

In Defense of Nationalism: the  
Importance of Myths, Memories  
and Symbols in the Process of  
Nation-Building

# Outline of Presentation

1. Meaning of Nationalism;
2. Origins of Nations (Paradigm Debates);
3. The Ugly Nationalism (Cambodia);
4. Why Ugly?;
5. What is nation-building?;
6. Role of national myths, memories, and symbols in the processes.

# Meanings of Nationalism

- A process of formation, or growth, of nations;
- A sentiment or consciousness of belonging to the national;
- A language and symbolisms of the nation;
- A social and political movement on behalf of the nation;
- A doctrine and/or ideology of the nation, both general and particular.

# Myths, Memories and Symbols

- Myths refer to stories from ancient times (past) to explain natural events or to describe the history or origin of a people.
- Memories refer to the ability of people to remember collections of events, experience, values and situations. (Collective name, shared descent, history, territory and solidarity)
- Symbols can be people, objects and events representing the quality or situation.

# When is the nation?

- Paradigm Debates
  1. Primordialism
  2. Perennialism
  3. Modernism
  4. Ethno-Symbolism

# Primordialism

- Nation is natural order;
- Role of the past is clear and unproblematic; the nation was always there;
- The task of the nationalist is to remind his or her compatriots of their glorious past, so that they can recreate and relive those glories.

# Perennialism

- Nation is immemorial, the forms may change or dissolve, but the identity is unchanging;
- Not natural order, later generation can choose to build on ancient ethnic foundations;
- The task of the nationalism is to rediscover and appropriate a submerged past.

# Modernism

- The past is irrelevant, the nation is a modern phenomenon; the earliest 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- Product of nationalist ideologies, which themselves are the expression of modern, industrial society. (Though they are free to use the past heritage);
- Nation-building can proceed without the aid of an ethnic past.

# Modern Characteristics

- Socio-economic inequality (Nairn, Hechter)
- Socio-cultural modernization (Gellner)
- Political statehood (Giddens, Bruilly, Mann)
- Ideological drive (Kouderie)
- Social Construction and imagined community (Hobsbawm, Anderson)

# Ethno-Symbolism

- Links between modern units and pre-modern ethnic population are clear;
- Ethnies are crucial for the formation of nation and nationalism
- Ethno histories, folk tales, the symbols, cultural ancestry, and collective memory are important;
- Myths, memories and symbols provide sole basis for social cohesion, political action as modern societies.

# A Definition

- An ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population which some its members deem to constitute an actual or potential 'nation'. (Anthony D. Smith, 2001)

# Charges Against Nationalism in Cambodia

- Xenophobia: Khmers hate foreigners?
- Fanaticism: Are we extreme? Warrior heritage?
- Racism: Do we think we are superior? What about the others?
- Backward thinking: Are we living in the past shadow?
- Genocide: Killing any specific race?

# Why does nationalism look so bad? Theoretical level

- Hegemonic Discourse
- Dominance of Modernist Paradigm

# Empirical level

- Only hot political expressions of nationalism are selected;
- Durability of ethnies and nation is overlooked;
- Mobilization of other important national Myths, Memories and Symbols is not included in analysis;
- Geopolitical factors are simply ignored;
- Other ideologies are not taken on board or treated less important;
- Collective memory is dismissed.

# What is Nation-Building?

- Not only a matter of establishing the appropriate institutions or generating a complex class structure around a communication infrastructure.
- Ceaseless re-interpretations, rediscoveries and reconstructions
- Refashioning national institutions
- Constructing social maps
- All done in light of myth-symbol complex

# Reiteration

- A process by which a historically positive feature of national identity is mobilized for other (e.g. economic) purposes within a contemporary context.

# Recapture

- The process of recapture is represented by an aspiration to recover historically positive features of national identity now regarded as problematic.

# Representation

- Representation entails the presentation of historically negative features of identity as contemporary advantages or, at the very least, as largely neutral.

# Repudiation

- Repudiation is necessary where national characteristics are not positive, either in an enduring or historical sense, and where they are unable to be represented in such a way to accord with the contemporary (economic) context.

Thank You

# Propositions of Nationalism

1. The world is divided into nations, each with its own character, history and destiny;
2. The nation is the sole source of political power;
3. Loyalty to the nation overrides all other loyalties;

# Propositions Conti.

4. To be free, every individual must belong to a nation;
5. Every nation requires full self-expression and autonomy;
6. Global peace and justice require a world of autonomous nations.

(Adopted from Kedourie, 1960)

# Attributes of Ethnies & Nations

- **Ethnies**
  - **Proper name**
  - **Common myths of ancestry, etc.**
  - **Cultural differentia(e)**
  - **Link with homeland**
  - **Some (elite) solidarity**
- **Nations**
  - **Proper name**
  - **Common myths of shared history**
  - **Common public culture**
  - **Occupation of homeland**
  - **Common rights and duties**
  - **Single economy**

# Dimensions of Ethnies

- Collective name
- Common myth of descent
- A shared history
- A distinctive shared history
- An association with specific territory
- A sense of solidarity