatic narrative – the manichaen struggle for superiority and survival between two powerful adversaries – made it a paradigmatic story for the actual conflicts of the nineteenth century. In other words, the allegedly age-old enmity between the Romans and the Germanic tribes, personified in the legend of Arminius, served to historicise and naturalise the present-day German-French antagonism.[47]

Tab. 7-1: The components of ethno-symbolic memory in early nineteenth century Germany

NARRATIVE	SYMBOLIC RESOURCES	SPHERE OF INFLUENCE
• The *Kulturnation* Narrative	*Sprache* *Bildung*	Educated Middle Classes: *Bildungsbürgertum*
• The Mythical Narratitve	Arminius the Cheruscan (Tripartite Myth: Ethnic Origin; Foundation; Liberation)	Educated Middle Classes: *Bildungsbürgertum*

War and German nationhood I (1806/13): fortifying the national boundary

France, the primary 'reference society' (Reinhard Bendix) for most countries on the European Continent in the period from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, had a particularly profound impact on the formation of nationalism in Germany. The French Revolution provides an appropriate starting point for an assessment of this impact. At least initially, revolutionary France was much admired by many members of Germany's educated classes. Some of the leading representatives of the German intelligentsia, such as Wieland, Tieck, Hölderlin, Wackenröder, Kant, Herder, Hegel and Fichte (Goethe was notably absent from this group) expressed their support for the Revolution and the changes it had brought about; as did lodges and scholarly associations. Several members of the German nobility, especially those adhering to the principles of enlightened absolutism, were also inspired by France and attempted to emulate (however selectively) aspects of French culture and politics.[48]

If the execution of Louis XVI repelled many of France's earlier supporters among the German intelligentsia and nobility, the outbreak of war and the experience of French occupation provoked anti-French sentiment among the wider German population. National propagandists sought to further their cause by tapping into such feelings. In August 1808, for example, the Prussian Baron Karl von und zum Stein (1757-1831) wrote in a letter to the Prussian King: 'There is great public outrage against an arrogant and predatory enemy here in the Prussian provinces. If wisely directed, it will express itself forcefully and will prevail.'[49] Blackbourn describes the impact of the 'hostilities of 1792-1815' on the wider German public at large: 'A whole generation grew up in its shadow; it affected everything from levels of consumption to religious observance. The war also had an ideological component absent from earlier dynastic struggles, and this left its mark on the reshaped German state-system.'[50] Michael Mann discussed the formative influence of the French revolutionary wars on European nationalism:

> [T]he French fuelled local nationalisms as 'liberation' turned into imperialism.... By 1799, revolts against the French were widespread.... By 1808, nearly all patriots were turning against the French; after 1812, even active collaborators [i.e. the states in the German south] were deserting a losing cause.[51]

While the popular hostility against French occupation was particularly strong in the German north, and especially in Prussia, it also gained momentum in the southern and south-western states, notwithstanding their opposition to Prussian, small-German nationalism. Even in the collaborator states that formed the so-called *Rheinbund,* anti-French resistance and rhetoric grew in strength from around 1810, as Napoleon's war efforts demanded ever greater sacrifices from the local populations (mainly in the form of troop recruitment and increased taxation), and especially after the French armies had been defeated by Russia in 1812.[52] In 1809, for example, a French envoy reported to Paris that the words 'liberation' and 'independence' could be heard with ever-greater frequency in Bavaria. An official report on the public mood in some of the Rhenish provinces, dating October 4, 1811, came to a similar conclusion. Addressed to the

French Minister of the Interior in Paris, it announced that 'the liberation of Germany' was 'the demand of the moment' in Halle, Jena, Leipzig, and Tübingen.[53]

In seeking to understand why French warfare and occupation provoked widespread nationalistic reactions, one must remember that the Napoleonic wars represented a novel phenomenon: that is, an expansionist mass nationalism. Post-revolutionary France fought its wars under the imperialist banner of *la grande nation,* and its citizens perceived their nation as having a civilizing mission. In theory, this mission consisted of carrying out what official propaganda described as the 'liberation' of other, less fortunate peoples. In reality, it entailed the imposition by French occupiers of their own customs and system of government on the 'liberated'.[54] Accordingly, this new form of (nationalistic) warfare triggered a new kind of (nationalistic) response, which had a popular character. French imperial nationalism thus served to nationalise the German masses. More specifically, it helped construct what became the backbone of German nationhood in the nineteenth century: a symbolic boundary predicated upon the antagonism with France. To quote Michael Mann again: 'As in England, contrasting stereotypes of 'national character', based on individual character, appeared. Germans characterized themselves as open, upright, and God-fearing, the French as sly, frivolous, and unreliable. The nation and *la grande nation* were no longer one.' [55]

Hence rather than an age-old resentment of the French (as some German nationalists claimed), it was the collective experience of war and French occupation that established opposition to France as the structuring principle of German nationalism. Andreas Rebmann, for example, was a former supporter of France who admitted to having changed his mind after Napoleon's defeat in 1813: 'I confess that I was once a warm supporter of the Rhine frontier, just as now, as a German, I am a vehement opponent of the same ... I have never forgotten that I am a German.'[56] To be sure, the two central elements of German ethno-symbolic memory before 1800 – the notion of the *Kulturnation* and the myth of Arminius the Cheruscan – were used to historicise and naturalise the symbolic boundary of German nationhood. To recognise that a contemporary conflict was historicised, however, is not to deny the fact that it

was the wars and their repercussions for the German people that elevated these elements from elite-centred symbols to popular national narratives. In the context of inter-nationalist competition, the notion that language was the most authentic expression of an ancient and organic 'German character' was politicised, as was the myth of Arminius. Both narratives, in turn, served to embellish the emerging symbolic boundary with a resonant myth of ethnic origin.[57]

In the pamphlets and speeches of the nationalist intellectuals, France appeared as the arch enemy, and French culture came to epitomise all that was not German. Fichte's 'Addresses to the German Nation' are perhaps the clearest testimony to this change of attitude from admiration for to bitter resentment of all things French. In 1799 Fichte had still been arguing that the German cause was lost 'unless the French achieve the most tremendous superiority ... in Germany'. By 1808, when he delivered his Addresses in Berlin, he had undergone a profound conversion. Now he was envisaging a great awakening of the German spirit, and demanded of his compatriots that they participate in a collective search for the 'national character', which henceforth had to take precedence over the striving for individual happiness.[58]

The available evidence suggests that Fichte's change of heart is indicative of a wider trend of historicising and naturalising the conflict with France. Historians played a key role in depicting France as the 'eternal enemy' of the German people. 'However far back we look in our history', the Berlin historian Friedrich Rühs wrote, 'we see that the behaviour of the French towards Germany has been consistently hostile'.[59] The popular writer Ernst Moritz Arndt spearheaded the movement making hatred of the French the essence of German nationalism: 'Let unanimity be your church! Make hatred of the French your religion, and let freedom and Fatherland be the saints to whom you pray!'[60]

Through various modes of communication, anti-French rhetoric radiated outwards from a few centres of ideology to a German public that was increasingly receptive to nationalist doctrines. Secret societies such as the *Tugendbund* (League of Virtue) or the German League of Friedrich Ludwig Jahn gained influence among the youth and among students in particular. In Hesse, Prussia and Braunschweig, patriotic

activists drew on local resentment in launching small insurrections against the French occupiers. When it became known that Napoleon's Russian campaign was facing defeat, such resentment rapidly evolved into the popular nationalism of the so-called Wars of Liberation against Napoleon. Schulze describes the public mood as these wars broke out: 'When King Frederick William III of Prussia issued a call to arms on March 17, 1813, it triggered a mass enthusiasm similar in some respects to the popular uprisings of the French Revolution, fed by a flood of nationalistic, anti-French propaganda and verse.'[61]

Plate 7-1: Adolph Menzel, *Victoria!* (around 1836), Lithography, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Painting depicts the German victory in the so-called *Befreiungskriege* against Napoleon's armies.

The numerous public ceremonies and festivals established in commemoration of the Wars of Liberation further contributed to the popularisation of anti-French nationalism, with the commemoration of the battle of Leipzig of 1813 emerging as the first national festival in German history. In the absence of a central organising body, a campaign by Friedrich Ludwig Jahn and Moritz Arndt ensured that the hundreds of regional events followed a common pattern during the first commemoration in October 1814.

Proclamations of Germany's military strength and manifestations of anti-French feeling, expressed in folk songs and speeches, supplied the thematic core of this commemorative event. A solemn part, during which bonfires were lit and an oath on the German nation was sworn, was followed by banquets, folk dances, concerts, and similar activities. Although clearly modelled on French revolutionary festivals, Jahn and Arndt spared no effort in seeking to infuse the event with an authentically German flavour.[62] The introduction of the Liberty Tree is illustrative of this. In order to represent German nationhood through the use of this new symbol, 'German oaks' became the centre of the numerous rituals of liberty that were conducted all over the country.[63]

At least three reasons can be cited for the rapidity with which the anti-French framework acquired a taken-for-granted status that cut across social, political and cultural boundaries. First, political developments confirmed existing anti-French stereotypes. The wars and subsequent occupation of German territory rendered plausible the view that France was intent on denying Germany's right to national self-determination. Some parts of Germany were more seriously affected than others: the states of the Rhineland, for example, which collaborated which Napoleon, 'suffered a brutal, physically destructive and economically crippling occupation' that lasted from late 1792 until the French defeat of 1813. The occupation of Prussia was briefer but equally humiliating for those who experienced it directly.[64]

Second, the absence of a powerful communal narrative prior to the nineteenth century increased the need to establish a relatively clear-cut symbolic boundary between Germans and non-Germans. Specifically, the existing communal memory had insufficient structural coherence and popular resonance to furnish a positive conception of German nationhood. Eric Hobsbawm has come to a similar conclusion. Pointing to the 'multiplicity of [symbolic] reference' that characterises German national discourse, he attributes the primacy of anti-French rhetoric in nineteenth-century German nationalism to the lack of a reasonably coherent conception of German self-identity. 'Like many another liberated 'people'', Hobsbawm concludes, '"Germany" was more easily defined by what it was against than in any other way.'[65]

Third, the wars not only provided an impetus for national mobilisation along anti-French lines, but also provided a stronger organisational basis for the national project. Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, the founder of the movement of the German gymnasts, clearly acknowledged the need for organisation and planning in his statement that 'the random activities of a Volk' did not 'make a festival'.[66] Thus, the groups and networks that organised the national festivals and initiated the erection of monuments became integral elements of an increasingly dense network of nation-wide communication. In addition to the informal organising committees of festivals and commemorations, then, the male choral societies, the sharp-shooting societies, the *Burschenschaften,* gymnasts and fraternities played important parts in this network.[67]

War and German Nationhood II (1870/71): Reinforcing the National Boundary and Creating New National Symbols

In the period from the Wars of Liberation (1813-1815) to national unification (1871), German society witnessed a number of developments that, either directly or indirectly, strengthened national identity. At the economic level, the German Customs Union *(Zollverein)* was formed under Prussia's direction in 1834; this facilitated and standardised the exchange of goods within a national economic area. The following year saw the opening of the first German railway line, which was the first section of a network which by 1848 covered more than 3,000 miles. At the political level, the failed Revolution of 1848 sparked a (short-lived) wave of nationalism, with the Liberal movement at the forefront. In 1859, moreover, the challenge to Austrian supremacy in Italy mounted by France (which had entered an alliance with the kingdom of Piedmont-Sardiania) provoked nationalistic reactions in Germany, which culminated in celebrations of the 100th anniversary of Friedrich Schiller's birth 'throughout the German-speaking regions'.[68] Another conflict with international repercussions was that between Prussia and Denmark over the Duchy of Schleswig in 1863/64, and had a similar effect. Finally, Prussia's victory over Austria was the ultimate blow to the Greater-German conception of national unity. After its defeat by Prussia in 1866, the

leading power of the Austro-Hungarian Empire found herself effectively excluded from a Prussia-dominated Germany. Austria's exclusion also led to a dramatic shift in the religious balance within Germany, which was now roughly two-thirds Protestant and one-third Catholic.

However, if these events were significant, the developments of 1870/71 – the German-Franco war and the subsequent national unification – marked a watershed in the process of nation formation. Prussia, the largest and most powerful among the German states and the driving force behind unification, emerged as the major player in the newly founded German nation-state. She accounted for roughly sixty per cent of the Second Empire's territory and population, and supplied by far the largest army of all the member states. Three-fifths of the civil servants who constituted the new bureaucracy were Prussian. The Prussian King, William I, became the Emperor of Germany, and Prussia's First Minister, Bismarck, became German Chancellor.[69]

While the war against France (which broke out in July 1870 and ended in January 1871) and national unification both had the effect of strengthening Prussia at the expense of Austria, they also provided a boost to popular German nationalism. The war was particularly important in this regard. Nationalism, as Breuilly is right to argue, was not the force that created the German state of 1871. Yet his related assertion that 'enthusiasm for a war against a powerful foreign state ... was not the same thing as positive national support for the new Prussian-German state'[70] somehow misses the point. Neither the small-German state nor Prussia emerged as the focus of this popular nationalism, although the latter had gained in prestige due to her decisive role in bringing about unification. Instead, it was the 'German nation' that was the frame of reference. Compared to the state, it was abstract enough and had sufficiently emotive associations to capture the minds and hearts of Germans from a range of social, religious and political backgrounds; and unlike 'Prussia', its capacity to mobilise troops extended far beyond the northern German states. It is worth noting, for example, that the armies of the southern states, many of which had supported France in previous confrontations, in 1870/71 'fought on the battlefields as enthusiastically as the Prussians'.[71] Bavaria and Baden had mobilised on July 16, 1870, and Württemberg

followed suit the next day. The speed and determination that characterised the process of mobilisation owed more to public opinion than to a sabre-rattling elite. Schulze therefore concludes:

> The fever pitch of patriotism in both public and press placed such pressure on southern German governments that their cabinets could see no viable path other than joining the North German Confederation, on whatever terms might be offered. German unification by no means came about solely on orders from above, from the ruling princes and their governments, but also as a result of clamor from below, from the forces of the liberal, middle-class national movement, and the result was accordingly not a Great Prussia but a German Empire.[72]

Most significantly, however, the war further reinforced the central organising principle of German nationalism, namely the antagonism with France. The war of 1870/71 popularised a perception of France as the 'incarnation of an existential threat to the nation-state of Germany'.[73] In contrast to the war of 1866 against Austria, which had been opposed by the Catholic population and (at least initially) a considerable segment of the National Liberals, the war against France was widely perceived as a national war. As Confino writes: 'Whereas in 1866 opponents of *Kleindeutschland* blamed the war on Prussia, in 1871 all, including democrats and *Grossdeutsche,* were convinced that France bore the responsibility for the conflict.'[74] An editorial that appeared in the *Augsburger Zeitung* on July 20, 1870 reached the following conclusion: 'The whole people has turned against France with an unanimity that exceeds all our expectations. This applies even to Württemberg and Bavaria, which are renown to be Prussia's fiercest opponents.'[75]

In various newspaper reports, a connection was made between the Wars of Liberation against Napoleon and the new war against France. The *Deutsche Kriegs-Zeitung,* for example, wrote upon the outbreak of the war: 'There is no more unmistakable testimony to the clear conscience of the German people in this war than the unanimity and enthusiasm with which they took up the holy legacy of the Wars of Liberation.'[76] And on September 6, 1870 (by which time the strategic superiority of the

Prussian-led troops had become evident), a statement in the *Vossische Zeitung* succinctly exemplified the process of nationalisation of the hostilities: 'The Germann people is fighting a war against the French people, not against a different constitution.'[77]

In his assessment of the events, Carr goes so far as to argue that 'the wave of anti-French feeling that swept through the cities and towns of South Germany' left the governments no choice other than mobilisation.[78] On August 2, 1870, for example, The *Frankfurter Zeitung* enthused: 'Swabians and Prussians hand in hand;/ North and South one army! / What is the Germans' Fatherland, – / No longer do we ask ourselves that question!'[79] Even in Württemberg, a state that had fought against Prussia in previous wars, the push for national unification had considerable force. When a *Landtag* election was called in December 1870 (after the battle of Sedan in September 1870 and before the declaration of the Empire in January 1871), the *Deutsche Partei,* having campaigned in favour of national unity, made massive gains. By contrast, the Democrats, who had shown themselves to be lukewarm about the prospect of a Prussian-dominated Germany, suffered large-scale losses.[80]

Plate 7-2: Anton von Werner, *Kaiserproklamation in Versailles* (1885), Oil on Canvas, Friedrichsruh, Bismarck-Museum.

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The public controversy over the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine points in the same direction. Local newspapers, particularly in the southern states, started calling for the annexation of the two provinces after the German victory at Sedan. When, shortly after unification, a few German politicians began to champion the idea of a referendum as a way of resolving the issue, a public outcry ensued; and when the first representative of Alsace-Lorraine made the same proposal in the Reichstag in 1874, there was uproar among the other members of parliament. In the debate that followed, many justified the annexation of Alsace and Lorraine on the grounds that the population of both provinces was ethnically German. As Jeismann comments: 'There was hardly a newspaper that did not run a series of editorials aimed at proving that, on historical, cultural and political grounds, the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine belonged to the German nation.'[81]

The Creation of New Rituals: Sedan Day and the Military Parades

In addition to reinforcing the anti-French antagonism, the events of 1870/71 brought into existence a number of new national symbols and rituals. Unlike in Switzerland, therefore, where an existing repertoire of myths and symbols retained its basic structure despite changes in interpretation, Germany witnessed the emergence of new symbols and rituals. In this regard, two developments deserve pride of place: first, the evolution of military rituals in the immediate aftermath of the war of 1870/71; and, second (and also inspired by war and unification), the emergence of the cult of Bismarck in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Having become a means of honouring important foreign visitors in the mid-eighteenth century, military parades were further promoted in the latter half of the century. Two kinds of parades became significant foci of national self-assertion in the wake of unification: those in honour of the Prussian King (*Kaiserparaden*), and those in commemoration of the battle of Sedan of 1870, the so-called *Sedantage*. Between 1873 and 1914, these latter celebrations were held annually throughout the Second Empire. They followed a standard pattern: tributes to the fallen soldiers at the foot of war

monuments (which were often unveiled on these occasions) were followed by speeches by local veterans.[82] As Allon Confino has shown in his recent study of Württemberg, the Sedan Day commemorations were truly popular national festivals. The significance of this ritual, according to Confino, lay in the fact that 'Sedan Day ... was tied with the unification and with the nation-state, and had no meaning outside of it. So, for better or for worse, contemporaries identified Sedan Day with the new era that began in 1871.'[83] Although Wilhelm I. refused to make Sedan Day an official national holiday, there was a strong commitment to the celebrations within the Protestant, liberal-minded sections of the German bourgeoisie.

Of even greater importance than Sedan Day (which was never free of controversy because of its close associations with the Liberal – and hence overwhelmingly Protestant – national movement)[84] were the parades in honour of the German King, the *Kaiserparaden,* which were held annualy from 1876 onwards. As mass national rituals, they rapidly grew in importance after the *levée en masse* had been introduced in Germany in the second half of the nineteenth century, although in Berlin and Potsdam they retained their elitist character until the First World War.[85] The parades on the *Tempelhofer Feld* in Berlin, for instance, were confined to members of the royal family and their guests – usually high-ranking military personnel and members of the diplomatic service. In the provinces, however, the parades were highly popular affairs. Here private associations rather than a close circle of military and bureaucratic elites were responsible for organising the events, with the numerous veterans' associations, the *Kriegervereine,* playing a particularly significant part.[86]

In terms of their capacity to nationalise the public sphere, the *Kaiserparaden* were probably more instrumental than any other public ritual. As they evolved over the years following their inception in the 1870s, a number of new practices were added to the basic ritual. First, the song *Heil Dir im Siegerkranz* was played at the outset, and soon emerged as Germany's (unofficial) national anthem. Second, from 1897 onwards the non-Prussian regiments wore a *Reichskokarde* of white, red and gold in addition to their regional emblems. Third, from the early 1880s German schools were closed for the day of the parades, as were those in Prussia from 1903.[87]

The fact that the *Kaiserparaden* fused small-German militarism with monarchical symbolism undoubtedly enhanced their popular appeal, reflecting the significance of the slogan *Für Kaiser und Reich* ('for King and Empire') as an ingredient of post-unification nationalism.[88] Militarism and monarchism had different meanings for different sections of the public, but the parades were able to reconcile both in a seemingly harmonious whole. The Liberal national movement had traditionally been sceptical of the monarchy, but tended to welcome militarism as a symbol of national unity and strength. Monarchical symbolism, on the other hand, helped to make a Prussian-dominated German nation-state acceptable to Catholics and to those who would have favoured a (Greater-German) solution including Austria.

What is more, monarchical symbolism supplied an emotive dimension to nationhood that the constitution of the Second Empire could not. 'I am absolutely convinced', declared a prominent member of the Catholic Centre Party in 1871, 'that the [German] population welcomes the linkage of *Kaiser und Reich* because of memories of old times that have not vanished'. He continued in justification of this assertion: 'The modern state is a very recent construction ... With its dry emphasis on the constitution of the German Empire it does not yet engender much popular enthusiasm.'[89] In 1907, the constitutional expert Paul Laband argued along similar lines when he admitted that 'the people cheer the *Kaiser* and devote more attention to him than a *Bundespräsident* could ever expect'.[90]

A New Myth of German Nationhood: The Heroic Bismarck

Of all the national symbols produced by the events surrounding German unification, the legend created around the German Chancellor Bismarck was perhaps the most resonant one. The process whereby (the politically controversial) Bismarck was made the subject of a national myth began in his own lifetime, in the late 1870s and 1880s. Gaining in influence after his removal from office in 1890, it reached the peak of its popularity after his death in 1898.[91] The term 'Bismarck era' was not a creation of twentieth century historians, but was coined by contemporaries for the period 1871 to 1890.[92]

Between 1898 and 1914, more than five hundred projects for honouring Bismarck's memory were initiated, half of which were eventually realised. His memory was kept alive through public monuments and festivals, stamps and postcards, as well as painting and literature.[93] The most extensive Bismarck hagiography (entitled *Bismarck-Denkmal für das deutsche Volk*) rapidly sold 100,000 copies when it first appeared in 1896; a second edition of 120,000 copies was published in 1915.[94] Various newspaper articles and public speeches provide evidence that Bismarck was widely seen as the very incarnation of German nationhood. Shortly after his death in 1898, the German student movement called for the erection of Bismarck towers. The students declared that the 'massive stones shall bear no name' because 'every child will be able to understand the message'.[95]

The German public's veneration for Bismarck did not go unnoticed by astute commentators. Max Weber, for example, attributed Bismarck's elevation to the status of a national hero to the upper bourgeoisie's 'longing for a new Caesar' who would serve to inhibit socio-political reform and upward mobility.[96] It may well be the case that Bismarck's departure from the political stage put conservative-minded groups into something of a quandary, and that this provided ideal conditions for the emergence of a Bismarck cult. It was not the upper bourgeoisie, however, who bore the main responsibility for Bismarck's increased symbolic significance. It was the petit-bourgeoisie and the students who spearheaded the Bismarck movement and demanded his immortalisation in monuments, on postcards and stamps, and in print.

The primary reason for their worship of Bismarck, it seems, was the fact that the ex-Chancellor was widely regarded as the chief architect of German unification. Given his pivotal role in the events that prepared the ground for unification, such considerations must have made intuitive sense to the bulk of the German public at the time. The wars against France, together with the unification of 1871, were 'the only national experiences which the citizens of the new Empire had in common, given that all earlier conceptions of Germany and German unification were in one way or another "Great German"'.[97] Bismarck had had a decisive impact on both – which was enough to make him a national hero.[98]

Conclusion

'The cultural shreds and patches used by nationalism are often arbitrary historical inventions. Any old shred and patch would have served as well.'[99] Ernest Gellner was undoubtedly right in rejecting the notion that nations were like biological organisms: nations don't have navels. Yet the findings of this chapter suggest that his other dictum – namely, that 'any old shred and patch would have served as well' when it comes to modern nation formation, and that all is dependent on the language-based high cultures of industrialised societies – is unconvincing. The nature of ethno-symbolic antecedents (i.e. their structure and resonance) in part determines the process of nation formation and shapes the construction of modern national identities. If we consider modern nation formation in terms of a continuum between two ideal types – from the situation where the past shapes the present to where the present determines the past – then the Swiss model is closer to the first, and the German closer to the second.

In modern Switzerland, an ethno-symbolic memory that had taken shape over several centuries imposed cultural constraints on the construction of national identity throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. Although significant events and developments (the civil war of 1847, the threat of ethno-linguistic nationalism from the 1870s, and the challenge to the late medieval myths posed by the critical historians) helped to promote national identity and added some new elements to the basic repertoire (i.e., polyethnic exceptionalism and Alpine determinism), the core myths were of primary importance in providing a frame of reference that cross-cut social and cultural boundaries. Modern Swiss nationalism is thus the result of the interplay between ethno-symbolic memory and historical events.

The German case suggests that where a pre-modern ethno-symbolic memory is fragmented and thus of limited popular appeal, the scope for the invention nationhood (or, rather, its constitutive symbols and narratives) is considerably enhanced. Such a scenario therefore approximates Hobsbawm's ideal-type of an invented national tradition. Nevertheless, such inventions will only resonate if they grow out of fundamental contemporary experiences that affect the larger part of a given population.

The German example suggests that drastic historical events – particularly wars followed by territorial occupation – can either literally create myth-symbol complexes or structure and popularise a fragmented ethno-symbolic memory, thus presenting an alternative pattern to the more developmental path to modern nation formation represented, for example, by Switzerland and England.

In nineteenth-century Germany, the opposition to France became the motor of national identity. On the one hand, the collective experiences of French occupation, the Wars of Liberation, and the Franco-German war of 1870/71 forged the symbolic boundary that structured German nationhood along anti-French lines. On the other hand, these experiences created a new repertoire of national rituals, symbols and myths that became the hallmarks of German identity: Sedan Day, the *Kaiserparaden*, and the Bismarck myth. The constitutive elements of German ethno-symbolic memory prior to 1800 – the narrative of the *Kulturnation* and the Arminius myth – entered the fabric of national identity as symbolic representations of Germanness, but did not play a decisive role. In short, nineteenth-Century German nationalism was the product of the wars against France.

Notes

[1] Friedrich (1966).

[2] Gellner (1996: 366-7).

[3] On the reproduction of cultural communities through ritual, see Kertzer (1988). The role of myths, symbols and rituals in national discourse is discussed in Schöpflin (1997).

[4] On the impact of Schiller's play, see Weishaupt (1992: 23).

[5] Oechsli (1889: 3).

[6] The new methodological principles introduced by the German historian Leopold von Ranke asserted that documents must be given preference over orally transmitted myths and narratives. According to Ranke, moreover, historians should confine themselves to 'primary sources'. The more immediate these sources were, the more potential they had for historical investigations. On the Rankean historiographical revolution and its consequences for historical analysis, see Evans (1997: ch. 1).

[7] Oechsli (1889: 3).

[8] It was not until the 1960s that these parameters would be called into question, resulting in recurrent public controversies over Switzerland's national origins. This is discussed in Zimmer (forthcoming).

[9] Quoted from Sieber (1991: 107-8).

[10] Quoted from Im Hof (1991: 234).

[11] Quoted from Helbling (1994: 196).

[12] *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. July 5, 1886.

[13] *Politisches Jahrbuch der Schweizerischen Eidgenossenschaft* (1891, vol. 6: 658).

[14] Hilty (1891: 3).

[15] The scholar who initiated this tradition was Helmut Plessner with his *Versätete Nation* ('The Belated Nation'). These works belong to the paradigm commonly referred to as the *Sonderweg* thesis. In the attempt to explain the Nazi dictatorship and its excesses, the proponents of the *Sonderweg* thesis have portrayed Germany's development in terms of its divergence from the western model of liberal democracy and political nationhood. A classical statement of this view can be found in Wehler (1985). For a 'revisionist' critique of this line of reasoning, see Eley (1980).

[16] James (1989: 10). For a similar view, see Schieder (1991). Brubaker's (1992) recent comparative account of German nationhood is close in spirit to the *Sonderweg* argument.

[17] This applies in particular to Greenfeld (1992), Mosse (1964), and Kedourie (1993). Brubaker combines a cultural with a political-institutional analysis, but his basic conclusion is the same: namely, that in Germany, as opposed to France, an ethno-cultural understanding of nationality prevailed. Still operating within a cultural paradigm but drawing on the communications theory influenced by Karl W. Deutsch, some have focused more on the role of voluntary associations, periodicals and newspapers in forging nation-centred discourse as a precondition of national integration. See, for example, Katzenstein (1976); Dann (1984); Düding (1984).

[18] Breuilly (1992: 22). Sheehan (1992) is another proponent of this view.

[19] Breuilly (1993a: 129-32).

[20] Breuilly (1992: 23).

[21] Reynolds (1984: 236).

[22] James (1991).

[23] Anderson (1979): 199.

[24] Bonney (1991: 200-203).

[25] Nipperdey (1986: 61-65); Blackbourn (1997: prologue).

[26] Quoted from Dann (1993: 39).

[27] Quoted from Johnston (1990: 12).

[28] Mann (1993: 236).

[29] Greenfeld (1992: 287)

[30] Many of the most significant works on modern German nationalism have paid scant attention to the time before 1800. Among those that have looked at pre-nineteenth century history, many have emphasised the continuity between Romantic thought and the radical volkish movement that became significant from the 1890s onwards (see Mosse 1964 and Greenfeld 1992). The question of the extent to which cultural antecedents have furnished the public construction of German nationhood during the nineteenth century has hardly been addressed. For a notable exception, see Hardtwig (1994).

[31] The frequent claim that German *Kultur* and German *Volk* were concepts invented in the late eighteenth century by Johann Georg Hammann and his most gifted student, Johann Gottfried Herder, is untenable. Herder's originality lies in the fact that he supplied these concepts with an unprecedented degree of philosophical sophistication. On the role of civic humanists in fusing the classical concept of the citizen republic with the ideal of ethno-cultural homogeneity, see McNeill (1988).

[32] Schulze (1994: 143-144).

[33] Johnston (1990: 4).

[34] See Hardtwig (1994: 38-39).

[35] Giesen (1993: 120).

[36] Elias (1989: 7-10).

[37] According to Greenfeld (1992: 289), remarkably few members of the German bourgeoisie were able to enter the ranks of the nobility in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The fact that the German nobility was much less affluent than its English or French counterpart may partially explain its marked propensity to shut the door against outsiders and would-be newcomers.

[38] Elias (1989: introduction).

[39] In terms of students at German universities during the eighteenth century, for example, the members of the educated middle classes outnumbered the nobility by ten to one, while the latter remained highly influential and heavily over-represented within the civil service. See Greenfeld (1992: 293-302).

[40] Breuilly (1993a: 107).

[41] Hardtwig (1994: 38-40).

[42] Schulze (1994: 142-143).

[43] Dörner (1995: 128-129).

[44] Dörner (1995).

[45] Dörner (1995: 130); Münkler and Grünberg (1994: 228-231).

[46] Dörner (1995: 134); Titzmann (1991: 121).

[47] See Flacke (1998).

[48] Blackbourn (1997: 50-52).

[49] Quoted from Johnston (1990: 67).

[50] Blackbourn (1997: 57).

[51] Mann (1993: 241).

[52] Created by Napoleon in 1806, the Confederation of the Rhine was, in the words of Sheehan (1992: 49), 'a French-sponsored league that replaced the old Empire'. It was mainly made up of the *Mittelstaaten*, the medium-sized states of south-western Germany, with Baden, Bavaria, Württemberg being its most important members.

[53] Johnston (1990: 209, 240).

[54] Some authors, such as Schulze (1991) and Sheehan (1992), have emphasised the modernising effects of French occupation. No doubt there were such effects, particularly in the sixteen principalities that came to form the *Rheinbund* in 1806 (and especially in Württemberg, Bavaria, and Baden). However, the negative consequences of occupation (such as food shortages or the humiliation of submitting to foreign rulers) fuelled popular nationalist resentment against the occupiers. Those Germans that perceived French rule predominantly in terms of its capacity to modernise outmoded German institutions therefore made up a tiny minority.

[55] Mann (1993: 241). For in-depth analyses of anti-French rhetoric during the Napoleonic wars, see particularly the works by Johnston (1990) and Jeismann (1992).

[56] James (1989: 18).

[57] According to Dörner (1995: 128), an analysis of folk songs and patriotic pamphlets suggests that the myth of Arminius experienced a boost during and in the immediate aftermath of the wars. Kleist's drama *Hermannsschlacht* appeared in 1821 and had several editions, but it was not until the 1860s that it became a stage success. On the intensification of cultural nationalism in the wake of the liberation wars, see also Dann (1994).

[58] Quoted from James (1989: 43). Fichte's conversion is also discussed in Greenfeld (1992: 363).

[59] Quoted from Jeismann (1992: 89).

[60] Quoted from Schulze (1998: 105).

[61] Schulze (1998: 106).

[62] As George Mosse commented on the world-wide impact of French republican ceremonies and festivals (1991: 14): 'The symbols would change, the concept of a sacred cult become more elaborate, but the example of the revolution was to provide a continuous inspiration.'

[63] See, for example, Düding (1988: 79-85). The most important German national monument that was built in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Walhalla, was based on an idea that emerged during French occupation. It was Crown Prince Ludwig of Bavaria (i.e. a representative of a collaborator state) who, in 1807, demanded that a 'hall of fame be built in honour of Germany's great thinkers'. See Nipperdey (1976: 148). The monument, which was 60 yards high and 136 yards long, represented the German aspiration for national unity. Both inside and outside the monument a strong 'Teutonic note predominated' (Mosse 1991: 54): famous and patriotic Germans and Germanic gods and the symbols of their worship filled the monument's interior, while Hermann the Cheruskan symbolised the Battle of the Teutoburger Forest.

[64] James (1989: 18).

[65] Hobsbawm (1983b: 278).

[66] Mosse (1991: 128).

[67] These groups and their role are discussed in Mosse (1991); Brandt (1988); Förster (1988).

[68] Schulze (1998: 137).

[69] Schulze (1998: 155-57). For the political and territorial consequences of national unification, see Blackbourn (1997: 256; 261; 266), and Schulze (1998: ch. 7). For a comprehensive account of the Second German Empire (1871-1914), see Wehler (1995: part VI).

[70] Breuilly (1993: 112).

[71] Carr (1991: 206).

[72] Schulze (1998: 145).

[73] Wehler (1995: 953).

[74] Confino (1997: 21).

[75] Quoted from Jeismann (1992: 245).

[76] Quoted from Jeismann (1992: 247).

[77] Jeismann (1992: 275).

[78] Carr (1991: 206).

[79] Quoted from Jeismann (1992: 245).

[80] Confino (1997: 21).

[81] Jeismann (1992: 259). The bulk of the population of Alsace-Lorraine, while German-speaking, maintained their loyalty to France. According to Blackbourn (1997: 260), by the end of 1872, 200,000 residents of Alsace-Lorraine had left the provinces for metropolitan France. For further evidence of the war's popular appeal, see also Craig (1981: 30-31). The widespread resistance to proposals to grant the population of annexed Alsace-Lorraine the right to self-determination is discussed in Schieder (1991: 202).

[82] Confino (1997: 43).

[83] Confino (1997: 29-30).

[84] Based on his case study of Württemberg, Confino (1997: ch. 4) concludes that Sedan Day was a highly partisan rather than a national festival. Its major supporters, the National Liberal Party and their followers, were active supporters of the *Kulturkampf*. One might add, however, that even if the German Catholics avoided the festival, it remained an important national event for large segments of the German population.

[85] Vogel (1997: 32-33).

[86] The parade that took place in Leipzig in 1876, for example, attracted more than 50,000 onlookers. See Vogel (1997: 68-69; 64).

[87] Vogel (1997: 58; 64; 70-76). Allied to the nationalisation of military ritual in the wake of 1870/71 was a boom in the construction of monarchical monuments. Although the pattern varied from region to region in terms of both scale and symbolic accentuation, it affected most areas of the German Empire in the last third of the nineteenth century. Especially instructive in this regard is the transformation of monarchical symbolism from an expression of particularism and *Vielstaaterei* into a popular embodiment of German national identity. See Nipperdey (1976: 141-142).

[88] Wehler (1995: 948).

[89] Quoted from Hardtwig (1981: 57).

[90] Quoted from Schieder (1991: 215).

[91] On the Bismarck myth, see especially Hedinger (1981). Machthan (1994: 7) argues that Bismarck was the most celebrated political leader in Europe between 1895 and 1933. Drawing on Max Weber's work, Wehler (1995: 368-76) convincingly describes Bismarck as a charismatic leader. Eley (1980: 60) shows how in the 1890s the figure of Bismarck became a focal point of radical nationalist groups which opposed Chancellor Caprivi's relatively conciliatory approach to the ' Polish question'.

[92] Wehler (1995: 849).

[93] The boom in the building of Bismarck monuments is well-documented. According to Schiffer (1994: 95), 166 Bismarck monuments had been erected all over Germany by 1903. Hardtwig (1981: 62) asserts that by 1914 this number had risen to more than 500. The driving force behind this boom in the construction of Bismarck statues, towers, pillars and other kinds of monuments was the more than 300 regional Bismarck societies, in which the petit bourgeoisie and university students played a major part. On the elevation of Bismarck to a symbol of national heroism, see also Nipperdey (1976: 166-67), Wehler (1995: 849-54), and Mosse (1991: 36-7).

[94] Machthan (1994: 31).

[95] Quoted from Hardtwig (1981: 67-8). See also Parr (1992), and (Mosse 1991: 37).

[96] Weber quoted from Hardtwig (1981: 58).

[97] Hobsbawm (1983b: 276).

[98] Hedinger (1981: 288). This is not to say that Bismarck had not been controversial. Far from it. His Prussian power politics was controversial especially in the southern states, which historically had viewed Prussia's rise with suspicion, and among Catholics, who could not forget that he had been in the vanguard of the *Kulturkampf*. However, his role in bringing about German unity provided him with a degree of moral authority that was acknowledged beyond Protestant-dominated northern Germany.

[99] Gellner (1983: 56).

CHAPTER EIGHT

In Search of Authentic Nationhood: Nature and National Identity in Switzerland, the United States, and Canada

The pursuits labelled 'identity politics' ... involve seeking
recognition, legitimacy (and sometimes power), not only
expression or autonomy ... This is even so for the identity of
nations, which normally involves a rhetoric of cultural difference
yet is in large part a claim to equivalent standing with other nations –
i.e. to be the same sort of thing that they are.

Craig Calhoun[1]

The myth of civic exceptionalism

In this final chapter, I will examine the supposition that some nationalisms can do without, or almost without, organic notions of community. That they can is the central claim advanced by the proponents of civic exceptionalism, a perspective still enjoying much currency both in scholarly and lay circles.

According to the thesis of civic exceptionalism, polyethnic nation-states like Switzerland or immigrant settler societies like the United States, Canada, and Australia are exceptions to the general 'rules' of nationalism and nation-formation. As mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, a number of influential historians and social scientists, ranging from Friederich Meinecke and Hans Kohn to John Plamenatz and Rogers Brubaker, have described such nations as 'civic' or 'political', hence setting them apart from their 'ethnic' counterparts.

Whatever the terminological and substantive differences in the views of these scholars, they are agreed that a basic distinction between two types of nations can, and indeed, should, be drawn. Civic nations, they maintain, derive their legitimacy and internal cohesion from their members' voluntary subscription to a set of political

principles and institutions. In sharp contrast, ethnic nations are founded on a sense of self-identity determined by 'natural' factors such as language or ethnic descent. Consequently, civic nationhood is the outcome of deliberate human commitment, while its ethnic counterpart is determined by forces lying beyond the reach of the individual citizen. Political theorist Bernard Yack has juxtaposed the two conceptions in a critical analysis:

> The myth of the *ethnic* nation suggests that you have no choice at all in the making of your national identity: you are your cultural inheritance and nothing else. The myth of the *civic* nation, in contrast, suggests that your national identity is nothing but your choice: you are the political principles you share with other like-minded individuals.[2]

European countries usually subsumed under the civic label include England, France, Holland, and Switzerland. Outside Europe, the New World societies of Canada, the United States, and Australia tend to be placed in the same category. However, in only a few of these societies has the belief in civic exceptionalism become an essential element of national identity. Its significance for the general population has been greatest in polyethnic nation-states with little ethnic conflict, such as Switzerland, and in immigrant settler societies, such as the United States and Canada.

In Switzerland, the belief in civic exceptionalism was expounded with an almost missionary zeal during certain periods of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in particular. The same is true for the United States of the post-revolutionary era and (to a lesser extent) for post-unification Canada. In all these societies, the narrative of civic exceptionalism has retained some of its appeal to the present day, even within scholarly discourse. Only recently, for instance, Swiss historian Urs Altermatt has argued that Switzerland belongs to a category of nations 'which derive their identity solely from the shared experiences of a political community'.[3] In an even more uncompromising fashion than his Swiss colleague, the eminent American political scientist Seymour Martin Lipset has embraced this view in his *American Exceptionalism* (published 1995). In keeping with G. K. Chesterton's statement of 1922 that 'America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed', Lipset has maintained that American

identity was (and still is) based on five essential values: liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism, and laissez faire. This, he tells us, sets the US apart from Europe, where nationality is mostly associated not with a set of values but with a community of history and birth. To quote directly from Lipset's work: 'Being American ... is an ideological commitment. It is not a matter of birth. Those who reject American values are un-American.'[4]

Critiques of civic exceptionalism

Claims of civic exceptionalism, however, have come under growing scrutiny in recent years, with the debate about the relationship between civic and ethnic nationhood now being hotly discussed issues among students of nationalism. For political theorist Bernard Yack, for example, the concept of civic nationhood is rooted in one of Liberalism's central creeds:

> The myth of the civic nation reflects one strategy that liberals have pursued in order to salvage their hopes for modern politics ... The idea of the civic nation defends the Enlightenment's liberal legacy by employing the very concept – that of the political community as a voluntary association – whose plausibility has been undermined by the success of nationalism.[5]

In a particularly trenchant essay, Nicholas Xenos considers the myth of American exceptionalism championed by Lipset and others. By examining a number of well-known speeches by Abraham Lincoln, he is able to show that this President, closely associated as he was with the creed of civic exceptionalism, in fact frequently employed the language of classical nationalism. In some of his most famous speeches, Lincoln invoked common ancestry and blood ties as manifestations of a common American heritage, in endeavouring to foster an image of the 'natural' American family.[6]

Whatever the merits of the recent scholarly debate about civic and ethnic nationalism, most of its participants, including those questioning the existence of civic nations, have largely confined themselves to theory. There is a conspicuous shortage of sustained empirical investigations into the construction of national identity in polyethnic nation-states.

This chapter provides an analysis of the highly significant role played by landscape symbolism in the national discourse of Switzerland, the US and Canada. The purpose of this is not simply to reconstruct the iconography of landscape discourse in these three societies (although this will be an indispensable part of the discussion). Rather, my aim is to use the comparative analysis to critique the notion of civic exceptionalism. Applying the analytical framework developed in the Introduction, I attribute the significance of naturalism in the national discourse of polyethnic societies to a widely perceived need to forge an organic definition of nationhood. Only by demonstrating that their nations are rooted in the organic (i.e. natural) world can the members of these societies do justice to the twin criteria for national authenticity set by classical nationalism: being both distinctive and natural communities.

The first criterion – distinctiveness – the members of these societies can meet satisfactorily by claiming that 'their' nations are civic exceptions to the general rule of nationalism. Thus the belief in civic exceptionalism is part and parcel of the self-image of polyethnic societies (as in Switzerland: see chapters 3 – 6); having been elaborated and constantly reiterated by intellectuals and politicians, the belief in civic exceptionalism has in these countries acquired the status of a popular (and scholarly) credo.

Yet the claim to distinctiveness in itself does not suffice, since, in a very fundamental sense, nation formation adheres to what Smith has designated a 'pattern of similarity-cum-dissimilarity'.[7] Hence, to meet the second criterion – being a natural community – the nation must be shown to be organically rooted. Given that the three societies under examination here 'suffer' (from the viewpoint of the adherents of

classical nationalism) from a lack of ethno-cultural homogeneity (i.e. Switzerland and Canada) and/or a pre-modern past (i.e. the US and Canada), the natural environment becomes a vital symbolic resource for the construction of national identity. (By contrast, the other European nation-states usually subsumed under the label 'civic nation' – England, Holland and France – fulfil both of these criteria: they are 'old' in the sense of possessing a pre-modern past, and are also monolingual and thus relatively 'homogeneous' in cultural terms. That they are able to do justice to nationalism's twin criteria of authenticity, I suspect, largely explains why the claim to civic exceptionalism has not evolved into a popular credo in these societies.)

Of course, by arguing that their nations are determined by a specific natural environment – the Alps in Switzerland, the North in Canada, and the West in the US – the referring to nature also served to buttress the claim of national distinctiveness. For what the Swiss, the Canadians, and the Americans asserted was that 'their' nature had produced an authentic and distinct 'national character'. Yet the fundamental paradox that typifies the parallel use of civic exceptionalism and naturalistic nationalism remains: the claim of civic exceptionalism allowed these nations to meet the 'distinctive' criterion of nationhood; but to meet the 'natural' criterion they had, to some extent, to undermine the very notion of civic exceptionalism. Yet, in view of what was at stake at the time, such paradoxes and contradictions, while they may strike the scholarly observer who cares about logical consistency, did apparently not matter too much to those directly involved. Their principal task was to construct a national identity that was both salient domestically and secure international recognition for their polities.

This chapter comprises six sections. I first discuss the historical origins of intellectual thought about the relationship between nature and cultural communities. I then distinguish between two ideal-typical ways of linking nature and nationhood and show their relevance in different societies. The following three sections present case studies on how national identity was naturalised in Switzerland, the United States and Canada, respectively. I conclude with a brief discussion of the role of geographical national identity in these three societies in the post-war era.

Thinking about geography and national character in history

Attempts to establish meaningful links between nature and culture communities are not confined to the modern era. Ever since antiquity, various groups or 'peoples' have turned to 'their' natural environment as a source of inspiration and collective identification. It was probably in the Hellenistic world that some of these themes were first developed in a more or less rigorous manner. These have remained at the heart of natural discourse ever since: the juxtaposition of rural and urban life, as well as the idea that certain physical environments might be more favourable to the emergence of high civilisations than others, provide examples of such themes. Some Greek dramatists in particular, such as Aeschylus and Aristophanes, or the historian Herodotus, referred in their writings to climatic factors to account for cultural differences. These Greek precedents, in their turn, exerted considerable influence on Roman writers. This became apparent, for example, when Tacitus, in the first century AD, described the Germanic tribes as rude and primitive and mentioned how closely tied they were to the Teutonic woods to support his claim.[8]

Yet it is only in the sixteenth century, that is, during a period marked not only by the discovery of non-European cultures but also by territorial consolidation and the rise of national consciousness in some European countries, that we witness a fairly widespread change in perception from 'nature' as a more general idea to the more specific notion of a 'landscape'.[9] A statement of Stefano Guazzo, dating from 1574, in which the author tries to explain alleged national differences by referring to a mixture of climatic and environmental factors marks this transitional stage: 'There is no help for it, but you must ... think that every nation, land and country, by the nature of the place, the climate of the heaven, and the influence of the stars has certain virtues and certain vices which are proper, natural, and perpetual.'[10]

Overall, however, neither geographical determinism nor cultural voluntarism prevailed in the works of early modern thinkers. Rather, the two conceptualisations of the relationship between nature and cultural activity made for a dualistic, and sometimes conflicting dialogue. Alongside the argument that nature in general, and

geography in particular, delimited the scope open for voluntary human action,[11] there existed at the same time the belief that human beings should interfere in nature for the sake of culture. In fact, this latter notion figured prominently in the theories of a great many outstanding thinkers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (including Machiavelli, Botero, Charron, and Milton). In its broad form, this belief asserted that a people's degree of civilisation found its clearest expression in its ability to cultivate nature. Perhaps Giovanni Botero best encapsulated this classical ideal in his *Reason of State* (1589): 'Nature gives a form to the raw materials and human industry imposes upon this natural composition an infinite variety of artificial forms; thus nature is to the craftsman what raw material is to the natural agent.'[12]

More systematic efforts to illuminate the link between particular natural environments and alleged national characteristics were to follow in the eighteenth century, especially in the works of Montesqiueu (1689-1755), Rousseau (1712-78), and Herder (1744-1803). As was the case with their precursors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the works of many of these authors reveal, although to varying degree, a tension between the notions of geographical determinism and human voluntarism; between an emphasis on humankind being a product of geography on the one hand, and on its role as a geographical agent capable of cultivating nature on the other. For Herder, for instance, as he cogently expressed in his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784-1791), geography was merely one among several important factors affecting the course of cultural development and must take its place alongside 'the circumstances and occasions of the times, and the native or generated character of the people'.[13] And even in the work of Montesquieu, rightly held to be the most influential proponent of geographical determinism of the eighteenth century, things are less clear-cut upon closer inspection. At one point in his *L'Esprit des Lois,* for instance, he clearly adheres to the argument of a multiple causes without conceiving of climatic factors as determinative in the last instance: 'Mankind are influenced by various causes: by the climate, by the religion, by the laws, by the maxims of government, by precedents, morals, and customs; whence is formed the general spirit of nations.'[14]

As the foregoing indicates, the philosophical and moral interest in the natural environment was not constant over time. It commonly gained in intensity at times in which profound changes in the broad cognitive and moral frameworks of orientation provided fertile ground for the emergence of new conceptualisations of the relationship between nature and culture. This is true of the Hellenistic era, whose authors created the notion of an idyllic place while they were exposed to the phenomenon of urbanisation in the metropoles they lived.[15] It also applies to the Renaissance period, when a more critical view of religious affairs and the emergence of new modes of scientific and moral thinking provoked a reconsideration of humanity's position vis à vis its natural environment. And it surely holds true for the latter half of the eighteenth century. In a world in which traditional forms of religious attachment and social solidarity were declining at a disquieting speed, geography and the natural environment at least seemed to offer some degree of stability, calm, and purity.

It was in this context that landscape became critical as a source of social orientation. Commenting on the significant rise of landscape art at the end of the eighteenth century, the German painter, Philip Otto Runge exhorted: 'We stand at the brink of all the religions which sprang up out of the Catholic one, the abstractions perish, everything is lighter and more insubstantial than before, everything presses toward landscape art, looks for something certain in this uncertainty and does not know how to begin.'[16] Furthermore, as politicised nature, particular landscapes evolved into integral parts of historicism's search for national pedigrees, that other powerful movement which by the turn of the eighteenth century had come to form the centrepiece of most European nationalisms and national identities.[17]

Landscape symbolism and the study of national identity

Given that the rise of nationalism in the late eighteenth century conspicuously reinforced the interest in geographical symbolism, it is somewhat surprising that, so far, little attention has been paid in the field of nations and nationalism to the conditions under which specific natural environments acquire significance in definitions of

nationhood.[18] On the other hand, scholars working in fields such as human geography, art history, or environmental history have recently made use of existing theoretical approaches to nationalism and national identification.[19] Yet these theories have served these researchers as signposts to be passed rather than as springboards for the construction of new theories that deal with the question of how landscapes are valued in different historical and political contexts. Lowenthal (1995: 283) expresses this marked and apparently widespread reluctance to draw even tentative theoretical conclusions, when he accuses '[t]hose predisposed toward particular explanations of landscape attachments' of misreading 'ambiguous material'.

Despite the absence of appropriate theoretical tools for landscape analysis, three broad positions are discernible. Adherents of a 'primordialist' perspective view people's attachments to their natural surroundings as a manifestation of basic socio-psychological needs, and as a phenomenon that is both universal and historically persistent.[20] Basing their analysis upon a psychological reductionism, however, those taking this position are at a loss to explain why people's interest in landscape can vary significantly over time. Applying an explicitly descriptive approach, a second group of researchers are concerned mainly with the way depictions of landscape are regarded as reflective of national virtues, such as freedom, liberty, or independence.[21] In contrast to the first two approaches, a third group of scholars emphasises the situational aspect by identifying the way in which the public role of landscape-symbolism is contingent on particular cultural and political contexts.[22]

Even though each of the three positions outlined above has something to recommend them, I believe that neither is satisfactory when it comes to analysing the possible causes of the changing currency enjoyed by geographical symbolism in definitions of nationhood. From a formal point of view, the authentication of a national culture entails two processes: the construction of continuity with a nation's alleged ethno-historical past (*historicism*) on the one hand and the creation of a sense of naturalness (*naturalisation*) on the other. The two processes, while analytically separate, are mutually intertwined and reinforce each other in the reality of nation formation: Whereas references to significant features of the natural environment serve

to buttress a cultural community's claims of continuity, the historicist curiosity for the collective past inevitably directs attention to significant features of the 'homeland'. Broadly speaking, the fundamental role of both historicism and naturalisation has to do, in large part, with their preventing the historical and cultural contingency of modern nations from entering into the picture.[23]

The dialectic of landscape and nationhood: two typical scenarios

Nationalising nature

From an ideal-typical point of view, symbolic analogies between 'landscape' and 'nation' can take either of two forms. The first can be termed *the nationalization of nature*. What is characteristic here is that popular historical myths, memories and supposed national virtues are projected onto a significant landscape in an attempt to lend more continuity and distinctiveness to it. In this way, an image of national authenticity is developed in which a nation's distinctiveness is seen to be reflected in a particular landscape. As a way of incorporating a particular landscape into the fabric of national identity, this ideological pattern acquired intellectual prominence in the mid-eighteenth century (with some early forerunners, as already noted, in European humanist thought). From there, it quickly spread to the educated public as a whole.

In each of the three cases considered, this pattern of linking nature and nationhood prevailed up until the middle of the nineteenth century. In Switzerland, the breakthrough towards the nationalisation of Alpine nature came in the course of the eighteenth century, when the mountains 'had ceased to be monstrosities and had become an integral part of varied and diversified Nature'[24] and when, towards the end of the century, a cult-like enthusiasm was focused on the Swiss Alps in particular. Thanks in no small part to the works of Johannes Scheuchzer, Albrecht von Haller, Jean Jacques Rousseau and an ever increasing body of foreign travel literature, the Alps increasingly became an important aspect of Swiss patriotism in the last third of the eighteenth century. The intellectual focal point of this rapidly progressing movement,

the Helvetic Society (founded in 1761), presented the Alps as the true seat of Swiss virtues. The mountains of central Switzerland were regarded as the genuine scene where the Swiss Confederation had been founded and has experienced its golden age of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[25]

After the founding of the Swiss nation-state in 1848, the association of Alpine landscape and Swiss nationhood further gained in salience. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Alps became the most common icon on tourist souvenirs. Furthermore, in 1863, the Swiss Alpine Club was founded. Its declared aim was 'to gain a better knowledge of our Alpine landscape, especially with regard to its topography, natural history and social implications'.[26] Finally, Alpine scenery became a prominent feature in the works of some of the most renowned Swiss artists in the second part of the nineteenth century. The Swiss novelist Gottfried Keller, for example, in his novel, *Der Grüne Heinrich* (first published in 1854), declared that '[w]ith the thoughtlessness of youth and childish age, I believed that the natural beauty of Switzerland was a reflection of historical and political merit and of the patriotism of the Swiss people: an equivalent of freedom itself'.[27]

In the United States of America, both before and after the Revolution the aim of cultivating large (and, from the viewpoint of the settling population, uninhabited) tracts of land inspired successive generations of European immigrants. This pattern continued even as wild nature began to be mythologised in Europe in the late eighteenth century. To a much greater degree than in Switzerland, where a sturdy Alpine landscape remained somewhat at odds with the classical ideal of nature (and where the classical and romantic conceptions occurred in tandem from the late eighteenth century onwards), the belief in man having the upper hand over nature was salient in the United States through much of the nineteenth century.[28] An Ohio newspaper report of 1817 provides an illustration of this future-oriented ideal of cultivation and progress: 'Looking only a few years through the vista of futurity what a sublime spectacle presents itself! Wilderness, once the chosen residence of solitude and savageness, converted into populous cities, smiling villages, beautiful farms and plantations!'[29] Confirming this picture, Alexis de Tocqueville observed in 1831 that the ideal of the

American settlers was not wild landscape, but its cultivation and transformation. He wrote: '[The Americans] are insensible to the wonders of inanimate nature and they may be said not to perceive the mighty forests that surround them till they fall beneath the hatchet.' He thus concluded that what supplied the 'American people' with a sense of identity was 'its own march across these wilds, draining swamps, turning the course of rivers, peopling solitudes, and subduing nature.'[30]

In Canada, too, the prevalent ideal (at least initially) was that of cultivation. This specific preference was inspired by both utilitarian (gaining land for agricultural production) and biblical motives. Hence Kaufmann concludes that 'for the Loyalists who founded English Canada, their new Canadian home was interpreted partly as a foreboding Wilderness, and partly as a new Garden of Eden'. Emulating the classical ideal first elaborated by civic humanists in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, 'English Canadians also expressed the traditional agrarian/biblical fear of wilderness depravity'.[31] Explorers such as David Thompson, Samuel Hearne and Alexander Mackenzie, for instance, in their travel journals of the eighteenth century, firmly subscribed to the view that man ought to reign supreme over nature. Consequently, they associated the wilderness they found in the Canadian Northwest with barbarity and desolation. The same holds true for some of Canada's prominent writers of the early nineteenth century.[32]

But, as already indicated, the nationalisation of nature, though it formed an important ingredient in the national narratives of Switzerland, Canada, and the United States, was by no means confined to these two cases. We encounter it in the English discourse on landscape which ever since the nineteenth century – at least in its dominant version of rural paternalism – showed a preference for the tamed as opposed to the savage lands. Here the former was equated with stability, permanence and harmony, while the latter was associated with an anarchic order, exemplified by French and American republicanism.[33] Writing in 1791, moreover, the English aesthetics theorist William Gilpin claimed a widespread preference in favour of the classical view, noting that 'the idea of a wild country, in a natural state, however picturesque, is to the generality of people but an unpleasing one'. And he concluded with some

apparent relief: 'There are few who do not prefer the busy scenes of cultivation to the grandest of nature's rough productions.'[34]

Similarly, in France, where Vidal de la Blache invented human geography as a scientific discipline at the end of the nineteenth century, landscape, for a time at least, was crucial as a means of defining national identity. As in England, if out of different motives, French geographers and historians depicted humans as having the upper hand over Nature rather than being determined by it. This neo-classical ideal of *homo sapiens'* capacity for creating a rational social order by transforming Nature was most cogently expressed in 1833 by Jules Michelet in his *Histoire de France*:

> Society, freedom have mastered nature, history has rubbed out geography. In this marvelous transformation, spirit has won over matter, the general over the particular, and idea over contingencies.[35]

Naturalising the nation: the search for organic nationhood

This leads me to the second formal possibility of establishing a symbolic link between nations and their natural environment, which can be designated the *naturalisation of the nation*. Resting upon a notion of geographical determinism, this perspective views the natural environment as doing more than expressing certain national virtues and characteristics. Instead, nature in general, and specific landscapes in particular, are depicted as forces of moral and spiritual regeneration capable of determining the nation and giving it a compact, homogeneous, unified form. Whereas the logic behind the 'nationalisation of nature' is in accordance with that of the civic conception of nationhood, the 'naturalisation of the nation' draws its inspiration from an organic ideal. Here the nation's characteristics appear to be determined by physical rather than social factors - the result being no less than a sense of *ideological ethnogenesis*. If anything gives the discourse about national identity in Switzerland, the United States and Canada its specific outlook, it is the fundamental role this second pattern – the 'naturalisation of the nation' – came to play from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.[36]

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To be sure, in neither of these cases did this second mechanism come to replace the other, historicist-expressionist pattern – the 'nationalisation of nature'. There is ample evidence, however, that in each case, for reasons that I shall discuss below, the 'naturalisation of the nation' began to dominate the discourse on national identity as the nineteenth century progressed. Of course, the concrete manifestations of this basic pattern were slightly different in each of the cases under consideration. So were the conditions that made the pattern become prevalent. But what remains significant – and what tells us much about the problems of nation-formation faced by these societies – is that the different currents belong to a common argumentative framework, much like variations on a single theme. To be more specific, it was a particular section of the national environment, in these cases, the Swiss Alps, the American planes, and the Canadian North, that was believed to be the major determinant of authentic nationhood. How can this be explained?

I can see three principal reasons why the 'naturalisation of the nation' came to dominate in these three cases. The first is related to the affinity between an ideological factor – the spread of a romantic style of thought in the latter half of the eighteenth century, and a material factor, geography.[37] Romanticism, as a doctrine and movement, was fundamentally a reaction to the Enlightenment (particularly in its French version). Where romantics of various provenances found common ground was in their opposition to the belief that society should be organized and structured according to general rational laws. The result was an alternative ethic and blueprint for the future, which privileged creative individualism and the growth of 'national character', which was seen as organic and natural, above the neo-classical ideals of universalism and regularity.[38] This romantic current of thought had a huge impact on nineteenth-century nationalism. The concept of national character was embraced by national intellectuals and movements all over Europe, as well as on the North American continent. What is of particular relevance to this analysis, however, is that two developments emerged from the romantic style of thought:

1. a search for natural analogies and natural determination, and

2. a preference for 'primitive' nature.

Hardly any country in the Western World remained unaffected by the new romantic narrative. Almost everywhere the educated strata became familiar with its most basic premises; and even if some embraced it with more fervour than others, few rejected its tenets altogether. Hence many began to perceive the world around them through a romanticised lens.[39] And yet, the degree to which the ideal of 'primitive' nature was accommodated differed from country to country. One (and only one!) factor that determined this ideal's appeal was geography. So while it is surely true that 'What men see in Nature is a result of what they have been taught to see',[40] the potential for the reception of particular mental constructs varies from case to case. Those societies which disposed over a rugged and relentless nature like the Swiss Alps, or which possessed large tracts of harsh, inaccessible wilderness like the Canadian North, embraced the naturalisation of nation with special fervour.

The second reason why the definition of national identity in Switzerland, the US, and Canada showed a strong propensity towards geographic determinism must again be attributed, I believe, to the coincidence of a material and an ideal factor. In this case, the *divergence* between the nationalist ideal of ethno-cultural homogeneity and the polyethnic composition of the three societies provided the impetus behind 'naturalisation'. Polyethnic societies too have aspired to the nationalist ideal of homogeneity in terms of culture or ethnic composition, even if these aspirations have had to be realised in a pluralistic environment.[41] Hence while such societies could not do justice to the ideal of ethnic homogeneity and often took pride in their polyethnic composition and civic values, their intellectual strata quite frequently embarked upon projects of *ideological ethnogenesis* in order to fortify the national identities of their respective populations.

The third factor for the significance of naturalism in the three cases concerns the lack of a distinct (pre-modern) ethno-historical past. Thus this third factor applies to the

United States and Canada, the two immigrant settler societies, while it has no relevance for the Swiss example. In Switzerland, the lack of ethno-cultural unity was the main cause of concern, while references to a long historical pedigree helped to foster a sense of organic nationhood. In the US and English-Canada such assistance was not available, which in turn provided a major incentive to forge nationhood via references to natural symbolism.

Subsequent sections demonstrate how the 'naturalisation of the nation' operated in each of the three cases.

'It is in the Alpine human being that we find common ground': nature and Swiss nationhood

The challenge of ethno-linguistic nationalism

As set forth in chapters 5 and 6, what posed a serious challenge to its conception of nationality was the fact that 'ethno-linguistic nationalism' became dominant in much of Europe in the late nineteenth century. Originating in Italy and Germany, this form of nationalism rapidly gained in strength around 1870, when it came to be seen as somewhat of a normative prerequisite of national legitimacy and served as a fertile ground for the emergence of irredentist movements in both countries.[42] When Nazism rose to power in 1933, its völkisch nationalism, with its markedly racial overtones, proved tantamount to a denial of the legitimacy of Switzerland's polyethnic conception of nationality. It is therefore chiefly from the 1870's onwards that the 'naturalisation of the nation' came to predominate in Switzerland.

The realisation of the discrepancy between the Swiss conception of nationality and that of its neighbours quickly set in, and it manifested itself in a widespread perception that Swiss nationhood was underdetermined. Let me repeat a statement by the eminent Swiss historian Karl Dändliker, which typifies this viewpoint. Alluding to the challenge posed by ethnic nationalism, he declared in 1884 that 'the Swiss people

did not enjoy the advantage of their neighbours: being a nation in the true and literal sense of the word, that is to say, being an entity uniform in terms of linguistic and ethnic composition'.[43] Dändliker's statement does not represent a marginal view but forms part of a concern that was apparently widespread at the time, at least among liberal intellectuals and the political establishment. When, in December 1914, German- and French-speaking Swiss had clashed over conflicting sympathies towards the parties involved in the First World War, the writer Carl Spitteler – in an emphatic call for national unity – argued that in the present European climate Switzerland's dual lack of ethno-cultural homogeneity and a strong centralist state were 'elements of political weakness'.[44]

Faced with the challenge of ethnic nationalism, liberal intellectuals and parts of the state intelligentsia thus endeavoured to create a distinct national identity for Switzerland. Yet, given that ethnic and volkish conceptions of nationhood emphasised ethnic or racial homogeneity, the 'nationalisation of nature' (the conception that puts the thrust on national originality and distinctiveness) would have been somewhat deficient as an ideological response. In view of the challenge at hand, therefore, the 'naturalisation of the nation', which can best be understood as a kind of ideological ethnogenesis, seemed the more appropriate response. But to arrive at a better understanding of why this particular reaction came to predominate, let us reconstruct the different stages of the overall response to ethnic nationalism.

The civic response

At first glance at least, the forging of a civic nationalism (the brand of nationalism that, by and large, had been dominant in Switzerland ever since the late eighteenth century) seemed to provide an appropriate antidote against the threat of völkisch nationalism. The most outspoken supporter of this ideological response in the 1870's was the Bernese professor of law, Carl Hilty. In 1875, he maintained that Switzerland was the perfect nation, and that it was her destiny to uphold a truly republican, voluntarist conception of nationality, based upon citizenship rights and political values:

Not race or ethnic community, nor common language and customs, nor nature and history have founded the state of the Swiss Confederation. ... What holds Switzerland together vis à vis her [linguistically more homogeneous] neighbours is an ideal, namely the consciousness of being part of a state that in many ways represents a more civilised community; to constitute a nationality which stands head and shoulders above mere affiliations of blood or language.[45]

But Hilty's presentist conception of nationality, though widespread among liberal-minded intellectuals, did not reflect the dominant line of thought.[46] Instead, a more popular brand of nationalism traced Switzerland's civic present back to its pre-modern past. This rested on two pillars: first, upon the myths of liberation and foundation (in particular the legends of Wilhelm Tell and the Oath of the Rütli), as well as on memories of allegedly glorious events (especially the victorious battles against the Habsburgs in 1315 and 1386); and second, upon the values and institutions of the modern Swiss nation-state, founded in 1848.[47] These two ideological dimensions, one inspired by legalist rationality and liberal-democratic ethics, the other by the emotive power of an ideological myth of descent, were at the heart of Swiss national identity in its most widespread form.

The Alpine response

Nonetheless, to some contemporaries, neither the purely civic conception of national identity nor its more popular historicist counterpart seemed sufficient as the sole basis of Swiss nationality. For instance, Johann-Kaspar Bluntschli (1808-1881), a moderately conservative intellectual and professional colleague of Hilty's, clearly recognised that, held against dominant nationalist standards, Swiss nationhood was perceived as underdetermined. Around 1870 he maintained that, in view of current debates on nationality in Europe, and given that 'the belief in the existence of a particular [Swiss] nation vis à vis the German, French and Italian nationalities' had recently been severely contested, it had become necessary to convince the outside world of the organic character of Swiss nationhood. To achieve this, Bluntschli argued, a notion of

nationality that was grounded on voluntarism and the institutions of the modern state, as Hilty had proposed, would not suffice. But neither, he maintained, would the reference back to the mythical past *per se*, even if it fostered the reproduction of historical memories of wars fought for independence and liberty in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[48] Instead, to buttress the claim for a distinct national identity that could stand up to the force of ethnic nationalism, a further element was needed. It is here that Bluntschli brings the Alpine landscape into play:

> I am surprised that Hilty did not, besides referring to the influence of the political idea, seek assistance from the country's nature to make the notion of Swiss nationality acceptable. For Switzerland's landscape is indeed of a peculiar character. If the Swiss possess a particular nationality, then this feeling derives above all from the existence of their beautiful homeland.... There may well be Alps, mountains, seas and rivers outside Switzerland; and yet, the Swiss homeland constitutes such a coherent and richly structured natural whole, one that enables to evolve on its soil a peculiar feeling of a common homeland which unites its inhabitants as sons of the same fatherland, even though they live in different valleys and speak different languages.[49]

The spread of the Alpine myth

The previous analysis has mainly focused on intellectuals, naturally the most vocal segments within any nation's public sphere. However, the idea that the Alps formed the ultimate source of national authenticity, that they were capable of fusing different linguistic groups into a single, homogeneous nation was not confined, in fact, solely to the realm of scholarly and intellectual discourse. To be sure, until the middle of the nineteenth century, the Alpine ideal had been the special preserve of a relatively small but articulate group of intellectuals and members of the intelligentsia. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, however, this doctrine had spread to ever-wider sections of the population. Indeed, between 1870 and the end of World War II the Alps were turned into a popular national symbol of the Swiss.

Even though it is difficult to grasp precisely how the Alpine myth spread from

its intellectual producers to ever-wider sections of the public, there are numerous examples that suggest that it had indeed become part of the national consciousness by the turn of the twentieth century at the latest. This was favoured, first and foremost, by national festivals and rituals of various sorts. A great many Swiss men and women directly participated in such public national events, many of which were deliberately staged in an Alpine environment. Crucial among these were historical plays, which experienced a remarkable boom after 1885.[50] Furthermore, Alpine and pre-Alpine areas provided the traditional geographical setting for military training courses, which provided a fertile ground for the forging of popular patriotism; and ever since the early nineteenth century, the great majority of Switzerland's male population has had to contribute to these most prominent rituals of the modern nation-state. Of no less importance was a folk-song movement that had witnessed a rapid expansion since the latter half of the nineteenth century, thus helping to embed the Alpine myth in the hearts and minds of many Swiss.[51] Likewise, Alpine symbolism played a crucial role in the ideology of *Geistige Landesverteidigung* (spiritual defence of the country), manifested in the National Exhibition of 1939.[52] In official pamphlets on display at the exhibition, the Gotthard was depicted as the mountain which – by fusing four different linguistic groups into a culturally and spiritually united nation – had enabled Switzerland to exist (see chapter 6).

The ideologies of the major political movements of the time were also replete with images of the Alps. During the two World Wars, the Liberal and Conservative parties in particular made frequent use of Alpine symbolism in their definitions of the Swiss nation.[53] So did people with direct influence on the course of national education. The school inspector Jacob Christinger, to name but one example, in a much-noticed final speech at the National Conference of Teachers in Basel in 1884, presented the argument with unmistakable clarity:

> It seems that linguistic and religious differences in particular form a barrier to the national education of the Swiss people, and some go even so far as to deny that our people possess a unified national character. We do not want to accept this delusion. We all gaze upon the same mountains, look back to the same heroic figures in our history, enjoy the same folk songs and are proud of the same rights and liberties.[54]

Moreover, recent analyses of history and textbooks used in secondary education in all parts of the country have revealed that the Alps served as one of the major motifs in fostering national identity within the education system.[55] Hence, in 1905, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Schiller's death, the *Verein für die Verbreitung guter Schriften* (Association for the Promotion of Good Books) launched a special edition of *Wilhelm Tell,* the drama in which the Alpine landscape around the lake of Lucerne figures so prominently and which had become part of the Swiss literary canon soon after its first publication in 1804.[56]

In the field of artistic production, painting stood out in terms of the attention it devoted to the Alpine theme. Already during the nineteenth century, with Alexandre Calame and François Diday, mountain painting 'had come to represent the very embodiment of national art' in Switzerland. But the peak of Swiss landscape painting was not reached until the turn of the century, in the form of the work of Ferdinand Hodler. In paintings such as *Dialogue with Nature* and *Communion with the Infinite,* or *Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau above a Sea of Mist,* Hodler revived 'the Romantic belief in the spiritual replenishment and uplifting experience to be derived from oneness with the grandeur of nature'.[57] Hodler's naturalistic paintings, wrote the art critic Hermann Ganz, added 'an overpowering force and magnitude to the Swiss landscape, enabling Switzerland to stand out as an independent entity against the countries which surround it.'[58]
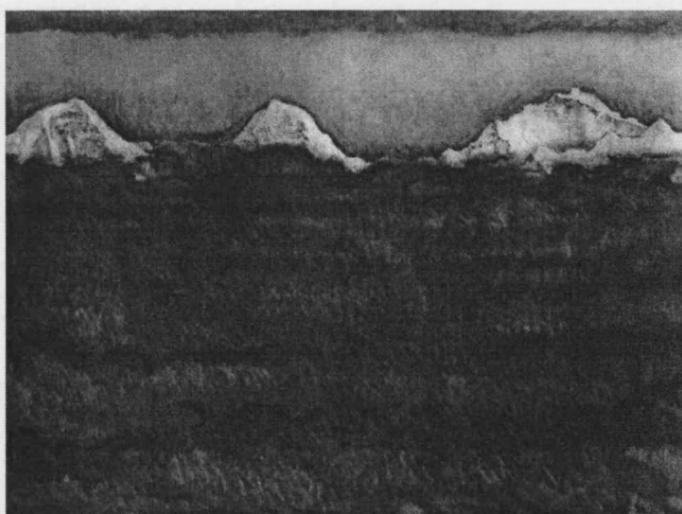

Plate 8-1: Ferdinand Hodler, *Eiger, Mönch und Jungfrau über dem Nebelmeer* (1908), Oil on Canvas, Musée Jenisch, Vevey.

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Finally, in an age of quickly expanding popular travel (railways) and mass communications, tourist propaganda and newspapers were important vehicles for the dissemination of the Alpine myth. In an advertisement launched by the Federal Swiss Railway Company during the inter-war period, the beauty of the country's rivers, its countryside and forests were described at length, principally to underline the predominance of Alpine symbolism. As the text pointed out, the Alps 'encircle the country and thus delimit its space, defend and erect it, and elevate it'.[59] In newspapers and pamphlets, too, the Alps figured prominently as one of the most frequently evoked symbols of national identity and unity. As described in October 1935 by a Zurich-based newspaper aimed at a lower middle-class readership:

> We understand by Swissness a certain inheritance of spiritual and physical features which we find among the people as a whole between the Alps and the Jura throughout the centuries of our history to the present day. ... We are the only typically Alpine state in Europe. ... The Alps are our actual strength, for it is in the Alpine human being that we find our common ground.[60]
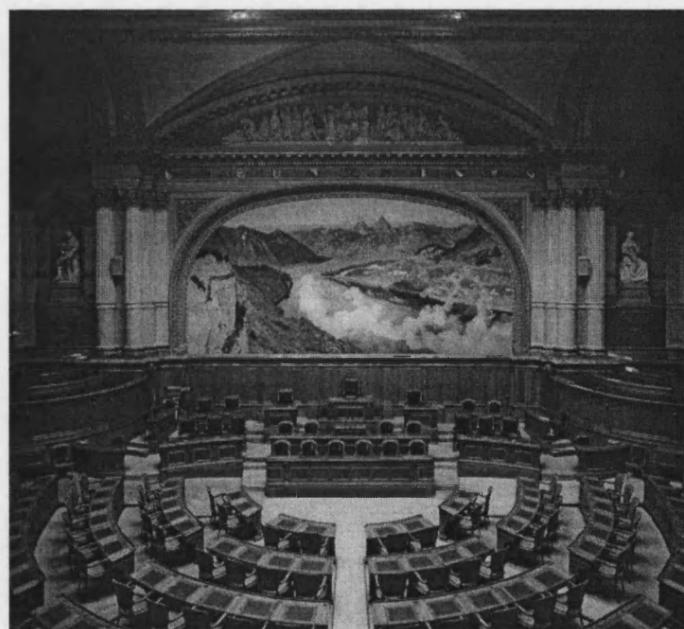

Plate 8-2: Charles Giron, *Wiege der Eidgenossenschaft* (1901), Oil on Canvas, Bern, Chamber of the National Council.
The painting portrays the mountains around Lake Lucerne, thereby fusing Alpine nature with the 'historic heartland' of the Swiss Confederation.

'The children of Israel in the wilderness': landscape and American nationhood

Ambivalent attitudes to tradition and an obsession with progress

The lack of a long and distinctive ethno-historical past posed a problem for the construction of American nationhood. Thus, as a genuinely American brand of nationalism gained momentum in the wake of the Revolution, the past remained a problematic source of inspiration. One way of dealing with this difficulty was to emphasise the value of progress. In *The Rights of Man* (1791), for example, Tom Paine described the past as tyrannical, and advised his contemporaries to look to the future instead of wallowing in nostalgia: 'We have no occasion to roam for information into the obscure world of antiquity. The real volume, not of history but of facts, is directly before us, unmitigated by the errors of tradition.'[61]

E. L. Godkin, a journalist of Irish origin, wrote about the 'new communities' that were 'springing up at the West every month'. As he continued describing his impressions: 'They have no history, and no traditions. The great memories of the Revolution are far less potent swells in Iowa and Illinois than in Massachusetts. The West, in short, has inherited nothing, and so far from regretting this, it glories it.' One of the consequences of the successive waves of westward expansion, he observed, was that these communities showed a 'strong tendency to live in the future, to neglect the past'.[62] William Cullen Bryant's poem, *The Past* (1828), corroborates the observation that nineteenth-century Americans tended to detest rather than glorify the past. It begins with these lines: 'Though unrelenting Past! / Strong are the barriers round thy dark domain, / And fetters, sure and fast, / Hold all that enter thy unbreathing reign.'[63] With a more obviously nationalist bent, George P. Marsh proclaimed in 1843 that it was in 'the character of youthful and vigorous nations to concern themselves with the present and the future rather than with the past'. It was 'not until the sun of their greatness' was 'beginning to decline', he concluded, that 'a spirit of antiquarian research is excited'.[64]

Instead of trying to forge distinctive traditions and collective memory, then, many Americans in the post-revolutionary era developed a marked obsession with progress. In contrast to the past-oriented narratives of European patriots, Americans began to create a future-oriented civic religion. Alexis de Tocqueville's suspicion, expressed in his *Democracy in America* (1840), that 'Among a democratic people poetry will not feed on legends or on traditions and memories of old days' corresponded, at least partially, with American reality.[65] More than a century after de Tocqueville had made this observation, one of the leading scholars of American culture, Michael Kammen, argued along the same lines: 'In many societies the force of tradition has served as a source of authority. But for much of American history the inhabitants of this continent clearly indicated that they did not want power to reside in pastness.' 'For most of the nineteenth century', Kammen maintained further, that 'formal education gave short shrift to the past. American history remained very much a minor subject in the schools – rarely a required part of the curriculum.' [66]

The late-nineteenth century historical revival – and its limitations

Nevertheless, from around the mid-nineteenth century onwards, a number of 'socially and politically prominent figures' began to criticise the widespread obsession with progress.[67] In 1876 Charles W. Eliot, then Harvard's President, wrote: 'I think we Americans particularly need to cultivate our historical sense, lest we lose the lessons of the past in this incessant whirl of the present.'[68] The rise of American nationalism may partly explain the reinforced public interest in the past that was particularly apparent in late Victorian America: 'People who formed societies for historic preservation justified their activities in terms of an obligation to the nation and to posterity.' This was manifested in 'a newly institutionalized respect for the past' as epitomised in music, the visual arts, and in the founding of museums and historical associations.[69] Hence Kammen argues with regard to the period of 1870 to 1915: 'Anyone who probes historical sources for this period will be figuratively assaulted by the nation's arsenal of

memory devices and by the astonishing diversity of its stockpile. ... Between 1861 and 1907, American memory began to take form as a self-conscious phenomenon.'[70]

However, despite this collective re-orientation towards history, the past remained an ambiguous and controversial source of national identity. In Michael Kammen's words: 'The history that followed 1789 presented two problems; it was potentially divisive, both morally and politically; and it verged upon the present, mere current events.'[71] In addition, there was 'a sense of inferiority', particularly widespread among middle-class Americans in the nineteenth century, in the face of European history and culture.[72]

'National character often receives its peculiar cast from natural scenery...'

While history remained problematic as a basis of nationhood, the natural environment seemed to provide a solution to the American quandary. To begin with, where historical references threatened to reveal connections with a European historical and cultural heritage, nature supplied a symbolic resource ideally suited to stressing what was distinctive and organic about American nationhood. Lowenthal thus concludes that '[t]o many Americans the grandeur of their natural landscapes more than compensated for the lack of historical associations'.[73] Even early in the nineteenth century, statements attributing a character-shaping role to the natural environment were not uncommon. The authors of such statements often insisted that 'natural wonders and antiquities in the United States were superior to their man-made counterparts in the Old World.'[74]

American landscape painting provided a particularly powerful means of elaborating the ideology of American national exceptionalism. Many American landscape painters, along with their sponsors and admirers, shared the belief (expressed in the book *Remarks made on a Short Tour, between Hartford and Quebec in the Autumn of 1819*) that 'national character often receives its peculiar cast from natural scenery'.[75] It is indeed a notable feature of American landscape painting of the nineteenth century that its creators, rather than being interested in nature as a universal

phenomenon, portray it as a force capable of inspiring American patriotism. As an article in the *Bulletin of the American Art Union* put it in 1848: '[I]t is not only nature that we want in our works of art, but it is our nature, something that will awaken our sympathies and strengthen the bond that binds us to our homes.'[76]

As expressions of American patriotism, landscape paintings soon developed a considerable appeal for the American middle classes. Art critics and other commentators urged the public to visit the exhibitions of the great landscape painters such as Thomas Cole (1801-1848), Frederic Edwin Church (1826-1900), Asher B. Durand (1796-1886), and Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902). Commenting on Durand's painting *Progress,* which was shown at the National Academy of Design in 1853, a reviewer for the *Knickerbocker* described it as 'purely American. It tells an American story out of American facts, portrayed with true American feeling by a devoted and earnest student of Nature.'[77] Another reviewer of art exhibitions wrote of Bierstadt's painting *The domes of the Yosemite* (1867): 'We recommend our readers to go at once and see the work. They will feel that the world is progressing and the Americans are a great people.'[78]

A preference for wild nature

The most distinctive aspect of American landscape discourse in the nineteenth century was the frequently stated preference for wild landscape. American landscape, so we learn from hundreds of statements, was novel, untamed and wild. Americans came to see in the wilderness of their natural environment, in Mankin Kornhauser's words, 'a symbol of the nation's potential as well as the country's history'.[79]

Two recurring themes characterised the landscape discourse of the nineteenth century. The first was a marked geographical determinism, embodied in the ideological mechanism I have called the naturalisation of the nation. In his *Leaves of Grass* (1855), novelist Walt Whitman provided an evocative example of this: 'The Largeness of nature or the nation were monstrous without a corresponding largeness and generosity of the spirit of the citizen.... His spirit responds to his country's spirit.... He incarnates

its geography and natural life and rivers and lakes'.[80] The hugely popular historian, George Bancroft, seconded Whitman's view. Referring to the mythical figure of Daniel Boone, he wrote: 'At sixteen he went into the wilderness as a surveyor, and for three years continued the pursuit, where the forest trained him, in meditative solitude, to freedom and largeness of mind'.[81] The second recurring theme in the landscape discourse was the tendency to depict the natural environment as a silent witness to great republican deeds. This mixing of naturalising and historicising narratives was no less prominent than the purely naturalising one. Painter Thomas Cole, in his famous *Essay on American Scenery* (1835), provided a typical example of this perspective:

> American scenes are not destitute of historical and legendary associations – the
> great struggle for freedom has sanctified many a spot, and many a mountain
> stream, and rock has its legend, worthy of poet's pen or the painter's pencil.[82]

The preference for wilderness also became apparent in the visual arts. In American landscape painting a pure (in the sense of virgin) nature came to be seen as containing the essence of American nationhood. As Thomas Cole reflected in a markedly patriotic tone in the 1830s (at least two decades before naturalistic nationalism became a prominent feature of American public discourse): '[A]ll nature here is new to Art. No Tivoli's, Mont Blanc's, Plinlimmons, hackneyed and worn by the daily pencils of hundreds, but virgin forests, lakes & waterfalls feast his eye with new delights.' In America, Cole proclaimed, the artist had the privilege of encountering nature in its pristine state, 'untouched from the time of creation for his heaven-favored pencil.'[83]

In addition, wild nature allowed artists to give expression to what was widely believed to be another distinctive feature of the United States: its dynamic and progressive spirit. Consequently, paintings celebrating the vastness of the American continent and the seemingly inexhaustible energy of its inhabitants were commissioned in great numbers. Hardly accidentally, the Niagara Falls were the most frequently depicted North American natural wonder in the nineteenth century. Two years after Frederic Church had completed his *Niagara Falls* (1857), a critic wrote:

[*Niagara* is] perhaps the finest picture yet done by an American; at least, that which is the fullest of feeling … If it is inspired by Niagara, it is grand and sublime; it is natural to the nation, since nature herself, has given the type…[84]
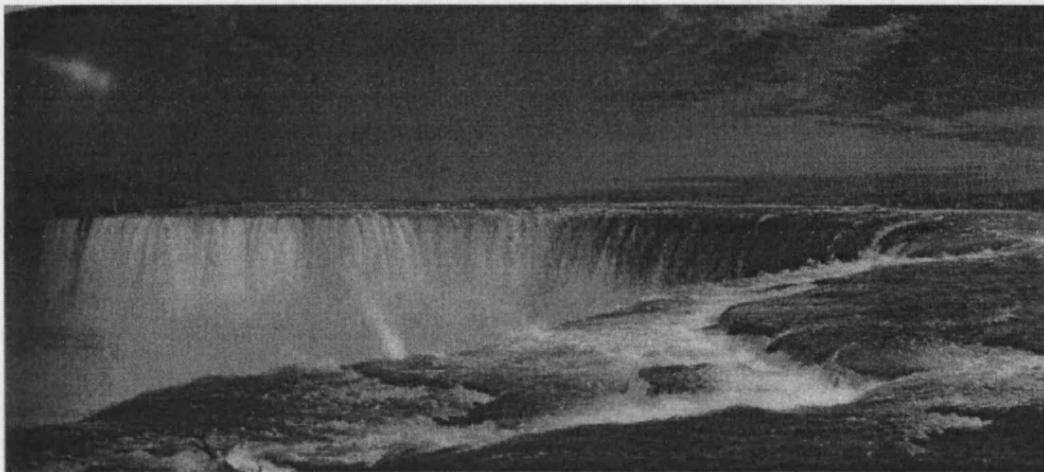

Plate 8-3: Frederic Edwin Church, *Niagara Falls* (1857), Oil on Canvas, The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

'The frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanisation'

Historians of both the popular and academic variety were the key players in the development and popularisation of the myth of the American frontier and its role in shaping the American character. In the 1870s, for example, popular historian George Bancroft expressed the opinion that the colonisation of the American West cleansed the settlers of their European past, thereby advancing a process of Americanisation. As he put it in one of his typically forceful statements:

European men, institutions, and ideas were lodged in the American wilderness, and this great American West took them to her bosom, taught them a new way of looking upon the destiny of the common man, trained them in adaptation to the conditions of the New World, to the creation of new institutions to meet new needs…[85]

It was the historian Frederick Jackson Turner, however, who made the most eloquent and influential contribution to the discourse about westward expansion and its impact on American nationhood. At a conference of the American Historical Association in Chicago in 1893, Turner presented a paper on *The Significance of the Frontier in America*. His 'frontier thesis' (developed after the frontier of settlement had been closed in the 1880s) was soon to exercise an influence that went far beyond professional historians. It 'quickly emerged', according to one historian of the American West, 'as an incantation repeated in thousands of high school and college classrooms and textbooks'.[86]

In his analysis of westward expansion in the period 1800 to 1880, Turner assumed that it was the frontier experience that had shaped the American nation and lent the American people their characteristic pragmatism, inventiveness, individualism and dynamism. He believed in 'the essential plasticity of man and society and demanded that upon them the environment exerted an irresistible and unseen influence'.[87] Turner had been educated by a generation of teachers who believed in organic growth and were sympathetic to the 'germ theory': that is, the idea that the virtues of liberty and individualism were related to Germanic ancestry.[88] Reversing this argument, Turner insisted that it was not Teutonic ancestry, but the influence of the environment that had been responsible for the emergence of a genuinely American character.[89] On the first page of his famous essay, he conveyed his big idea in typically concise fashion: 'The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development.'[90]

Turner did not create this resonant notion out of nothing. After all, for a great many Americans the frontier was lived experience, which to a large degree explains the great importance his treatise acquired in such a short time. Turner mobilised familiar symbolic codes such as the log cabin in developing a systematic theory of how the frontier experience had shaped the American character. As White observes: 'Americans had recognized for generations the cultural utility of the frontier in their politics, folklore, music, literature, art, and speech. All Turner had to do was to tell Americans about the SIGNIFICANCE of this familiar frontier'.[91] In his vision of American

nationhood, moreover, Turner tried to reconcile nature and progress, but the progress he envisioned 'was achieved', in White's words, 'by retreating to the primitive along successive frontiers'.[92] It was the American wilderness, Turner argued, that

> strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him [the American] in the hunting shirt and moccasin. It puts him in the log cabin of the Cherokee and Iroquois ... In short, at the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man ... the outcome is not the old Europe, not simply the development of Germanic germs ... The fact is, that here is a new product that is American.[93]
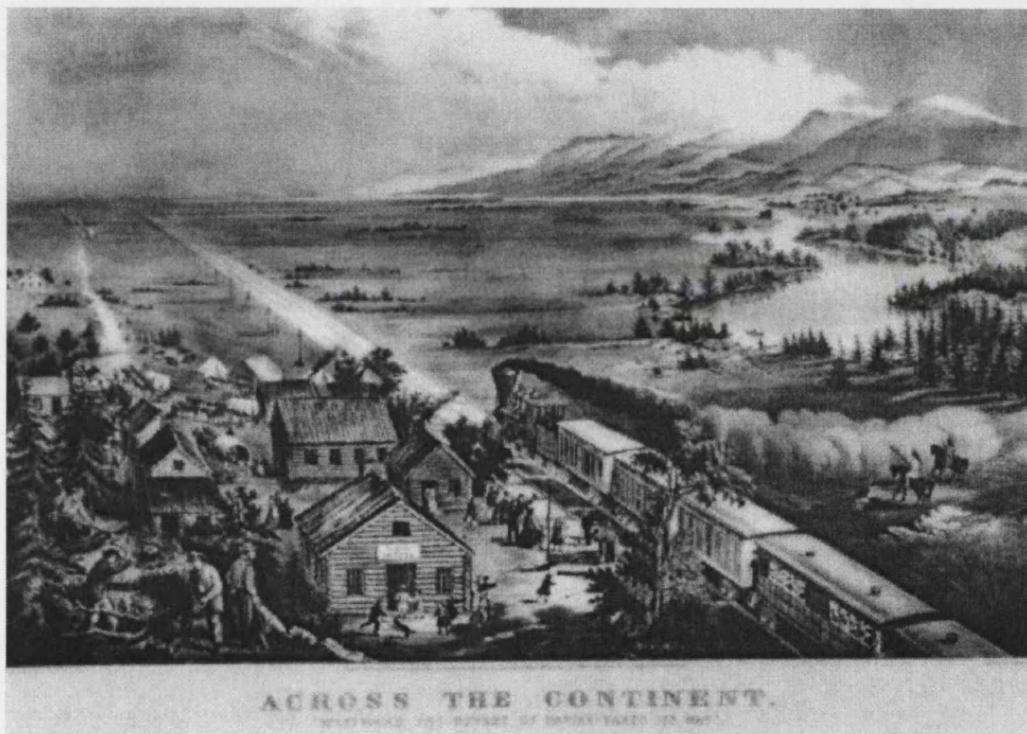
Plate 8-4: *Across the Continent: 'Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way'* (1868)

Painters like Cole and intellectuals like Bancroft and Turner, along with the poets and literary critics who would follow their lead, embraced wild American landscape as a symbol of national identity. Taken together, they formed a vocal group keen to exert a significant and lasting influence. Acting as 'popularizers who made their views widely accessible', they were largely successful in their endeavours. Initially the preoccupation

of a small avant-garde of intellectuals and artists, the linking of nationhood with landscape imagery soon captured the popular imagination. This was accomplished, to a large degree, through the public education system. Nineteenth-century American schoolbooks were 'speckled' with assertions about the character-shaping role of the landscape of the New World. Popular culture – in the form of musicals, advertising, theatre, and so forth – played an equally significant part in the dissemination of the West and the American frontier as icons of American identity.[94]

The 'Northmen of the New World': landscape and Canadian nationhood

The predicament of Canadian national identity

Several authors have regarded a more-or-less permanent identity crisis as a characteristic feature of modern Canadian society. Most have attributed this to the hybrid character of the emerging Canadian nation-state. Lipset, in an influential comparison of Canada and the US, puts it thus:

> The reasons for this uncertainty are clear. Canada is a residual country. Before 1776, Anglophone Canadians possessed the same traits that distinguished other American colonists from the British. Then ... the new nation to the south developed a political identity formulated around the values set out in the Declaration of Independence ... There is no ideology of Canadianism, although Canada has a Tory tradition derived from Britain and is, like the United States, descended from a North American settler and frontier society.[95]

Yet this dual political inheritance – American 'Whig' liberalism on the one hand, and British 'Tory' conservatism on the other – was but one dimension of the predicament of Canadian nationhood. The other was an emerging public culture that, while continuing to maintain close associations with the British symbolic heritage, was extremely receptive to American cultural trends. Kaufmann describes an 'historical British-American dilemma' that has accompanied (Anglo) Canadian attempts to forge an authentic national identity out of the toolkit of available symbols and values: '[A]n

American folk culture revolving around a pioneering New World lifestyle and a *British set of myths, symbols and collective representations.*[96] Unlike the French-Canadian nationalism of the 1820s, which could look back to a 200-year history of French settlement, English Canadians had no distinctive ethno-historical foundation from which they could construct an 'authentic' national identity.[97]

This problem was at the heart of English-Canadian identity from the time of the first Loyalist migration northward in 1784. Anglo Canadians lacked the cultural differentiae that could have allowed them to forge a distinctive national identity vis-à-vis their neighbours in the south, the Americans: 'Most Loyalists spoke with an American accent, believed in liberal democracy and individualism, shared an "American" landscape and pursued a pioneering North American lifestyle.'[98] At the same time, there was a clearly expressed loyalty to Britain. The retention of symbolic ties with Britain, while it certainly helped to differentiate English Canadians from their American neighbours, at the same time hindered the formation of a distinctly Canadian identity. Kaufmann has compared the difficulties faced by would-be nation builders among the English Canadians with the more favourable situation of their counterparts in French Canada and the United States: 'Thus while movements toward liberal-democratic reform (including rebellion) in the United States and French Canada contributed toward ethnic self-definition, similar movements in English Canada led toward ethnic dissolution because Toryism was at the heart of English Canada's Loyalist founding myth.' Consequently, the English-Canadian nationalism that developed between Confederation and the end of World War I was based on a 'new synthesis between loyalty and liberty', between 'Loyalist mythology and Britannic sentiment', between widespread pride in being part of the British Empire and a newly developed myth of (Loyalist) ethnic election.[99]

'Canadians loyal to their soil': fortifying the national boundary

Natural determinism offered a potent remedy for a national identity that would otherwise have been – at least from the standpoint of Anglo-Canadian nation-builders –

hopelessly underdetermined. Hence when naturalistic nationalism rose to prominence in English-Canadian discourse in the later nineteenth century, its foremost function was that of establishing a symbolic boundary vis-à-vis both the United States and Britain. The project of fostering a distinct sense of Canadian nationhood gathered momentum after 1867, when the colonies of Canada East, Canada West, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick united to form the Canadian Confederation; and the first nationalist movement, Canada First, was founded in 1868. One of its protagonists, W. A. Foster, urged the citizens of the new Confederation to make a deliberate choice about their collective identity. 'It is the duty of all Canadians', he insisted, 'whether by birth or adoption to recognize the pressing necessity for the cultivation of a national sentiment which will unite the people of the various provinces more closely in the bonds of citizenship'. The 'surest means of cementing a confederation and securing political action in the interest of the whole Dominion', he continued, was to 'draw the line between Canadians loyal to their soil and those who place their citizenship in a subordinate or secondary position'.[100]

A theme that was already implicit in Foster's statement – the association through the 'soil', of Canadianness with loyalty to the natural environment or 'homeland' – was soon to become a part of all discussions about Canadian identity. The view that the wilderness and cold climate of Canada's North constituted a force capable of shaping a distinctively Canadian character was to become the cornerstone of an increasingly powerful Anglo-Canadian nationalism. A particularly outspoken supporter of Canada First, Robert Grant Haliburton, expressed it thus in an address to the Montreal Literary Club in 1869: 'We are the Northmen of the New World'.[101] William Foster, inspired by Romantic nationalism and Darwinian theories of development, argued along similar lines as he sought to distinguish Canadians from Americans. He wrote:

> The old Norse mythology, with its Thor hammers ... appeals to us – for we are
> a Northern people – as the true out-crop of human nature, more manly, more
> real, than the weak marrow-bones superstition of an effeminate South.[102]

In the literary world, too, the subject of Canadian landscape rose to prominence in the late nineteenth century, freeing it from the predominantly negative connotations it had had prior to the founding of the Confederation. The Confederation School of poet-critics, for example, 'enjoined Canadian writers and painters to head to the "cleanly" North, rather than to disport themselves to the jaded fleshpots of Europe'.[103] William Douw Lighthall introduced an anthology of poetry entitled *Songs of the Great Dominion* with the following words: 'The poets whose songs fill this book are voices cheerful with the consciousness of young might, public wealth and heroism, ... through them ... you may catch something of great Niagara falling, of brown rivers rushing with foam, of the crack of the rifle in the haunts of the moose and caribou'.[104] At about the same time, there appeared an increasing number of northern adventure novels, romanticising and glorifying life in the wilderness of the Canadian North, with the pioneering but lonely lifestyle of the trapper being portrayed as the embodiment of essential Canadianness.[105]
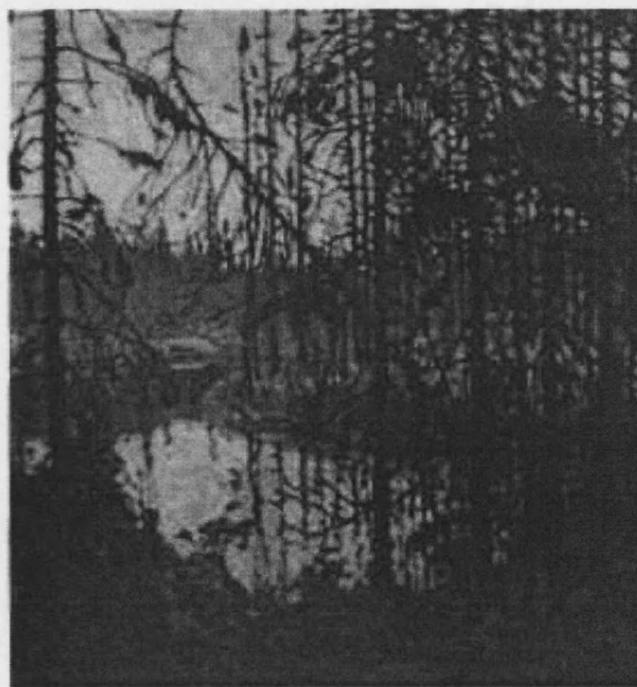

Plate 8-5: Tom Thomson, *Northern River* (1915), Oil on Canvas.

This tendency to naturalise the Canadian North, first evident in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, persisted well into the twentieth. In fact, the trend reached a new climax in the context of the cultural nationalism of the 1920s. In addition to forging a symbolic boundary vis-à-vis the big republican neighbour to the South, this new cultural nationalism 'sought to make a clear break with the British connection'.[106] The experience of World War I, which cost the lives of more than 60,000 Canadian soldiers, furthered the cause of a nationalist movement that encouraged people to detach themselves from existing imperial attachments and loyalties. Through movements such as the Canadian League, the Association of Canadian Clubs and the League of Nations Society in Canada, this cultural nationalism gained wider influence. It particularly appealed to 'the small groups of young university teachers and professional men ... who established the *Canadian Forum* and debated public issues through its pages and who founded the Canadian League and later the Canadian Institute of International Affairs'.[107]

In the visual arts, too, the naturalisation of the nation gathered momentum in the opening decades of the twentieth century. One group of Canadian landscape painters who made a particularly significant contribution to the movement of cultural nationalism was the Group of Seven. Comprised mainly of Ontarian artists, these painters acquired legendary status during their own lifetimes. They first met in 1910 and 1911, and in the 1920s began to exhibit together. The wild landscape of the Canadian North emerged as a leitmotif in the paintings of the group's members, as the titles of some of their works clearly indicate: *Terre Sauvage* (A. Y. Jackson, 1913); *Sketch for Northern River* (Tom Thomson, 1912); *March Evening, Northland* (J. E. H. MacDonald, 1914). According to one Group of Seven painter, Canada was 'a long thin strip of civilisation on the southern fringe of a vast expanse of immensely varied, virgin land reaching into the remote north. Our whole country is cleansed by the pristine and replenishing air which sweeps out of that great hinterland.'[108] While their landscape paintings earned the scorn of the Imperial Canadian art establishment, 'the group used this conflict to symbolise the tension between Canadian and British identity and became active propagandists for the cause of an independent Canadian cultural

nationalism'.[109]

Not only among fellow cultural nationalists but also among the wider public, the Group of Seven and their works soon became famous. One expert on the movement has argued that 'by 1938 [their] influence had spread to all parts of the country. In its own generation only a few resisted its hegemony'.[110] F. A. Housser's popular *A Canadian Art Movement: the Story of the Group of Seven*, published in 1926, described the importance of the Group of Seven in fostering a distinctive and authentic Canadian identity:

> Our British and European connection, so far as creative expression in Canada
> is concerned, has been a millstone around our neck ... For Canada to find a
> complete racial expression of herself through art, a complete break with
> European traditions was necessary ... What was required more than technique
> was a deep-rooted love of the country's natural environment ... The message
> that the Group of Seven art movement gives to this age is the message that here
> in the North has arisen a young nation with faith in its own creative genius.[111]

Geography 'assists by creating a unity of race': transcending Canadian pluralism

In addition to fortifying the boundary of Canadian nationhood vis-à-vis both Britain and the United States, references to the natural environment served the purpose of transcending the cultural pluralism that had characterised the Canadian Confederation since its foundation in 1867. More specifically, Anglo-Canadian nation builders had to come terms with the fact that in the geographical area of Quebec a predominantly French-speaking population had begun to settle early in the seventeenth century. With the fall of New France in 1763, moreover, ethnic consciousness among the French-speaking population was accentuated; and 'by the 1820s a new middle class, sprung from the upper levels of St. Lawrence *habitant* society, fomented the first French-Canadian nationalism.'[112] Kaufmann writes on how Anglo-Canadian nation-builders perceived this new situation: 'The principal problem for the English-Canadian intellectuals who narrated Canadian identity was the French-English divide,

geographically located just east of the Great Lakes.... By the 1820s, English-speakers formed a majority and believed themselves capable of assimilating the French.'[113]

For the most part, however, these attempts at assimilating 'the socially cohesive French-Canadians' clearly failed, and Canada's first Constitution in 1867 'only served to confirm the fact that Canadian pluralism was here to stay'.[114] At the ideological level, however, the persistence of a French-Canadian population with a distinct identity only reinforced an Anglo-Canadian nationalism in which the idea of a 'northern people' played a pivotal role. An Ontario newspaper, for example, lamented in the 1880s:

> Are we forever to be jabbering about our respective merits as Englishmen, Scotchmen, Welshmen, French and Germans; as Irish Catholic and Irish Orangemen? We have heard a great deal too much of this stuff talked. It is time that all classes of our population, whether born here or elsewhere, whatever their creed or country, should consider themselves, above all, Canadians.[115]

This Anglo-Canadian nationalism was inclusive insofar as it aimed at transcending the French-English divide. Nevertheless, like its Swiss and American counterparts it was as much 'organic' as it was 'civic' in terms of its inspiration and rhetoric. Its most vocal proponents portrayed Canadians (irrespective of their ethno-cultural origins) as members of a single people, and Canada as 'a melting pot of French and British peoples'. Although certain values and lifestyle patterns were regarded as vital manifestations of 'Canadian character', their adoption was depicted as the inevitable result of forces outside the control – and indeed even the awareness – of Canadians. Specifically, Canadian nationhood was portrayed as determined by either history or the natural environment.[116] Some believed the roots of this alleged national homogeneity to lie in the mists of pre-historical times. 'There is no real or vital difference in the origin of these two [French and English] races', argued F. A. Wightman in 1909: 'back beyond the foreground of history they were one'. Similarly, the historian William Wood claimed that 'many of the French-Canadians are descended from the Norman-Franks, who conquered England ... However diverse they are now, the French and British peoples both have some Norman stock in common.'[117]

However, as in the American case if for different reasons, the pre-modern past was an ambiguous source of national inspiration. This was not the case with regard to the natural environment. Thus the belief that northern wilderness could accomplish the miracle of Canadian ethnogenesis soon came to capture the popular imagination. What is more, the theme of a northern melting pot retained its salience throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. Painter Lawren Harris, a member of the Group of Seven, voiced a widespread attitude when he declared in the 1920s that

> it is only through the deep and vital experience of its total environment that a people identifies itself with its land ... To us there was also the strange brooding sense of another *nature* fostering a *new race* and a new age.[118]

Nature and nationhood in the post-war era

The question that still remains is that of what was the role played by landscape symbolism in the post-war national discourse of Switzerland, the United States, and Canada. Although a detailed response to this question would require a chapter in itself, a tentative answer may nonetheless be suggested here. In sum, my argument is this: the view that the natural environment produces a certain 'national character' – a view that raised few eyebrows throughout the nineteenth and into the mid-twentieth century – is no longer prominent as an ideological device used in official speeches and political rhetoric.

The main reason, it seems to me, is that reservations about organic notions of community have gained ground in the anti-nationalist climate of the immediate post-war era, at least in the West. Fostered by liberal intellectuals and spread to wider society via the education system, the view that societies are what people make of them rather than what 'history', 'culture' and 'nature' dictate has become prevalent. The result seems to be that mainstream politicians are now increasingly reluctant to use an overtly organic language for fear of being stigmatised as 'right-wing' or 'reactionary'.[119] The discourse of multiculturalism, which has been salient since the late

1970s as a critical response to xenophobic anti-immigration movements, has only served to further debilitate the appeal of organic notions of community, as has the process of European integration which has been accompanied by a decidedly civic rhetoric. (This is not to deny, of course, that organic conceptions of community continue to thrive in the rhetoric of xenophobic movements throughout Europe. The same is true of the ethnonationalisms promoted, for instance, by the Lega Nord in Italy or the Basques in Spain.)

Nevertheless, landscape imagery remained in general has retained significance as a self-evident symbol of nationhood after the Second World War. Particularly on the vernacular (as opposed to the explicitly ideological) level, the association of nationhood with nature is frequently made, partly because the appeal of categories such as 'nature' and 'landscape' is no longer confined to a privileged European elite (which was largely the case until the end of the nineteenth century). In the twentieth century, and particularly over the past fifty years or so, the natural environment (or rather: particular portions of it) has begun to capture the imagination of the masses. In Switzerland, for example, travel and tourism started to be enjoyed by the masses from the turn of the nineteenth century, and hence the Alps became an integral part of popular leisure culture. For Swiss pupils of primary school age the annual outing *(Schulreise)* became part of the curriculum in the twentieth century, and more often than not these journeys would lead into an Alpine environment. Hill walking, hiking, and skiing became activities that appealed to all sections of Swiss society. Most Swiss took the opportunity to practise these; and all, indeed, could see the mountains on a clear day, whether they lived in Zurich, Bern, Geneva, Lucerne, or Lugano.

But even in scholarly accounts of Swiss national identity, the Alpine landscape was assigned some role. In a much-cited book published in 1951, for example, the prominent Swiss historian Hermann Weilenmann argued that geography had in large part determined Switzerland's character as a nation. More specifically, he maintained that the forms of co-existence that had emerged in the small Alpine communities of Central Switzerland had in large part shaped 'the Swiss nation state as a whole'.[120] The writer Elias Canetti, in his *Masse und Macht,* first published in 1960, argued that the

mountains were the undisputed symbol of the Swiss nation.[121] Even on the recent occasion of August 1, 1989, as the Swiss were celebrating their national holiday, state representatives made use of Alpine symbolism in stirring public feeling. Hence the President of the Swiss Confederation, Jean Pascal Delamuraz, delivered his official address to the nation from the Gotthard, the mountain that in the 1930s had acquired such significance as a symbol of Switzerland's stand for independence and liberty.[122]

In the United States, the indications are that the narrative and symbolism of the American wilderness, the Wild West and the frontier have retained much of their significance (despite oppositional voices in an increasingly diverse society). This is true even of the ideological level. In the early 1990s, for instance, a controversy erupted over the meaning and importance of Turner's frontier thesis. The controversy unfolded when a number of journalists for whom this thesis was indispensable for explaining American identity discovered that the 'New Western Historians' had 'relegated [Turner] to the periphery'. As Grossman concludes from this incident:

> The frontier thesis in the minds of reporters, and apparently their readers, remains vital; it persists as the standard explanation of western and American exceptionalism. It remains so deeply embedded in a wider constellation of images about the West and the United States that the reporters regarded any questioning of it as radical and daring.[123]

The controversy was felt even more profoundly at the time of 'The West as America' exhibition at the National Museum of American Art in 1991. The historians responsible for the exhibition adopted a deconstructivist approach: that is, their aim was to convey to the visitors that many of the most cherished works on the frontier theme (including famous paintings, works of literature, popular histories, and so on) could best be understood as 'ideological narratives' rather than reflections of 'how it actually was'. The reactions were mixed, to put it mildly, with some visitors dismissing the exhibition as perverse and two United States senators voicing 'their outrage over the Smithsonian's complicity in debunking our frontier'.[124] Against the backdrop of such public reactions, a critical historian of the American West concluded on the significance of frontier symbolism and mythology for American culture and identity:

Packed full of nonsense and goofiness, jammed with nationalistic self-congratulation and toxic ethnocentrism, the image of the frontier is nonetheless universally recognized, and laden with positive associations. Whether or not it suits my preference, the concept works as a cultural glue – a mental and emotional fastener that, in some very curious and unexpected ways, works to hold us together.... In the late twentieth century, the scholarly understanding formed in the late nineteenth century still governs most of the public rhetorical uses of the word 'frontier'.[125]

Post-war Canada reveals a similar trend to that of the United States, at least as far as Anglo-Canadian discourse is concerned. (It is highly doubtful that French-Canadians share the enthusiasm for the Canadian wilderness, given the roots of this particular narrative in a nation-building discourse aimed at transcending Canadian ethnic pluralism.) Writing after the Second World War, Arthur Lower claimed that 'if the Canadian people are to find their soul, they must seek for it, not in the English language or the French', but in the 'unconquerable vastness of the north. From the land, Canada, must come the soul of Canada'.[126] One literary critic went so far as to claim that 'the Northern imagination' was '[p]erhaps the most exciting creative force in contemporary Canadian fiction – French and English ... Increasingly, our most perceptive novelists have shown that the Canadian imagination in many of its most original flights is inspired by the North'.[127] An even more pronounced variation on the same theme appears in a work by William Morton, erstwhile President of the Canadian Historical Association. In his *Canadian Identity* (1961), in a passage reminiscent in both style and tone of Frederick Jackson Turner's writing on the American frontier, he asserted that

Canadian history began when the Vikings crossed the frontier of fish, fur and farm across the North Atlantic ... From that obscure beginning Canada had a distinct, a unique, a northern destiny. Its modern beginnings are not Columbian, but Cabotan. And when the French followed Cartier up the St. Lawrence, they were at once committed by the development of the fur trade to the exploitation of the Canadian Shield ... The Canadian or Precambrian Shield is as central in Canadian history as it is to Canadian geography, and to all understanding of Canada ... And this alternate penetration of the wilderness

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and return to civilization is the basic rhythm of Canadian life, and forms the basic element of Canadian character.[128]

As recently as 1991, moreover, the author of an academic paper on 'The Forest and Canadian Culture' came to the conclusion that it was 'geography which sets the tone of Canadian culture just as it sets the rules of our working lives and governs our economic relations with other countries'.[129] Meanwhile, John Ralston Saul, a widely read essayist and novelist, fortified the boundaries of Canadian nationhood by bringing the theme of northern landscape into play. The following passage, written in 1997, provides a particularly succinct account of the role that the wild landscape supposedly continues to play in determining Canadian identity:

> Our destiny is tied to the territory of which we are custodians – that is, the northern half of the continent....Not religion, not language, not race, but place is the dominant feature of civilizations ... In more temperate, central countries, place is eventually dominated ... [but] our on the margins, place is never dominated.[130]

Exceptional nations in search of natural identity

Nation-builders in the polyethnic societies of Switzerland, the United States, and Canada faced a particularly challenging task because of their divergence from the norms of classical nationalism. When it comes to the construction of collective identity, anything that distinguishes one group from others can be used as a boundary marker. This is why national ideologues in these three societies began to elaborate the concept of civic exceptionalism. Particularly in the two republican nation-states, Switzerland and the United States (from the late eighteenth century onwards), and to a lesser extent in Canada (from the late-nineteenth century onwards), the belief in forming an exception to the general rule of nationalism took on a missionary character. However, the fact that the notion of civic exceptionalism was at times embraced with such zeal also reflects an ill-disguised uneasiness about 'not being like them'.

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Hence my second point: being different from the norm in this manner also posed its own problems. Nationalism demands that nations are more than merely groups held together by the institutional framework of a state. Specifically, it demands that nations be 'natural' communities, rooted in the 'organic' rather than simply based on the voluntary commitment of a citizenry. Measured against these criteria, polyethnic societies appeared hopelessly underdetermined. This is why the cultural and political elites – who had to operate within the ideological framework of classical nationalism – endeavoured to anchor 'their' nations in the organic world. The outcome was a dual strategy: while fervently subscribing to the rhetoric of civic exceptionalism, these elites at the same time fostered an ideology of organic (not ethnic) nationhood. This they accomplished by claiming that their communities, too, were naturally determined rather than merely abstractions. More specifically, they claimed that a particular part of the natural environment – the Alps in Switzerland, the West in the US, and the North in Canada – had created a unique 'national character'.

Notes

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[1] Calhoun (1994: 21, 25).

[2] Yack (1996: 198).

[3] Altermatt (1996: 60).

[4] Lipset (1996: 31). Further proponents of the 'American exceptionalism' thesis (including Alexis de Tocqueville, Wilbur Zelinsky, and Liah Greenfeld) are discussed in Kaufmann (1998: ch. 2), who also takes a critical stance on the exceptionalist view of the American nation.

[5] Yack (1996: 207). On the debate about civic and ethnic forms of nationalism, see also Miller (1995: especially chapter 5), and Shils (1995).

[6] Xenos (1996: 227).

[7] Smith (1991: 75).

[8] Schama (1995: 83-84 and 254-55). For an in-depth analysis of ideas about the natural environment in Antiquity, see Glacken's illuminating *Traces on the Rhodian Shore* (1967: part one).

[9] Schama (1995: 10). Hirsch (1995: 2) maintains that the term 'landscape' has its origin in the Dutch word *landschap*. It was introduced into the English language in the late sixteenth century 'as a technical term used by painters'. Lowenthal (1978: 377) maintains that the notion of a 'landscape' emerged where

significant parts of the natural environment began to be perceived in 'scenic' rather than strictly 'utilitarian' terms.

[10] Quoted from Hale (1994: 55). On the boost of climatic theories in the sixteenth century, see Glacken (1967: 449-456).

[11] A way of reasoning so clearly expressed in what may rightly be regarded as the two outstanding works on the influence of the environment on human beings appeared in the sixteenth century, see Jean Bodin's *Methodus* (1566) and *Republic* (1576)

[12] Quoted from Glacken (1967: 371). As Thomas (1983: 257) argued in his recent analysis of attitudes towards nature in early modern England: 'For the neo-classical theorists of the later seventeenth century, it was axiomatic that geometrical figures were intrinsically more beautiful than irregular ones.'

[13] Quoted from Glacken (1967: 542).

[14] Quoted from Glacken (1967: 578).

[15] Wozniakowski (1987: 17).

[16] Quoted from Rosen and Zerner (1984: 52).

[17] On the part played by ethnic historicism in the emergence of nationalism and the fostering of national identities, see, for instance, Smith (1995a: ch. 3). For an account of the Herderian conception of cultural community, see Berlin (1976).

[18] With the partial exception of Smith (1986: 183-90).

[19] Good recent examples are the reader, *Geography and National Identity* edited by David Hooson (1994), and Daniels (1993). And there is of course Simon Schama's (1995) path-breaking historical account.

[20] See Hooson (1994: introduction). For a primordialist account of the connection between nature and group life that operates with the more general term 'territoriality', see Grosby (1995).

[21] This approach is characteristic of most contributions in Hooson (1994).

[22] A point made by both Lowenthal (1978: 401) and Schama (1995: 15).

[23] The 'naturalisation of social classifications' as a measure to reduce uncertainty is discussed most illuminatingly in Douglas (1987: 48). Benedict Anderson, in his *Imagined Communities* (1991: 12), has made a related point in arguing that 'it is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny'.

[24] Hope Nicolson (1959: 345).

[25] See Walter (1990: 57); Marchal (1992b).

[26] Quoted from Dübi (1900:440). In 1900, the Swiss Alpine Club counted 5976 active members who were spread over 44 different national sections in all linguistic parts of the country. The activities of the Club consisted in a considerable number of excursions and publications. By the turn of the century, thirty four maps on a scale of 1:50,000 of different parts of the Alps chain had been edited. This is discussed in Dübi (1900: 440-43).

[27] Quoted from Jost (1988: 18-19).

[28] The crucial distinction between the classical and romantic conception of nature is set out in detail in Wozniakowski (1987) and Short (1991). The literary incarnation of this fusion of the classical and romantic conceptions of nature, which came to shape the Swiss patriots of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, was of course Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse* (first published in 1761). Rousseau depicted the Swiss Alps and their inhabitants as exemplars of simplicity, purity, honesty, and liberty, the republican virtues *par excellence*.

[29] Quoted from Nash (1967: 23).

[30] Quoted from Mankin Kornhauser (1998: 77).

[31] Kaufmann (1998: 679-80).

[32] See New (1989: 54-57, 70-71).

[33] To quote Lowenthal (1994: 22): '... the English landscape is not natural but crafted....Englishmen tame and adorn nature....' For the symbolic significance of English landscape during the inter-war period, see Potts (1989).

[34] Quoted from Mankin Kornhauser (1998: 71).

[35] Claval (1994: 44).

[36] Another instructive case in which the land takes the role of an organic connector between a distant past and the national present is Israel. In the Zionist reconstruction of the national past with its strong Herderian overtones, the land is the most important organic principle next to language. Land and language link the Zionist national revival with antiquity, thus bridging the long period of exile. This is discussed in Zerubavel (1995: chapter 2). In the case of the United States, nature – embodied in the Frontier – has functioned as a surrogate for a long historical pedigree. See Kammen (1991: chs. 1-3).

[37] Needless to say, Romanticism, in terms of both its ideological trajectory and its socio-political roots, presents us with too multifaceted a phenomenon to allow for sweeping generalisation. Yet whatever the differences between the various romantic currents, there nevertheless existed a commonality with respect to their socio-political origins and ideological orientations. The literature on Romanticism is vast. Detailed treatments of the different national currents can be found in the excellent reader by Porter and Teich (1988). On Romanticism and the Arts, see Rosen and Zerner (1984).

[38] On Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment, see Berlin (1981). On Herder's conception of a cultural community, see Barnard (1969). For differences and similarities between early Romantic and neo-classical thought, see Smith (1976). On romantic nationalism's search for poetic spaces and golden ages, see Smith (1986: 179-200).

[39] Porter and Teich (1988).

[40] Hope-Nicolson (1959: 3)

[41] Smith (1991: 149).

[42] On the impact of Italian and German irredentism on the reconstruction of Swiss national identity, see Frei (1967).

[43] Quoted from de Capitani (1987: 25).

[44] Spitteler (1915: 5).

[45] Hilty (1875: 29)

[46] Frei (1964: 213). This civic conception of national identity again came to dominate liberal and left-of-centre discourse during the 1930's. See Zimmer (1996).

[47] For other prominent representatives of this view, see the much-noticed speeches of the Federal Council in Numa Droz (1895), and of Max Huber (1916 and 1934), prominent intellectual and long-standing Swiss envoy at the International Court of Justice in the Hague.

[48] Bluntschli (1875: 14).

[49] Bluntschli (1875: 11).

[50] A very recent study of newspaper articles from August 1 (August 1st being Switzerland's national holiday since 1891) in the period from 1891 to 1935 reveals that the Alpine myth occupied a crucial place in liberal and conservative papers all over the country although the socialist press was more critical. See Merki (1995: 67-71).On national festivals, see Santschi (1991). For a discussion of historical plays, see Kreis (1988).

[51] Braun (1965: 326-29).

[52] Lasserre (1992: 192); Marchal (1992b: 49-50).

[53] This is set out in Widmer (1992: 619-38) and Wigger (1996: 86-89).

[54] Quoted from Helbling (1994: 160).

[55] See, for instance, Helbling (1994); Rutschmann (1994). On the significance of folk songs, see Im Hof (1991: 158-9).

[56] Helbling (1994: 173).

[57] Nasgaard (1984: 134, 125).

[58] Quoted from Jost (1988: 18).

[59] Quoted from Walter (1992: 14). The advertisement was launched in 1911 and 1937 respectively.

[60] Quoted from Zimmer (1996: 100).

[61] Quoted from (Kammen 1991: 42).

[62] Quoted from Kammen (1991: 51).

[63] Quoted from Kammen (1991: 43).

[64] Quoted from Lowenthal (1976: 93).

[65] Quoted from Kammen (1991: 18).

[66] Quoted from Kammen (1991: 42, 51).

[67] Kammen (1991: 60).

[68] Quoted from Kammen (1991: 136).

[69] Kammen (1991: 160, 166).

[70] Kammen (1991: 94, 100).

[71] Kammen (1991: 161).

[72] Mankin Kornhauser (1998: 80).

[73] Lowenthal (1976: 102).

[74] Kammen (1991: 44).

[75] Quoted from Mankin Kornhauser (1998: 73).

[76] Quoted from Mankin Kornhauser (1998: 81). In this context, the difference between Australia and the United States is highly instructive because it underscores the value of the visual arts as a source in nationalism research. While Australians (who only in 1901 united in federation, and even then maintained their identity as part of the British Commonwealth) tended to stress their ties with Britain until the turn of the twentieth century and beyond, Americans of the post-revolutionary era came to see in their separateness from Britain the defining element of their nationhood. This difference was reflected in the landscape paintings created on the two continents. As Elizabeth Jones writes (1998: 26): 'Touring in America – already a separate nation – premised the resemblance *and* the difference of American nature and civil society from that of England. Touring in Australia, on the other hand, provided a warranty that this New World was – or could be – very much like the old. Americans needed to underscore their distinctiveness, Australians their connectedness.' However, in tandem with the rise of an Australian patriotism from the late nineteenth century onwards Australian landscape painting underwent a transformation that brought it more in line with its American counterpart. Hence in 1889, commenting on the trend in art exhibitions in Victoria, art critic Frederick Bloomfield observed with some satisfaction that the 'predominant element was this year distinctly local. The majority of canvases were covered with scenes from the Australian bush, incidents of Australian life, and glimpses of the Australian coast. A few years ago there would have been, perhaps, half-a-dozen pictures in the entire collection which would have owed their origin to the inspiration of the country in which they were painted'. And he concluded in an overtly patriotic tone: 'Today the visitor is agreeably assured that the sentiment of this new Southern World is beginning to find expression, and that the penumbra of a genuinely Australian School of Art is veritably visible.' Quoted from Jones (1998: 44).

[77] Quoted from Kammen (1991: 45).

[78] Quoted from Johns (1998: 39).

[79] Mankin Kornhauser (1998: 73).

[80] Marshall (1988: 212).

[81] Quoted from Noble (1965: 29).

[82] Quoted from Mankin Kornhauser (1998: 79).

[83] Quoted from Mankin Kornhauser (1998: 73).

[84] Quoted from *New World From Old,* p. 165.

[85] Quoted from Noble (1965: 39).

[86] White (1994: 12).

[87] Coleman (1966: 23).

[88] Coleman (1966: 25).

[89] Coleman (1966: 27). Bonazzi (1993: 151) writes on the organic evolutionism informing Turner's thinking: 'Turner equated societies to organisms and, as a consequence, their history to the development of new species. His task as a scientist was to trace the process of adaptation through which the social organism he was dealing with, the United States, had become a distinct organism with an identity of its own.'

[90] Turner (1920: 1).

[91] White (1994: 12-13).

[92] White (1994: 25).

[93] Turner (1920: 4).

[94] Kammen (1991: 45). There is, however, yet another strong indication of the significance of the 'organic' in the construction of American nationhood in the nineteenth century. With the frontier closed in the 1880s, 'genealogy would become an obsession of native-born Americans', instigated by fears that new immigrants (now increasingly from non-Anglo-Saxon countries) could not be assimilated. White (1994: 47) describes this perception among native-born Americans: 'What their parents had secured through experience, they secured as an inheritance; descent from true Americans had replaced the pioneers' consenting to undergo the quintessential American frontier experience. New immigrants, to whom this frontier experience was foreclosed, seemed like dangerous, exotic, and unassimilable aliens to many native-born Americans.' On attitudes towards immigration in the nineteenth century, see also Kaufmann (1998: chs. 2 – 5).

[95] Lipset (1990: 42).

[96] Kaufmann (1997: 112). Emphasis in the original.

[97] Kaufmann (1997: 114-15).

[98] Kaufmann (1997: 118).

[99] Kaufmann (1997: 122, 123).

[100] Smith (1890: 6).

[101] Quoted from Kaufmann (1998: 682).

[102] Foster (1888: 25).

[103] Woodcock (1987: 10).

[104] New (1989: 113).

[105] See Berger (1966: 20).

[106] Kaufmann (1998: 24).

[107] Vipond (1980: 33).

[108] Quoted from Berger (1966: 21).

[109] Woodcock (1977: 73).

[110] Tooby (1991: 26).

[111] Quoted from Cook (1986: 185).

[112] Kaufmann (1997: 113).

[113] Kaufmann and Zimmer (1998: 501)

[114] Kaufmann and Zimmer (1998: 501).

[115] Quoted from Kaufmann and Zimmer (1998: 502).

[116] Kaufmann and Zimmer (1998: 501).

[117] Quoted from Kaufmann and Zimmer (1998: 502).

[118] Quoted from Berger (1966: 21). Nationalist movements with a considerable popular appeal such as the Native Sons reiterated the basic message of northern trans-ethnicity. The same holds for a number of influential Anglo-Canadian historians who not only participated in public controversies over Canadian nationhood but also began to influence what was taught in Canadian schools and universities. See Kaufmann and Zimmer (1998: 502-3).

[119] Particularly the naturalization of the nation – the belief that landscape in general, and the Alps in particular, are capable of determining national character – may be less sustainable under conditions of "reflexive modernization", with an attitude of "systematic doubt" starting to colonize the sphere of everyday life. On the implications of "reflexive modernization", see Giddens (1991).

[120] Weilenmann (1951: 258).

[121] Canetti (1971: 192).

[122] See Marchal (1992b).

[123] Grossman (1994: 3)

[124] Grossman (4).

[125] Limerick Nelson (1994: 94).

[126] Quoted from Levill (1982: 140).

[127] Mitcham (1983: 9).

[128] Quoted from Kaufmann (1998: 687).

[129] Fulford (1991: 11).

[130] Saul (1997: 69, 158).

Conclusion

Summary

The theories we select for our empirical analyses, and the results they tend to produce, are to a large degree determined by the cases we examine. In this study, Switzerland has provided the major case of analysis, and I do therefore not pretend that my conclusions necessarily hold for other cases as well. What I have attempted, however, and what I believe distinguishes this thesis from a conventional case study, is to broaden the reach of my arguments by adding systematic comparisons with other societies. I hope that by choosing this strategy, I have been able to make a general contribution to two debates. The first is the role of ethno-symbolic memory in modern nation formation. The second concerns the impact of civic and organic conceptions of nationhood on the reconstruction of national identity, particularly in polyethnic societies.

Ethno-symbolic memory and nation formation

The impact of ethno-symbolic memory on the construction of Swiss nationhood in the modern era was considerable. Forged in the wars against Habsburg Austria (1315 and 1386) and the Reich (1499-1500), such a collective memory began to take shape in the Old Swiss Confederation from the fifteenth century onwards. Resting on the antithesis of 'communalism' and 'feudalism', it comprised three central myths: a myth of foundation (embodied in the myth of the Rütli); a myth of liberation (expressed in the legend about Wilhelm Tell); and a myth of ethnic election, which simultaneously explained and justified the Confederate victories over the armies of the nobility. Sustained and reinforced by the parallel rise of a set of Confederate institutions – the Diet, the ritual of the communal oath, and the special concordats – this ethno-symbolic memory rose to prominence in the Old Confederation from the fifteenth century

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onwards. By the close of the seventeenth century, the myths of foundation and liberation had come to provide the constitutive narrative of Confederate self-identity. The Swiss Peasant War of 1653 underscores the popular resonance of the foundation and liberation myths in early-modern Switzerland and their capacity to inspire collective action against ruling authorities deemed oppressive.

The Confederate memory was not tantamount to nationalism or 'national consciousness'. To interpret it in such a way would mean to read a modern phenomenon into earlier centuries, thus adopting the teleological view that is at the heart of national historicism. It is the late-eighteenth century patriots who must be credited with turning this memory into an early Swiss nationalism by fusing the core myths with the future-oriented political narrative of the Enlightenment. Initially, their project revealed strong universalist tendencies, with some of the founding members of the Helvetic Society arguing that the noblest form of patriotism consisted in a cosmopolitan love of humanity. From around the 1780s onwards, however, more emphasis was placed on the ethno-historicist conception of community and on what some patriots described as the virtues of 'national character'. These included, above all, the republican values of simplicity and democracy, values that were portrayed as rooted in an Alpine natural environment. To the extent that the champions of national authenticity gained the upper hand, the notion of 'noble patriotism', although it was never completely abolished, was relegated to a minority faith.

The fusion of civic and ethno-historicist narratives that the patriots had accomplished supplied the basic framework for future national discourse. It was at the heart of both the republican nationalism of the first half of the nineteenth century and the public debates over national identity after the founding of the Swiss nation-state in 1848. The socio-political conflicts that punctuated the period from 1798 to 1848 favoured the emergence of a public sphere that further reinforced 'the nation' as an emotive and cognitive category. Yet while this progress on the level of public communication prepared the ground for an intensification of nation-oriented activity, the existing repertoire of myths and narratives continued to define the scope within which the national discourse took place. Both the republican nationalists fighting for

the creation of a modern nation-state and their conservative opponents justified their rival claims by referring to the same historical myths. The national festival of 1891 in Schwyz and the National Exhibition of 1939 in Zurich provided impressive manifestations of the resilience of the core myths and narratives that constituted Swiss ethno-symbolic memory.

Although this disposition to interpret the present by referring to the past cut across linguistic and religious boundaries, the historicist pattern adopted varied depending on political and cultural affiliation. The tendency to view the 'national past' in genealogical terms, for instance, was most notable in Catholic-Conservative circles and their mostly rural constituencies. These groups conceived of the protagonist of Switzerland's gallery of myths, Wilhelm Tell, as an ancestor in the first, and an ideological role model in the second instance. Or to put it differently: they viewed Tell as a role model to be emulated because he was considered an ancestor. The republican nationalists, on the other hand, tended to interpret the founding and liberation myths primarily in terms of a source of moral and ideological inspiration. The inclination to 'read' the core myths in ideological rather than genealogical terms, it appears, was most marked among the educated elites of the French- and Italian-speaking cantons.

The resonance of the ethno-symbolic memory rested on the fact that it was both constitutive (i.e. by furnishing actors' worldviews) and constraining (i.e. by delimiting the scope open for national invention). To be sure, by interpreting specific myths and narratives in the light of new worldviews (e.g., the Enlightenment in the case of the patriots of the eighteenth century) and conditions (e.g., the threat of ethno-linguistic nationalism 1870 – 1939), the meaning of the former was partially transformed. However, the fact that, from the 1760s to 1939, the existing ethno-symbolic memory largely retained its significance as a framework of reference testifies to its considerable resonance. The continued appeal of ethno-historicism lay in the fact that it served two major purposes for the construction of national identity. First, it provided a source of moral inspiration, and a means of lending authority and legitimacy to the project of creating a Swiss state in accordance with Enlightenment ideals of rationality and good

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government. Second, the core myths functioned as a 'particularist' counterweight to the civic discourse of the Enlightenment, which was essentially universalist in its nature.

The comparison with Germany in chapter 7 has revealed that, where ethno-symbolic memory held little popular resonance prior to the take off of modern nationalism, a different pattern of nation formation was the likely outcome. Thus in Germany modern nationhood was mainly forged by nineteenth-century events (the wars against France and national unification). To be sure, in Germany, too, a stock of myths and narratives existed that had their origins in the pre-modern period. However, its two most prominent elements – the legend about Arminius the Cheruscan, and the narrative of the German *Kulturnation* – provided inspiration only to a small cultural elite. It was not until the wars against France had created a nation-centred discourse that transcended religious and regional boundaries that this toolkit of myths and narratives began to capture the public's imagination.

Civic and organic conceptions of nationhood

The second conclusion that can be drawn from this analysis is that there are no purely 'political' nations, as the myth of civic exceptionalism would have us believe. Nationhood, to be feasible and sustainable in the long term, needs stabilising principles of the kind that Mary Douglas considers vital for the reproduction of institutions more generally. Institutions – including the collective loyalties and identifications that constitute 'the nation' – gain their legitimacy and thus stability from the 'naturalisation of social classifications'. To quote again Douglas' crucial passage: 'There needs to be an analogy by which the formal structure of a crucial set of social relations is found in the physical world, or in the supernatural world, or in eternity, anywhere, so long as it is not seen as a socially contrived arrangement.'[1]

To be sure, for historical and structural reasons, political values and state institutions tend to acquire a particular significance in the national discourse of polyethnic societies such as Switzerland, Canada and the United States. However, the strong civic thrust that characterises the construction of nationhood in these societies

should also be interpreted in functional terms: as an indispensable symbolic marker that served to accentuate what was held to be distinctive about one's own national identity. However, for nation-building elites operating in an international system defined by the doctrines of classical nationalism, the sole reliance on civic nationhood posed considerable problems. The predicament consisted precisely in the fact that the civic conception of nationhood puts the main weight of emphasis on the voluntary and constructed nature of national identities. Civic nationalism brings to the fore the constructed and contingent nature of nationhood. What is more, in propagating the belief in civic exceptionalism, it literally glorifies the voluntary dimension of nationhood, depicting it as superior to the putatively parochial affiliations of language and ethnicity. My analysis has revealed, however, that these societies could often hardly conceal their unease about 'not being like the others'. The missionary zeal with which the belief in civic exceptionalism was frequently embraced is thus in part a reflection of this insecurity.

But the civic conception of nationhood in itself, while it could adequately serve to render these nations distinctive, was unable to do justice to the criteria of cultural authenticity as defined by classical nationalism. Nations, according to nationalism's core doctrine, had to be 'natural' communities. To be able to do justice to classical nationalism's criteria of national authenticity, the national ideologues of these societies had to supply proof that their nations were organically determined rather than merely products of human will. Among the generally recognised manifestations of organic nationhood, shared language and a distinctive pre-modern past take pride of place. From this nationalist point of view, therefore, nation-states that were not based on shared language, such as Switzerland and Canada, or those that lacked a distinctive pre-modern past, such as Canada and the United States, appeared as inadequate.

Yet the nation-building elites of polyethnic societies, who saw it as their task to secure international recognition for their states, developed a particular awareness that an emphasis on human will alone was insufficient as a basis for national identity. In Switzerland, this predicament became most obvious when ethno-linguistic nationalism was on the rise from the 1870s onwards. This led to the adoption of a combined

ideological 'strategy' of historicism and geographical determinism. Thus on the one hand, cultural and political elites pointed to the long historical pedigree of the Swiss nation. This long pre-modern past, they argued, was a testimony to the organic nature of Swiss nationhood. The (implicit and sometimes explicit) logic behind the historicist narrative was this: a national community like Switzerland that had developed over the space of several centuries was both natural and authentic despite of its lack of cultural homogeneity.

A second narrative, the adherents of which pointed to the identity-shaping role of the natural environment, reinforced this claim to national authenticity. Specifically, they emphasised that Switzerland's Alpine environment had produced a unique national character. In Canada and the United States, where for obvious reasons the past could be of less assistance, the natural environment played the key role in attempts at rendering nationhood natural and authentic. This is true in particular of the later nineteenth century, when romanticist conceptions of community experienced a revival both in Europe and on the North American Continent.

Postscript

Have the twin engines behind the construction of national identities in the modern era – historicism and organicism – lost their grip on the public's imagination? Let me end with some admittedly impressionistic observations and speculative conclusions on this issue, drawn from recent Swiss developments.

The challenge to the late-medieval framework

As for historicism, there is evidence that a re-conceptualisation in the public perception of the Swiss past has been in the making since the 1970s.[2] A new historical memory, promoted by a heterogeneous but increasingly influential coalition of cultural and political elites, has acted as the driving force behind this transformation. The profound

novelty of the new historical memory lies in the fact that its proponents openly reject the temporal and geographical framework upon which the reconstruction of Swiss nationhood had hitherto been based. According to the view they adhere to, the history of the Swiss nation begins either in 1798, when the Helvetic Republic was established, or in 1848, the founding date of the modern Swiss nation-state. Allied to this is a geographical shift concerning the nation's symbolic capital: it is not Catholic central Switzerland with its pre-modern mythical repertoire that is seen as the true cradle of modern Switzerland. The revisionist coalition re-allocated this honour to the mainly Protestant towns – above all Zurich, Bern, Basle and Geneva – the traditional champions, that is, of the liberal state-construction as it came into being in 1848.

Given that even the most resolute supporters of the liberal state between, say, 1870 and the end of World War II did not question the late-medieval framework, this presents quite a radical departure. However, over the last three decades or so such concerns seem to have weakened considerably. The organisation of the festivities in commemoration of Switzerland's 700th anniversary in 1991 is an impressive testimony to this change of orientation. Not only was the public debate leading up to the festival protracted: 'Few countries engage in soul-searching of this depth when planning celebrations', was the comment of one foreign analyst.[3] As the celebrations revealed, moreover, the traditional focus on the late-medieval past (embodied in the founding date of 1291) had become controversial beyond the immediate realm of critical historiography.[4]

A major motive for discrediting the late-medieval past was the conviction that it had too often acted as the handmaiden for conservative, isolationist and therefore essentially selfish policies which had prevented Switzerland from playing a more constructive role in European affairs.[5] This view surfaced again in the intense public discourse concerning the national celebrations that were held in 1998 all over the country. The year 1998 provided a threefold reason for national commemoration: 1848 (the year when Switzerland was founded as a modern nation-state); 1798 (when the Helvetic Republic was established with the aid of French troops); 1648 (when Swiss independence was officially recognised in the Treaty of Westphalia).

Surprisingly enough, each of these three dates received public attention, although 1848 was favoured by the Swiss parliament and most probably by the majority of Swiss citizens. Yet 1798 was favoured by a coalition of left-of-centre politicians, some intellectuals and those cantons that had lost their former status as subject territories thanks to the Helvetic regime. 1648, on the other hand, was favoured by a relatively small group of Catholic Conservatives for whom both 1798 and 1848 symbolised the political dominance of the Protestant and Liberal cantons. The late-medieval past, on the other hand, received either little attention or was depicted in openly negative terms.

However, what this outlook on the state of post-war discourse about Switzerland's national past suggests is not that the Swiss are currently witnessing the dead of historicism as a mechanism for the construction of national identity. What it indicates is that the reconstruction of national identity in which they are presently engaged marks a cultural shift of no small significance: the transformation of the traditional temporal and geographical parameters of Swiss nationhood. The result is a new historicism, one more in accordance with the liberal and critical public.

Fears of 'Überfremdung'

What about the second pivotal mechanism, organicism? Has the belief in organic conceptions of community faded as a result of globalisation and the pressures on national sovereignty deriving from European integration? As I argued at the end of chapter 8, organic rhetoric has become rare in the speeches of mainstream politicians of the West. At least in Europe, explanations of human behaviour as rooted in the physical world – biology or the natural environment – is no longer en vogue in view of the mass killings that have been committed in the name of racist worldviews. Switzerland is of course no exception to this general rule, although the natural environment to this day takes a relatively prominent place in conservative discourse about an allegedly 'unique Swiss character'. Yet can we conclude from the decline of organicist rhetoric among the centre and left-of-centre parties that organic notions of community are no longer

germane to how people define their national identities? The relative success of the anti-immigration movement of the 1960s and 1970s and the rejection at the ballot box in 1994 of a proposal to facilitate the acquisition of Swiss citizenship for young foreign nationals indicate otherwise. (Of course, similar trends against foreign immigration could and can be observed in other countries as well; yet the populist character of Swiss democracy brings out more clearly than a purely representative system ever could the attitudes and worldviews of the so-called ordinary men and women on the street.)

Fears of *Überfremdung* began to be raised more frequently from the mid-1960s onwards, when Swiss society was confronted with a sharp increase of labour immigration, mainly from southern European countries. (The term *Überfremdung* is hard to translate. Essentially, it refers to a scenario in which the authenticity of Swiss culture becomes undermined as a result of too much foreign immigration. An accurate but inelegant translation would be 'over-foreignisation'.) Swiss right-wing parties decided to use the traditional Swiss weapon, the ballot-box, to solve the problem of foreigners. In the course of the 1970s, the Nationale Aktion, the Republican Party and other right-wing organisations tried either to set quotas on foreigners or to tax employers who engaged foreign labour. In addition, the supporters of these proposals demanded that only a relatively small number of foreign nationals be granted Swiss citizenship each year. The voters rejected such proposals on every occasion. Nevertheless, the first referendum, which took place in June 1970, was rejected by a mere 54% of the total vote. By October 1974, when the second referendum against foreign immigration was conducted, the no-votes had increased to 66%, and in the third referendum in March 1977 they had reached 71%.[6] To be sure, by the end of the 1970s the concept of *Überfremdung* had lost much of its significance as a cultural code in public discourse. This does not mean, however, that the political mobilisation against foreign immigration had not left its imprint on future legislation. Instead, a new strategy was adopted designed to prevent *Überfremdung* through the double policy of discouraging immigration and cultural assimilation and social integration.[7]

What needs underscoring, moreover, is that the discourse of *Überfremdung* was salient both in conservative circles and among supporters of the Social Democrats and

the trade unions, although it was less prominent among liberal groups. In 1964, a report in a trade union newspaper painted a critical picture of apparently widespread feelings of resentment among the unions' rank and file against foreign guest workers:

> We are quick to criticise the discrimination of the blacks in the United States and are always ready to draft resolutions against the policy of apartheid in South Africa. Yet, shockingly, the xenophobia to which many of our colleagues adhere contrasts sharply with the hollow internationalism that many of them are eager to display on every possible occasion.[8]

As recently as 1994, moreover, the voters rejected a referendum which would have made it easier for young foreigners between the age of 15 and 25 who had spent five years in Swiss schools to become citizens by an accelerated (and cheaper) procedure. Both the main parties and parliament had overwhelmingly welcomed the proposal. The popular vote went 52.9% to 47.1% in favour of liberalisation but the vote by canton revealed that thirteen had voted 'No'. The strongest opposition to the initiative came from the Catholic and rural cantons, while urban areas voted in favour of the proposed legislation. A second line divided the French-speaking cantons, which tended to be overwhelmingly in favour, and the German-speaking areas, which were either less decisive in their approval (the urban areas) or were clearly against the proposal (the rural areas). Commenting on the outcome of the referendum, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* noted sadly that

> once again the vote showed how little in these matters the views of parliament, the large parties and organisations can predict the behaviour of the voters. One ought to add that the political leaders and party members did all too little for an enterprise that they must have known would not be automatically accepted.[9]

My admittedly impressionistic observations suggest that millennial hopes about the coming of internationalism may be premature. This is despite the undeniable force emanating from global capitalism and the project of closer European integration currently under way. Tom Nairn got it just about right in the early 1980s:

No one in his senses is going to deny the increasing interdependence of the global economy, the economic rationale of larger productive units and markets, the growth of state intervention, the role of multinationals, or any other fetishes. But no automatic, 'logical' rendition of these factors into political or historical internationalisation has in fact occurred. ... internationalism and nationalism are, in a curious way, perfectly twin ideologies. They are part of a single, overall, modern thought-world.[10]

Notes

[1] Douglas (1987: 48).

[2] The trend is discussed in Kreis (1993: 1–16).

[3] Bendix (1994: 39).

[4] See Roger Sablonier, 'Schweizer Geschichte als Ländlermusik der Geschichtswissenschaften? Ein mediävistischer Rückblick auf das Jubiläumsjahr', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung,* February 22/23, 1992; Franciois de Capitani, 'Als es die republikanischen Tugenden zu beschwören galt. Im Jahr der 700 Jahre Eidgenossenschaft sind auch die nationalen Feste nicht mehr ganz das, was sie früher waren', *Weltwoche,* no. 1, (January 3, 1991).

[5] On 6 December, 1992, the Swiss people voted against joining the EEA (European Economic Area) by the narrow margin of 50.3%. However, at cantonal level the majority voting against the initiative was much more clear cut.

[6] The figures are quoted from Romano (1998).

[7] Romano (1999).

[8] Quoted from Romano (1999).

[9] Quoted from Steinberg (1996: 126).

[10] Nairn (1997: 27, 41).

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