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Politics and the nation: nationalist mobilisation of ethnic differences

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ABSTRACT. Based on a critique of the exogenous and expressive views of politics underlying many studies of nationalism, this article analyses the political factors that affect nation-building processes in a direct manner. First, ethnicity should be considered not so much as an historical and objective starting point but as the outcome of nationalist intellectuals' efforts at filtering and selecting political and cultural elements. It is important to examine the structure and genealogy of nationalist ideological capital using myth/symbol analysis or frame analysis. Second, one of the key concepts in the study of nationalist movements is the Political Opportunity Structure, as it refers to the developmental context, both institutional (democratisation, decentralisation, etc.) and strategic (potential allies, electoral dealignments, etc.). In this sense, ethnic regulation policies should not be taken as mere effects or responses, but as decisive intervening causes in the very process of national identity-building. Finally, this article argues that rational choice analysis and collective action logic can be found useful in explaining the successes or failures of nationalist movements that attempt to mobilise and organise politically as mass phenomena.

Taking politics seriously in the analysis of nationalism

The recent proliferation of studies on nationalism has multiplied the number of disagreements among researchers over methodology, theoretical perspectives, explanatory factors and the like (Smith 1998). This became abundantly manifest during the conferences held in Santiago de Compostela, Warwick and Barcelona, among others (Beramendi et al. 1994; Smith 1996; Abrahamian 1997; Safran and Máiz 2000). There are also, however, areas in which increasing consensus has emerged from these debates: Nationalism is considered to be an entirely modern phenomenon, inseparable from the state. Whatever the historical roots of its ethnic component, the actual genesis of nationalism occurs within a specific institutional and political arena. This is the

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case both with nation-state nationalism and with nationalism that challenges a nation-state or a multinational or colonial empire, demanding its own state.

So far, so good. But, in order to reach a more plausible and complete explanation of nationalism, is it enough to simply abandon any perennial sense of the nature of nations, emphasising instead that they are 'imaginary communities', or providing a more balanced account of an ethnic past and of present nationalist leaders' impact? The point is that the questionable logic of traditional studies still persists to some extent and is excessively active in contemporary thought on modernity, political nature and state-centredness of nations. An underlying set of explanatory assumptions, which might be labelled *exogenous ethnicity*, is to some extent present in many analyses of nationalism. The logical sequence of this 'expressive' argumentation, often implicit in discussions of subnationalism or of nations without a state, may be summarised as follows: (1) there is a prior, objectively differentiated *ethnicity*, based on certain features (language, 'race', culture, tradition, territory, etc.), which (2) generates a pre-political matrix of common *national interests*. The community, through the efforts of its elites and intellectuals, becomes increasingly conscious of this, to the point of (3) fashioning a *collective identity* that is adopted by a certain segment of the population. The political expression of these national interests sooner or later gives rise to (4) a *nationalist movement* that, by (re)discovering and extending the national hallmarks to include broader and broader segments of society, finally demands (5) the right to self-determination and the establishment of a *state* that ensures self-government and embodies the defence of the interests of the community.

However, nationalism should no longer be considered as a manifestation or mere externalisation of a pre-existing, given entity, the nation. Rather, the nation itself is the dynamic and open-ended outcome of a complex process of political and social construction that takes place in certain cultural, economic and political contexts due to the pressures of nationalism. Going well beyond an appeal to the ethno-cultural differences, the final analytical account of a nation-building process requires meeting a series of explanatory conditions in the areas of structure and action. These prerequisites can be summarised as follows:

1. Certain distinguishing *ethnic preconditions*, which are not objective facts, but the outcome of a process of selection, filtering and invention that nationalists carry out using ethnic 'raw material' of richer or poorer quality, and which is in turn the product of prior conceptualisation by elites and intellectuals.
2. An appropriate *political opportunity structure*. This may be *formal*, when the politicisation of national differences is encouraged by political decentralisation (as in consociational or federal states) or by increasing opportunities for political access (as in democratisation processes). It may also be *informal*, such as governmental ethnic policies and strategies that facilitate

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nationalism, electoral realignments, intra-elite conflicts, an availability of new alliances, etc.

3. Efficient *political mobilisation*, which through organisational efforts and appropriate discursive strategies is able to establish the active existence of the nation as an undeniable political fact with a broad social base by building on shared national interests and specific objectives of self-government.

In short, there are no ethnic founding eras or national interests that are entirely prior to the political process. Instead, each political mobilisation produces – that is selects, highlights, reformulates and popularises – distinctive ethnic markers, along with concrete and contingent national interests. Furthermore, the specific social and political context may in turn be altered by the nationalist movement itself and by other internal or external factors that may increase or limit opportunities. A theory that takes into account the constructive, dynamic, open-ended nature of the process must reintroduce *politics* as the fundamental and truly performative element, instead of representing it as the vicarious expression of a pre-existing nation.

Ethnicity as a cultural and political outcome

The eclipse of primordial and organic notions of ethnicity, along with increasing agreement on the malleable, historical and non-natural aspects of the diacritical features that shape the ethnicity of nations, has given rise to two very different sets of issues. First, we find that differentiated ethnicity is necessary but not sufficient for the genesis of a nation. A group that maintains its own particular language, culture, traditions, customs and economy may exist without developing a nationality (Stavenhagen 1996; Gurr 1993). Nor is it is enough for the group to be conscious of common cultural markers and to believe in a common ancestry. The ethnic difference must also be socially activated through shared experience of oppression, inequality or exploitation, and then politically mobilised for political entrepreneurs, intellectuals and organisations in order to forge a social block around certain ethno-national characteristics.

Secondly, and more fundamentally, both the *nation-building* potential of ethnicity and its very content are problematic when seen from a more constructivist viewpoint. Specifically, the problem is that ethnicity does not constitute a pristine difference – a static set of objective or given factors; rather, it is the dynamic result not only of a process of selection or rediscovery, but also of political and intellectual production, emerging from the same cultural and political mobilisation that defines the objectives as well as the criteria for community ascription – the specific features for belonging to a group. If ethnicity constitutes a series of identity markers that are socially and politically constructed but never entirely crystallised, then one of the first goals when analysing nationalism should be to explain the mechanisms used in setting the

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specific criteria of ethnic identity in each particular nation-building process. We should explain not only the fluctuation and malleability of such criteria, but also the sociopolitical processes that shape them through collective nationalist action.

The problem with certain classical theories of ethnic conflict, such as those that appeal to the 'cultural division of labour', the 'split labour market' or 'ethnic competition', is that they tend to absorb the ethnic factors into the structural economic factors that activate them. Thus ethnic factors lose their independent explanatory force, becoming minor if not superfluous variables in the analysis. The most patent example of this analytical elision of ethnicity is found in the theory of 'split labour markets' developed by Bonacich, Banton and others. In fact, Bonacich grants causal relevance only to structural socioeconomic factors, such as differences in salaries and inequalities among groups within the labour market (Bonacich 1972 1979). Ethnicity thus becomes a constant, devoid of significant variation. Banton focuses on ethnic competition generated by a certain group's monopolisation of economic resources; once again, ethnicity is in fact irrelevant, this time due to the explanatory weight of other social factors (Banton 1977).

This weakening of ethnicity in favour of economic and mobilisation factors can also be encountered, albeit to a lesser degree – in the writings of researchers such as Olzak, whose concept of 'ethnic resources' is a case in point. According to her conception, ethnic resources are principally organisational factors such as networks, information circuits or institutions that maintain stable interactions over time. They are not the ethnic materials used by political leaders and organisations. In Olzak's scheme, ethnicity becomes self-evident and purely accessory to mobilisation, a sort of 'black box' that one does not attempt to analyse (Olzak 1985). Hechter recognises the central importance of cultural differences due to religion and language along with the problematic issue of interpreting meaning from the viewpoint imposed by ethnicity, yet his *internal colonialism* hypothesis makes unequal development the explanatory cause, and this relegates the study of ethnicity to a marginal status, as something virtually transparent and self-evident. Time and again ethnicity is subordinated to the structural factors that catalyse it, and concentration on these structural factors allows little margin for systematic study of the ethnic origin of nations (Gellner 1964; Nairn 1977; Ragin 1979).

Analysis of the ethnic preconditions for nationalism has fared no better at the hands of most rational choice studies, due to the emphasis that the logic of collective action places on incentives structure for action and mobilisation. By limiting its analysis to this type of question, this approach, too, in turn avoids any substantive treatment of the formation and internal articulation of the ethnic preconditions for nationalism. An example of this is evident in Rogowsky's concept of *stigmata*. Group characteristics that provide easy identification and are difficult for members to alter can only be considered as the basis of negative selective incentives that hamper *free rider* behaviour due to the visibility of the individual's choice (Rogowsky 1974).

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Given that ethnicity and its component elements are not objective and natural but derived from a process of elaboration, and thus susceptible to a number of changes and re-formulations by nationalist elites and intellectuals, there is an immediate need to examine this process. In fact, this endeavour should be central to analysis of nationalist mobilisation, aiming to explain why any one specific version comes to predominate over other accounts of language, culture, history, myths and symbols. It is also necessary to explain which specific values are linked to which 'national interests', along with the process by which each of these becomes self-evident for a large body of citizens as part of their consciousness of their nationality.

The first step should clearly be to establish the fundamental reason for an individual's ascription to a certain community by determining the boundaries and appropriate weighting, configuration and internal structure of the ethnic factors involved: culture, language, history, traditions, customs, territory, economy, race, religion, etc. A decisive aspect that is common to all these genetic national elements is their 'organic', supposedly pre-political nature as ingredients to be used in the development of a nationalist discourse. From the mere existence of these elements, nationalists derive the 'unequivocal' conclusion that the nation is a natural fact, even though this may not be obvious to the majority. Hence the nation is presented by them as a solid, reified entity that has existed from time immemorial as an apolitical reality that is there regardless of any individuals or consciousness, as 'nature imposing itself' upon the nationals in self-evident fashion. Both structural and individual political dimensions are treated as irrelevant, by definition, to the essential ethnic nucleus that defines the nation during its (hidden) building process.

In the classic words of Kohn, none of the elements that confer national charisma (language, territory, traditions, religion, customs, etc.) are indispensable for the formation of the nationalist community, which can in fact be founded upon very different combinations or variations of these elements (Kohn 1949). This is an additional reason for analysing how and why certain diacritical elements become politically significant for some group, which however proceeds to depict them as natural and self-evident. This key issue must be examined without confounding it with the question of the social preconditions that nurture this phenomenon and the collective action problems that the group in question must solve.

Analysts have insisted time and again that nationalism is characterised by a dual identity – a peculiar and explosive combination of interests and affective relationships (Rothschild 1981). National identity is composed of a unique mix of emotive and expressive relations, of feelings and loyalties side by side with instrumental and calculated political interests, so that the latter are fully explained and significant only in the light of the former (Nagata 1981). Not surprisingly, both the ethnic and the instrumental perspective have emphasised that traditions, stories, myths and symbols are powerful generators of feelings of affinity or exclusion, of proximity or hatred among groups and successive generations. They are manipulated and reproduced over time by nationalist

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elites in order to build an insider and outsider – or even friend and foe – dichotomy.

Ultimately this is the basis of the indisputable relevance of the *mythic-symbolic analysis* of the ethnic formation of nations (Armstrong 1982; Smith 1986). It is vitally important to explain the cultural materials that are inherited by nationalists and available at each juncture, since these veritable *ethnic repertoires* may not predetermine or condition but certainly do guide subsequent formulations, restricting future possibilities in the production of a nation. As I have argued, these ethnic materials – culture, religion, language, myths, symbols, etc. – have their own *political* history. They are the contingent result of filtering, selection and invention by previous generations of nationalist elite and intellectuals.

As well as the mobilising power of ethnicity and the process by which it is put forward as indisputable evidence of a national community, it is important to consider both its *structure* and its *genealogy* by carrying out a detailed diachronic and synchronic analysis of the foundational narrative of the community. For example, it is no small matter that in *hindutva* nationalism the founding myth is built around a war god (Rama), or that the myths of the Golden Age and universal nobility of early Basque nationalism are grounded in traditional intolerant Catholicism (Elorza 1995). These cornerstones affect not only the *external* linkage of nationalism with the principles of other ideologies such as racism, fascism or liberalism; they also affect the *internal* articulation of the diacritical elements that are selected to shape the nation. In short, the inherited ethnic repertoire will significantly influence the subsequent development of nationalism. It constitutes the *nationalist ideological capital* that is in part transmitted (and partially reformulated) from generation to generation. As it develops in conjunction with diverse ideologies, it maintains over an extended period of time its potential to be inclusive or exclusive, to set objectives, to delimit that which is indigenous and alien.

A useful tool for analysis of the schematic stereotypes and collective beliefs that give political meaning to participation in nationalist collective action is the 'mobilisation frames approach'. In most cases it is possible to distinguish certain framing strategies: the definition of a specific national problem, naming causes and causal agents as antagonists, setting goals and chances of success, defining specific legitimate actors as national protagonists, etc. (Snow and Benford 1988; Gamson 1992). These discursive devices determine antagonistic insider/outsider stereotypes so that differences from 'others' take on extreme importance while internal differences within the national community are minimised. Frames do not 'reflect' or 'express' a pre-existing objective national reality. Instead, as 'rhetorical strategies', they are fundamental instruments for building an ethno-national entity by highlighting certain features of social reality while blurring others, by proposing one particular set of political objectives and not others. In each case, the strategy of framing particular values or ethnic differences with socioeconomic interests and political objectives in mind leads the nationalist movement towards a specific

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hegemonic orientation. It also determines who the 'authentic' members of the nation are, what formula of self-government is aspired to, potential allies for the movement, and whether the community will be democratic or authoritarian. Frames accordingly are a central element in the analysis of nationalist collective action.

Each generation forms its *cognitive map* of the nation. But it does this in the midst of inherited notions surrounding a series of specific sets of myths and symbols. Using these raw materials, nationalists proceed to 'rediscover' and reinterpret (Smith 1986 1998) their national ideological capital in accordance with the diverse political requirements and urgencies of each moment. Thus nations inevitably become imagined communities, the putative carriers of partially invented traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) that are formed during the process of political mobilisation. For this reason the analysis of ethnic preconditions should not focus essentially on scientific, historical or archeological evidence of objective, solid characteristics. Instead, one must look within the mobilisation process, at the specific nationalist discourse that gives birth to a nation by imbuing its name with particular meaning. These nationalist narratives, these 'tales of nationalism', should be analysed as a *frame of meaning* for interpreting nationalist mobilisation (Johnston 1991).

The political opportunity structure of nationalism

Social preconditions such as social mobilisation, communication and shared or competitive economic interests play a fundamental role in activating nationalist mobilisation (Hechter 1975; Gourevitch 1979; Nielsen 1980; Olzak 1985). Yet an equal or even greater role is played by a set of political-contextual factors that have been overlooked by most researchers (important exceptions include Young 1985; Brown 1994). The institutional and strategic political contexts that nationalism encounters are, as structures of incentives, of paramount importance, given that competition between groups occurs in shaped political arenas. Two aspects of political context are especially relevant to the success or failure of political mobilisation. The first is the *institutionalisation* of ethnicity, that is, the normative regulation and territorial structure of political power, and the second the more dynamic aspect of the *policies* and *regulatory strategies* applied by governments to ethnic problems and conflicts. These factors are central to ethnic mobilisation because ethnicity is not a given, long-crystallised attribute but a consequence of the diverse political processes that regulate the nation-building process, so that institutions and policies constitute more than simply a context that determines the gamut of possibilities available to actors. Rather than acting merely as a frame for their interests or having an external influence on their activity, institutions and policies directly *form* the actors on the scene, along with their interests and their mobilisation repertoire (Brubaker 1996). Nagel has pointed out that ethnic mobilisation becomes more likely when political access and

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participation structures are organised along ethnic lines, or when the public policies that are implemented 'recognise' and institutionalise ethnic differences. But, on occasions, the very process of regulating ethnic limits creates new collective identities that formerly did not exist (Nagel 1986).

The political context thus becomes decisive in activating the potential for nationalist mobilisation generated by ethnic and social preconditions. For its analysis, an extremely useful concept is the *political opportunity structure* (POS), which was developed in social movement analysis to explain a series of political, strategic and institutional factors that facilitate or complicate the progress of nationalist mobilisation (Tilly 1978; Tarrow 1989; Kitschelt 1986; Kriesi 1995; Jenkins and Klandermans 1995; McAdam et al. 1996). The POS concerns the 'structural conductivity' of a given context for a certain movement. It is principally composed of variables that refer to the characteristics of the political system in which mobilisation takes place: an open or closed political system, stability or instability of electoral alignments, presence or absence of future allies, divisions among the elites in power, and other variables of this kind. However, this should not be seen as a static analysis of its components. In particular, three of its features may be stressed because of their relevance to what we are investigating here. First, it can take into account both the *formal* political structure and the various *informal* strategies or schemes used in developing this structure and implementing public policies. Secondly, the dynamic character of the POS can capture the broadening of the opportunity spectrum, as the movement reaches the point of creating its own opportunities (Tarrow 1994). Third, the POS presents a subjective dimension of 'opportunities as perceived by the actors'. This third feature partially de-emphasises the structural nature of the concept, as actors create meaning when they 'read' into the POS an open or closed scenario for nationalist mobilisation (Gamson and Meyer 1996; Klandermans 1997).

One of the components most commonly included in the POS is the *degree of state centralisation or decentralisation* in which a movement takes place. Originally proposed by Kitschelt (1986) on the basis of the distinction between 'strong' and 'weak' states, it is ideal for our purposes here. In summary, ethnicity is the outcome of diverse factors including state structure and government policies, constitutional/legal frameworks and regulative strategies adopted by governments; all become decisive in explaining the channels and vicissitudes of mobilisation (Gurr 1993; Stavenhagen 1996).

We may classify the principal regulatory policies for ethnic conflicts in two main categories according to their possible effects on mobilisation: elimination and accommodation. *Elimination policies* aim at somehow doing away with subnational differences, in order to unify a territory ethno-culturally. Pursued with variable intensity and diverse outcomes, the state's objective is to deactivate ethnicity and forge a 'nationalising' (Brubaker 1996) or 'ethnocratic' state (Stavenhagen 1996) that serves one dominant ethnic group and its interests. It is quite clear that in most countries *assimilation* has been the

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preferred policy for getting at the root of the problem. This policy involves ignoring or reducing collective rights, while simultaneously supplying negative and positive incentives to abandon any traditional or subnational collective identity, so as to adopt the language, culture and values of the dominant nation in a gradual nation-state building process. However, it is important to distinguish between *assimilation* policies proper and *integration* policies. The former pursue the explicit goal of gradually eliminating internal national differences in order to create a common ethno-cultural identity, while the latter pursue a merely 'civic' common identity (McGarry and O'Leary 1993). Integration policies are compatible with a certain recognition of national minorities, and are more flexible than assimilation policies, which focus exclusively on producing a single nation. Strict assimilation policies are by definition majoritarian and militate against consensus by incorporating strategies which with a *cultural* goal attempt to impose one official language in public administration, education and the media. In the *political* arena, they encourage over-representation of the dominant nationality in public positions. In the *legal* arena, they empower the dominant nation's institutions and conventions of private law. In the *economic* realm, they extend preferential treatment to companies or regions representing the interests of the hegemonic nation's elites (Linz and Stepan 1996).

Comparative analyses show that in the building of modern nation-states, homogenising processes have been relatively successful, but assimilation policies have had a high cultural and democratic cost. In fact, the likelihood of re-emerging internal nationalism in multinational states fully depends on the success or failure that past assimilation processes have had in creating a national state. The chances for internal nationalism to become active are highest wherever nationalisation was late and deficient from a political, economic, educational or cultural perspective (Rokkan 1970; Tiryakian and Rogowsky 1985). Certain challenges to assimilation tend to encourage demands for cultural and political autonomy. These challenges may derive from the social preconditions of unequal development, or from a cultural division of labour, or from inter-territorial competition. Other challenges to assimilation arise from democratic incentives for territorial representation and decentralisation, the crisis of the centralised and sovereign nation-state, as well as the renewed sense of value given to local languages and cultures. The long-term presence of elites who benefit from the reactivation of ethno-national demands thus constitutes a novel feature that feeds the nationalist conflicts arising on every side (Linz and Stepan 1996).

Most democratic states are also multinational or multiethnic (Connor 1994; Linz 1995; Safran and Máiz 2000). Their stability partially depends on solution of the territorial problem. Hence it is common to adopt non-majoritarian forms of decentralising political power, while also implementing *accommodation* policies that do not conform to the 'nationalising state' mould. There are two fundamental varieties within these institutional policies, each having a specific effect on the mobilisation process: federalism and consociational

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democracy. *Federalism* may be defined as a system with a politically decentralised structure that combines self-rule with shared-rule. It constitutes one of the most enduring solutions that have been devised as an *accommodation* policy in multinational states. The most interesting variety for our purposes is *territorial federalism*, in which the federated units broadly coincide with the territorial location of the diverse ethnic national groups within the country. One should not infer that accommodation tends to *deactivate* nationalist mobilisation, even though it has demonstrated its effectiveness as a democratic answer to territorial conflicts within the state. It spans both the formal political opportunity structure and the strategies and informal methods used by those in power, and their way of interpreting the formal institutional framework. The outcome may include a variety of contradictory results, depending on what stable institutional structures exist and which regulatory or developmental policies are applied. In fact, some scholars have traditionally not considered federalism as an accommodation strategy, given that it was seen to stimulate increasing demands for autonomy and, in the end, secession (Nordlinger 1972).

Similar contradictory outcomes may also be observed in *consociational* democracies, the usual characteristics of which include ignoring majoritarian criteria so as to govern with the consensus of the principal groups within a state, a tendency towards grand coalition governments, proportional recruitment of elites and civil servants, and in short, a high degree of autonomy in the decisions that affect the specific groups (Lijphart 1968 1977). Consociationalism has been successfully implemented in several countries in order to deactivate ethnic conflicts somewhat by new and more democratic means than otherwise possible. Yet there are two problematic effects derived from it that concern ethnic national mobilisation. First, it encourages elite politics by strengthening the role and power of the leaders of the various groups. This implies that, in one way or another, it postpones mass democratic mobilisation, ignoring the competitive side of politics and the formation of an active citizenry (Barry 1991). Second, consociationalism involves the questionable assumption that subnational and ethnic groups are objectively crystallised once and for all, when in fact they are extremely dynamic political entities that react to strategic and institutional stimuli, changing over time in their interests, features and demands. This means that consociationalism sanctions and strengthens existing ethnic borders, the dominant version of a national culture or the existing criteria for citizenship ascription, which we have already seen to be the product of specific elites' and leaders' interests (Brass 1991). To sum up, the empirical evidence suggests that, rather than being external phenomena preceding institutionalisation, ethnic conflicts are in fact influenced by diverse accommodation formulae, which act as causal agents in these conflicts (Gurr 1993;Stavenhaven 1996).

As noted above, there are two significant aspects of the POS: one formal (decentralised structures) and one informal (ethnic policies). But it is also important to link the degree of decentralisation with the level of openness of a

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political system, that is, its degree of *democratisation*. It is well known that repressing a movement (by eliminating channels for political representation, weakening individual rights, or exerting political or legal pressure...) greatly increases the costs of collective action, making co-operative behaviour very difficult (Tilly 1978; Tarrow 1994). This seriously complicates the mobilisation process. In general, the analysis of social movements finds that when the costs of collective action decrease, mobilisation tends to increase, so that protest occurs precisely when the system becomes more open and flexible, although democratisation also tends to favour the adoption of more moderate strategies by the movement's leaders (Kriesi 1995).

The study of nationalism, however, shows that the results of repression can be much more diverse. It is true that a high degree of repression increases the cost of acting so much that it often blocks the development of the movement and reduces the level of protest. However, it has also been found that, given a certain level of repression, the movement will increase its degree of organisation, possibly to the point of isolating itself as a clandestine movement. This enables it to resist the passage of time, leading to fundamentalist positions that generate very resistant networks. These reinforce the collective identity and foster a willingness to assume risks, justifying the patriot's personal sacrifice of life or liberty through mechanisms such as promoting of the cult of heroes and leaders chosen to speak for the whole people. This is often the case among repressed national minorities (Smith 1986; Guibernau 1996).

Several studies have also demonstrated that using negative and positive incentives in different ways with different groups is central to the process of internal solidarity building (Gurr 1993). In addition, a structural analysis of institutions and laws can only be complete with research on changes in the openness of public policies, that may take place without alteration of the normative framework normative framework (Della Porta 1995). In general, democratisation has the effect of favouring nationalist political mobilisation (Gurr 1993). But we sometimes find that prior to a democratic transition there was already a specific authoritarian institutionalisation of multinationalism. In the ex-USSR and ex-Yugoslavia, for example, this was to give rise to the relational triad that Brubaker observes: nationalising states, national minorities and *irredenta*, each with its particular effects on the nationalist mobilisation processes (Brubaker 1996).

A third element of the POS, also to be included in the analysis of nationalist mobilisation, is the restructuring of the *party system* in close association with *electoral dealignment*. From the beginning, researchers of nationalism pointed out that one of mobilisation's effects was the appearance of nationalist forces in the party system, which would also test the movement's maturity and effectiveness (Horowitz 1985). In Hroch's model this implies moving from phase A to phase B, from mere cultural agitation to explicit political action (Hroch 1985 1993). Since nationalism is first and foremost a form of politics, the organisational dimension of leadership and administration of resources becomes a central element in achieving success in a competitive political arena

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(Brass 1991). However, the excessively rigid line found in Hroch's model between cultural and political phases of the process of nation-building may be avoided by using the concept of *multi-organisational fields* (Oberschall 1984; Klandermans 1997). Since nationalist movements rework and spread a particular ethnic matrix, they usually generate a variety of cultural associations, clubs, publishing houses and mass media entities. A diffuse network of allies established in fields such as culture, religion and education constitutes a set of political support networks that are essential for the organisational growth of the movement. In fact, the ethnic/national conflict is a *continual* form of collective action that requires a certain broad level of organisation. In this regard, comparative analyses demonstrate that nationalist movements tend to arise in *catnet* situations, to use Tilly's term, in which groups of individuals operate through structured networks of social and political relations constituting something like a *nationalist social capital*.

The rise and success of nationalist parties depends both on the trade-off between radicalisation versus electoral success, and in good measure on the strength of the existing party and electoral systems. The latter may hinder the political consolidation of a movement if it is majoritarian. However, a partial or general political realignment that erodes a dominant party's vote may provide new opportunities for nationalist parties. If nationalists are able to activate cultural/linguistic resentment politically, or highlight relative deprivation or cultural division of labour negative effects, the POS may widen enough to allow the establishment of a firm nationalist base even where there was previously no such political tradition. Nationalism as a mobilisation process can thus benefit from favourable political environments (electoral dealignments), while at the same time producing its own opportunities (by adapting its political discourse to the average voters). A moderate stance and the occasional discrediting of one of the hegemonic parties may create a chance for nationalism to establish itself within the political system, or even to fight for the leading role, thus generating a differentiated subsystem of parties within the larger party system.

The same strategies that Dalton (1994) and others encounter in ecologist movements are also used by nationalist movements, which have approached in three very different ways the party system: functioning within existing parties as a nationalist faction; forming separate cross-class (catch-all) nationalist parties centred on the defence of the homeland's interests, attempting to become identified with the entire community; and avoiding political competition altogether by adopting a cultural stance. But the dynamic nature of political opportunities may also channel the process in the opposite direction. A radical turn in nationalist demands or the inclusion of nationalist demands in a state party's platform may reduce the presence of the nationalist parties even when they had apparently consolidated their electoral position. Two good examples of this are the SNP in Scotland and the BNG in Spanish Galicia (Moreno 1995; Máiz 1996; Máiz and Losada 2000). Linear growth in the political maturity of a nation – from cultural expression to full-fledged, broadly

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supported political nationalism – only takes place in self-fulfilling nationalist narratives.

We find, then, that in multinational states with strong parties, a *vote* for a nationalist party may be due to displeasure with the dominant policies and parties, to a reawakening of national identity, or to the ability of the party to moderate itself and act as a catch-all. The simultaneous influence of other electoral issues and the capacity of state parties to bring them to the fore will also mark the debate. Voters may turn back to state parties for a variety of reasons, including: strategic voting, excessive radicalisation of nationalist demands for autonomy, or failure to secure selective concessions and benefits...

One theory that helps explain nationalist party membership is the 'group solidarity hypothesis': individuals will most likely be drawn towards an organisation that offers concrete selective or identity benefits that are not supplied by competitors. The most probable cause of a growing demand for benefits by an ethnically differentiated population is an improvement in its educational level and professional qualifications, which leads some of its members to seek new opportunities. Thus a nationalist party must offer its members both a social network for integrating into a community and a discourse that protects their welfare and holds out a real possibility of self-government. But just as nationalism combines emotional support with calculated strategies and interests, so competing parties too may offer positions of prestige, social status, power, selective incentives and so on. The *structural conductivity* model highlights how past and present political diversity and plurality may have lasting effects on the capacity of nationalist parties to gain support. Greater political competition historically has been a complicating factor in the efforts of a nationalist movement to break into the party system (Pinard 1975; Nielsen 1986; Díez Medrano 1995).

Finally, nationalist parties must also possess sufficient resources to be able to reward their members and maintain their organisation. In sharp contrast with the internal colonialism thesis, it has been shown that the more developed a region is, the greater its capacity to generate additional resources for use by the organisation that defends its interests. Consequently, it is foreseeable that the membership of a nationalist party will increase as individuals consider participation to be the best way for ensuring personal progress and increased benefits, especially in the area of the selective incentives that the party offers (Hechter and Levi 1985).

Solving nationalist collective action problems

Favourable ethnic preconditions and an open political opportunity structure are necessary but not sufficient conditions for the establishment and consolidation of a stable nationalist movement. Like any other social movement, nationalism must also solve specific collective action problems that arise when individuals threaten the mobilisation process with non-

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cooperative behaviour. Throughout this paper we have insisted on the dual nature of nationalism on its being both emotional and interest-laden, symbolic and strategic. We will conclude by attempting to demonstrate a more substantial relationship than is generally acknowledged between two aspects of this type of political mobilisation: the formation of nationalist political preferences and the movement's interpretative framework.

Breton, Hardin, Hechter, Laitin and Motyl, among others have shown the analytical futility of considering nationalism as an 'irrational' phenomenon from an *individual* perspective. Without denying the existence of normative or altruistic factors, they centre on explanations of nationalist mobilisation that emphasise the participant's private interests. Thus, Hardin has highlighted how nationalism may be fruitfully analysed by examining the formation of a group that depends on 'co-ordination power'. Since it depends on membership participation and involvement, this group will be substantially less flexible than one based on 'exchange power'. As a consequence it will tend to employ hostility and insider/outsider exclusion mechanisms built on stereotypes that galvanise the collective identity, rather than draft policies or programmes with clear objectives. New members in a group based on co-ordination power will strengthen the group's power and possibilities of achieving its objectives. This in turn will benefit the members, so that a direct link is established between participating and obtaining benefits through the distribution of selective incentives.

Nationalism's collective action problem is not a prisoner's dilemma, according to Hardin, but rather a *coordination game* with no conflict among the potential outcomes. By reinforcing mutual expectations nationalism generates an identification process built on satisfying interests: the benefits obtained are to be distributed among the group. In a political conflict over scarce resources, a co-ordinated group has the advantage of low transaction costs and strong identification, which spectacularly increases its political potential (Hardin 1995). But this may also apply to its potential for violence: under the right conditions, highly organised nationalist groups may resort to strategic violence in order to increase the cost of the government's centralising policies, thus pressing for additional concessions. Hence this peculiar economy of violence may be partially explained in instrumental terms: the weaker the organisational capacity and the less control the members have over it, the greater the possibility of an increase in violence disconnected from the cost/benefit ratio. This would be one explanation of the violence in places such as Northern Ireland, the Basque Country, Bosnia or Rwanda (Hechter 1995).

However, the analysis of nationalist movements clearly shows the defect of Olsonian collective action logic, which implausibly assumes that individuals decide to participate and become committed in an isolated fashion, as if the factors that guide individuals to act of one accord – solidarity, commitment, trust, pressure – were non-existent. Well-known *internal* solutions to the extended prisoner's dilemma involving the emergence of co-operation can be explained by repeated encounters between actors who foresee future

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interaction (Hardin 1982; Axelrod 1984). This is especially the case when there is a *community*, that is, a group of individuals who possess common beliefs and values, maintaining direct and multiple contacts (Taylor 1987). This last element is an extraordinarily interesting one in the analysis of nationalist mobilisation, because individuals within a group maintain direct links and loyalty with the entire collectivity. And more significant is the fact that the community is surrounded by a dense network of organisations such as associations, clubs or other small groups of various types: cultural, religious, instrumental friendship, etc. These relationships constitute a *micro-mobilisation context* of solidarity, support, trust and behaviour visibility that allows the deployment of a vast repertoire of control devices, stimuli and selective social incentives. In this way, face-to-face networks and communities tend to overcome barriers to co-operation such as invisible personal behaviour, low probabilities of reward or penalty, the subjective importance of one's own contribution, etc.

But we should also take into account *external* solutions to the problem of co-operation, which involve changes in the preferences and expectations of the actors. An example would be the action of political entrepreneurs who assume the risks involved in being *early-risers*, by supplying decisive resources for changing other's beliefs or expectations and encouraging other's *conditional co-operation*. At the same time, they are the beneficiaries of certain selective incentives (fame, prestige, power within a group). However, we must not overlook the fact that in nationalist movements we also find *expressive* incentives, so that the costs of participation may be considered part of its benefits (*in process benefits* to use Hirschman's terminology). When participation in mobilisation is seen through the community's interpretational framework of nationalism, with its doctrine of patriotic mission and sacrifice on behalf of the homeland, it becomes a reward in itself, whether or not the ultimate objectives are achieved.

Our analysis has thus led us beyond the narrow assumptions of epistemological individualism and private interest, towards including in the study of nationalism the *altruistic* preferences theory (Hechter 1987). This well-worn research tradition within rational choice theory incorporates the affective and normative aspects that constitute such an important part of the phenomenon we are studying, and explains, for example, how *unconditional co-operation* improves the supply of incentives for *late comers* and so helps mobilisation to reach the take-off level. Chai's analysis of the development of altruism in communities of origin is, beyond the problems we have previously emphasised, of special interest in this regard. Noting the ubiquity of altruistic preferences among the members of nationalist movements, this author hypothesises their genesis from an *endogenous* and constructed standpoint, not merely *exogenous*, finished, complete and prior to the political process. In this way we assume that ethnic preconditions and ethno-national identities have a political and social side to their production of altruistic preferences. Their endogenous nature allows us a more political and dynamic analysis of the

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emergence of co-operation. For Chai, the formation of altruistic preferences is not connected to the survival of traditional community links within a local area of face-to-face communication, but rather to emigration and broader population nuclei. Thus migration to urban centres or plantations generates the formation of a common set of interests which, according to the cultural division of labour hypothesis, superimposes the ethnic identity on a certain position in the labour market.

Having the same interests – even if they are both cultural and economic – will not be enough to overcome the free-rider problem that blocks ethno-national collective action. At this point altruism towards the members of the group acts as a factor in reducing the cost of co-operation while supplying selective and expressive incentives. In this way a virtuous circular process is established between co-operation and altruism, creating additional altruistic preferences towards other members of the group until altruism extends to the entire ethno-national community, thus overcoming the previously limited trust and altruism which were purely local and familial. Co-operation is encouraged because its marginal utility within ethno-national competition is increased, which in turn forges even stronger links within the group and crystallises the boundaries of a differentiated ethnicity. Hence the ethnic boundaries of groups are built on ascriptive characteristics such as race, language, culture, religion or customs, which in the end become the basis for nationalist mobilisation through the process of endogenous development of altruistic preferences (Chai 1996).

So finally we are led back to the mythic–symbolic dimension that feeds national loyalty with a common culture and an insider/outsider opposition (Máiz 1994; Hedetoft 1995); to the nationalist discourse, mobilisation frames and rhetorical strategies of essentialist, 'natural' or 'objective' ethnicity, which we have already referred to in the second section of this paper. In the end, solving the specific problems of collective action, broadening the opportunity structure and framing the insider/outsider antagonism as self-evident narrative are the nationalists' main tasks in the political production of the nation. This implies that the researcher must consider the nation not as an objective, cultural, pre-political fact, but as a very contingent outcome of nationalist conflict, inner hegemonic struggle and social mobilisation that arises in specific cultural and political settings. That is, it is necessary to take politics seriously in the analysis of nationalism.

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