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Nationalism in a global era: the persistence of nations

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it is referred to more appropriately as AAVE. Yoruba and Igbo are first listed (in Chapter 61) as among the main Bantu languages; later it is mentioned that some classifications place them among the Kwa languages, a view far more prominent among Africanists. Despite such minor matters, *How Language Works* is a valuable work that will give the general reader a quick understanding of the phenomena that fascinates linguists.

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Nationalism in a global era: the persistence of nations, edited by Mitchell Young, Eric Zuelow and Andreas Sturm, London and New York, Routledge, 2007, xi+247 pp., £65.00/\$140.00 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0-415-41405-0

Belief in the swift withering away of the nation due to the forces of globalisation was quite widespread in the early 1990s, among academics and commentators alike. Of the leading theorists of the nation, Anthony Smith has been one of the most vocal critics of this position. In a considerable number of books, he has consistently argued that nations are based on historical *ethnies* and so have a continuity that has been understated by many scholars – there is thus no sound reason to assume that their dominance as political and emotional power containers will be short lived.

In 1990, Smith took the initiative to form the Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism (ASEN), managed to this day from the interdisciplinary department at the London School of Economics from which he recently retired. The present volume, based on papers from the 2004 ASEN conference, not only documents the very significant contribution of the organisation to the study of nationalism, but can also be read as a tribute to Smith's achievements and a vindication of his theoretical position. Every chapter describes thriving nations, most of them busy redefining themselves to fit twenty-first century sensibilities, but none apparently threatened by obsolescence. There are chapters on independence celebrations in European countries, on the role of Atatürk's mausoleum in creating shared national memories among Turks, on monuments in Thai nationalism, on tourism and national identity in Ireland, on Jordan, Croatia and the Baltic nation-states. Before this, we are treated to thoughtful theoretical introductions provided by the editors, Edward Tiryakian, William Safran and Smith himself. The book proves beyond doubt that nations and national identities persist and are unlikely to go away soon. The individual chapters are learned and enlightening, sometimes brilliant and exciting.

Of course, a number of difficult questions, most of them discussed incessantly by scholars of nationalism for decades, immediately present themselves. Who belongs to the nation, and what does it take to be a member of a nation? What is the essence of the nation? What is the importance of nationhood to politics, economics and personal identity, relative to other principles of organisation or sources of identity? These and other critical matters are raised in many of the chapters but, to my mind, not all of them are treated in a satisfactory way.

The main argument is nonetheless convincing. Beginning with a quotation from Eric Hobsbawm – who cites Hegel's observation that the owl of Minerva flies only at dusk – the editors drily note that the owl of nationalism began its flight early. They and their contributors argue that national identities show no sign of abating, but are adjusting quickly to globalisation while retaining their symbolic continuity with the past. However, not all the contributors are as cautious as Smith, who not only distinguishes between different kinds of nationalism, but also separates the nation from the state. In other words, *contra* Hobsbawm

(and Marx and Engels, a century and a half earlier), Smith claims that national identities may well prevail independently of economic globalisation and the political weakening of the (nation-)state. Writing these lines just after the first semi-final of the European football championship (Germany scraped through, as usual, narrowly beating Turkey), I agree wholeheartedly with this point of view. Later chapters show how memorial sites and public rituals strengthen the sense of 'we-hood', and they have lost none of their force in spite of devolution of economic and political power.

Yet, as the volume moves on, certain wariness begins to grow. Elgenius's chapter on public celebrations is wonderful, and Sturm's contribution on brands of Thai nationalism is fascinating and deserves special credit for introducing a context rarely studied in comparative research. Wilson writes interestingly on the Atatürk cult, and shows – although he does not make much of it analytically – that the Turkish claim to historical continuity (going back to the Hittites and beyond) is completely devoid of an ethnic content, since the ancestors of the Turks lived in Central Asia. And yet something is missing. Only slightly more than half of Thailand's populations are Thais. The politics of exclusion or enforced assimilation in modern Turkey, directed at Kurds and other ethnic or religious minorities, has been infamous worldwide. Modern Croatian nationalism, dealt with in the context of linguistic purification in Young's chapter, has a Janus face, to put it mildly. Minorities in Norway have a complex and highly interesting relationship to the flag waving and brass music so omnipresent on Constitution Day (one of Elgenius's examples). In a word, the frontier areas of the nation-as-imagined-community are scarcely dealt with in the book. What we are offered instead is the symbolic centre, where the semantic thickness of the nation is astonishing.

As every good scholar knows, aiming the searchlight at a particular spot leaves everything else in the dark – and, as long as one does not insist on one's own perspective as the only valid one, there is nothing objectionable about this. However, one wonders if the editors have not fallen into the same trap as some of the people they criticise for claiming that national identity will soon be a thing of the past, by arguing that 'the nation persists as an important source of identity, community and collective memory for *most* of the world's population' (my emphasis). How do they know? Since the contributors focus almost exclusively on devoted nationalists and their movements, we have no means of assessing their relative importance compared to other sources of collective identity, or the extent to which people around the world are indifferent to, feel alienated from, or even oppressed by a state endorsed collective identity with which they do not or cannot identify. I have known more than one German, and more than one immigrant, who has looked to globalisation and European integration with the hope that these transnational processes might make national identity less of an issue.

This book is a fine and timely contribution to the study of contemporary nationalisms, but the jury is still out on the relative importance of nationalism, compared to rival (local, regional and transnational) forms of collective identification.

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When ways of life collide: multiculturalism and its discontents in The Netherlands, by Paul Sniderman and Louk Hagendoorn, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2007, xiv + 155 pp., \$24.95 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0-691-12906-8

Since the economic crisis in the 1970s and 1980s, ethnic minorities in The Netherlands – especially the poorly educated Turks and Moroccans among them who entered the country as