

Lund University  
Department of Sociology

ANTHONY D. SMITH REVISITED  
IN LIGHT OF THE RELATIONAL TURN

Author: Olle Frödin  
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Supervisor: Abdulhadi Khalaf

## ABSTRACT

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The divide between the two major paradigms within the scientific study of nationalism, modernism and ethnosymbolism, has increased recently. A significant theoretical shift in the study of nationalism, the relational turn, has undermined the analytical treatment of nations as substantial entities and postmodernist scholars drawing from the modernist paradigm and the relational approach have rejected the ethnosymbolist school of thought and particularly its leading proponent, Anthony D. Smith. The purpose of this study was therefore to demonstrate the compatibility of ethnosymbolism and the relational approach, and to criticise the current postmodernist understanding of Smith's ethnosymbolist theory. In this essay I have argued that the postmodernists considered leave out several crucial aspects of the various historical trajectories and expressions of nationalist, ethnic or religious upsurge. I also wanted to show how it is possible to avoid further misinterpretations of ethnosymbolism. I presented the major features of Anthony D. Smith's theory of ethnicity and nationalism through his own work, and some of the major postmodernist criticism of Smith. The postmodernist critics claim that Smith's theorisation is founded on essentialist assumptions and that it is contradictory to the relational approach. I have argued that this criticism is based on a number of misinterpretations of Smith's theory. I then suggested that Smith's conception of the nation could be seen as a habitus, embedded in a matrix of narratives and discourses. As a way to avoid further misunderstandings of ethnosymbolism, I have proposed a marked distinction between ethnic or national habituses and nationalist discourses. This implies that a pre-existing ethnic habitus can be exploited by a nationalist discourse. I have finally argued that Smith's ethnosymbolist approach continues to be valid and highly relevant, as it is mindful of a wide range of historical trajectories of nationalism.

Key words: Ethnicity, Nationalism, Habitus, Discourse, Narrative, Ethnosymbolism, Anthony D. Smith

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# 1. Introduction

Ever since nationalism emerged in the early nineteenth century there have been those who have predicted that it would eventually decline and disappear along with internationalising processes of modernity. Globalisation has reduced the power of states, and the idea that national identities will be eroded has gained additional immediacy (Halliday 2001:454). However, as decisive technological revolutions in communications and the end of the cold war furthered the dominance of Western ‘transnational’ liberalism, changing patterns of global and local politics followed that increased the significance of culture. Local ethnic and religious cultures remain alongside a globalised culture. Culture denotes a variety of social boundaries, but religion has historically proved to be one of the most influential. Western modernity has challenged religious faith since the eighteenth century, and due to contemporary globalisation, this process is perhaps more evident than ever before (Murden 2001:457-459). As a result, the global integration produces counter-reactions of different kinds, as it is seen by many as an imposition of one culture’s values and interests on others. Castells holds that the increase of religious fundamentalism is related to the dynamics of social exclusion and the crisis of the nation-state. Moreover, in a world submitted to cultural homogenisation through the ideology of modernisation, he sees nationalism as a refuge to a “last bastion of self-control and identifiable meaning” (Castells 1997:12, 52). Fred Halliday in turn contends that nationalism is an intrinsic part of the process of globalisation and not an alternative to it (Halliday 2001:454). Thus, nationalism, ethnic or religious upsurge seems to be considerable features even of the globalized, contemporary world.

Along with this international development towards an increased political significance of culture, the theoretical divide between approaches focusing on ideology and power, and ‘ethno-cultural’ approaches has increased within the scientific debate on nationalism. This divide stems from the two dominant paradigms within the field. The modernist paradigm conceives of nations and nationalism as products of modernity. This approach aims to demonstrate how states have mobilised and united populations in new ways in order to deal with modern conditions. Modernists generally emphasise social and economic causes of nationalism, implying that nations are products of large-scale social changes associated with processes of modernity. The modernist paradigm emerged as a reaction to the implicit ideas of an older generation of scholars who tended to regard nations as natural expressions of history (Özirimli 2000:85). These assumptions are often related to primordialism, the earliest theoretical paradigm in the study of nationalism. The question of the primordial concerns whether ethnicity, worldview or behaviour is actually determined by some by some deep cultural, psychological or even biological human quality (Tilley 1997: 499-500). However, today most scholars agree that nations are historically formed constructs and no serious scholar believes that nations or ethnic groups are unchanging entities

according to Brubaker (1996:15). The second major paradigm in the contemporary debate, ethnosymbolism, primarily represented by Anthony D. Smith, stress the symbolic legacy of ethnic identities, and seeks to show how modern nationalism rediscovers and reinterprets the symbols, myths, memories, traditions and values of their ethno-histories, as they encounter the challenges of modernity (Smith,1998:223-224). Ethnosymbolists argues that modern nations and nationalism are grounded in pre-existing ethnic ties and that the nationalist, political mobilisation is based on this legacy (Smith 1995:71).

Recently, several different theoretical developments have been brought together and undermined the treatment of nations as stable entities. In this thesis I will designate this theoretical shift as '*the relational turn*', since it focuses on the relational, social dimensions of identity and nation-construction. This theoretical turn, along with an increased scholarly interest in postmodernism, has led to a theoretical shift from large-scale sociological investigations that explore the development of the historical rise of nationalism, to small-scale studies of the way national identities are constructed as narratives or discourses (Thompson and Fevre 2001:307-308). More recent postmodern approaches to nationalism have mainly been a continuation of the modernist paradigm, even though they stress cultural aspects to a greater extent (Smith, 1998:137-142, 224). Postmodernism is an ambiguous label. In this essay postmodernism refers to the way this school of thought has been applied to the study of nationalism, with specific reference to a number of critics of Smith's ethnosymbolism. A shared assumption of these postmodern approaches is that ethnicity emerges as a creation of discourses within the modern state. This postmodern development of the modernist paradigm has turned ethnosymbolism, with its emphasis on pre-modern sentiments, into a theoretical "other", and several scholars have thus resolutely rejected the ethnosymbolist school, partly drawing from the relational turn (see Hall 1998, Norval 1996, Özkirimli, 2000).

The relational approach has made significant contributions to the study of nationalism, mainly since it avoids a realist treatment of the nation, that is, treating the analytical category of the nation as if it existed as such in the real world. However, ethnosymbolism continues to be an important perspective as it does not treat claims to explain nationalism by ethnicity and claims to explain it by state-building and self-interest elite mobilisation as mutually exclusive. Therefore, the strengthening of the modernist assumptions and the subsequent dismissal of ethnosymbolism in the light of postmodernism and the relational turn is problematic, since I contend that the postmodern approaches I consider in this essay leaves out several crucial aspects of the various historical trajectories and expressions of nationalist, ethnic or religious upsurge.

## **1.2 The purpose of the study**

The overarching purpose of this essay is to reclaim the relational approach on behalf of ethnosymbolism, and thereby criticise the postmodernist understanding of the ethnosymbolist school and particularly its leading proponent, Anthony D Smith. With reference to this I aim to show how a number of postmodernist scholars have misinterpreted Smith's ethnosymbolism, partially on the basis of the relational approach. I will argue that Smith's ethnosymbolist theory is compatible with a relational approach, and that it constitutes a more appropriate framework in order to enable a critical understanding of the reproduction and exploitation of national, ethnic or religious identities in relation to contemporary processes of globalisation, than the postmodern approaches considered in this essay. I will also try to show how it is possible to avoid further misinterpretations of the ethnosymbolist approach.

In order to carry out the purpose of the essay I aim to answer the following interrelated research questions: What are the main features of Smith's ideas on nationalism and ethnicity? Why and how has Smith's theory been criticised by postmodernist scholars of nationalism? In what ways is this criticism founded on misinterpretations? How is Smith's theory reconcilable with the relational approach? How is it possible to avoid misinterpretations of the ethnosymbolist approach in the light of the relational turn? What are the major problems associated with the postmodern approaches I examine in this essay, in relation to ethnosymbolism? Why is Smith's ethnosymbolist theory still a valid and relevant theoretical approach?

## **1.3 Selection, method and outline of the study**

This essay will concern the role of theory in the social sciences. Theory is important as the systematic examination and construction of knowledge about the social life. Theoretical sociology makes explicit the orientations that may be taken for granted by empirical researchers. A theory can be conceived of as a logically integrated causal explanation, that is, as an orderly system of tested propositions. In the social sciences theory mostly represents an orientation or a perspective (Calhoun 1995:4-5). Theories offer means to think about the empirical world and methods to make observations, but they also contribute in constituting our access to the social world. Different theories offer different perspectives that one may consider in the study of social phenomena, since these can be seen in different ways. (ibid:8-10). Horkheimer made a distinction between traditional, positivist theory that accepts the products of historical human action as unchanging and fixed conditions, and critical theory. He advocated a critical theory which would search more deeply for the categories of our consciousness, and challenges the ways they shape and constitute the world we see and take as possible (ibid:14). A theory constitutes the foundation for the further choice and justification of research methods. By demonstrating the choice of

theory, the researcher accounts for his/her premises and assumptions about epistemology, ontology and human nature.

Sociologist Anthony D. Smith is one of the key figures among the scholars of nationalism since the 1980s and he is the leading proponent of ethnosymbolism in the field (Özirimli 2000:174). He is also the main subject of the postmodernist criticism of the ethnosymbolist approach (ibid:217). In this essay I have therefore selected Smith's theory as an example of the ethnosymbolist approach.

In section 2, I will briefly describe a number of theories of nationalism relevant to this study. I am then going to summarise the line of theoretical development resulting in the postmodern and relational approaches to nationalism, before presenting the relational turn more thoroughly. I will present the relational theories of Margaret Somers and Rogers Brubaker, both influenced by the themes of Bourdieu. In section 3, I will present the relevant features of Anthony D. Smith's theory on ethnicity and nationalism through his own work. I will also present three representatives of the main postmodern criticism of Smith's theory, Norval (1996), Hall (1998) and Özirimli (2000). Resting upon postmodernism and the relational approach, they all claim that Smith founds his theory on realist assumptions regarding the ontology of the nation, and they have all posited Smith's theory as contradictory to a relational, constructivist account of nationalism. In section 4 I will assess the criticism of Smith and try to elaborate Smith's theory in accordance with the relational turn. Proceeding from the postmodernist criticism of Smith, I will try to show why it is groundless and founded on misinterpretations. At the same time, I aim to demonstrate how Smith's ethnosymbolist theory can be interpreted in a way compatible with the relational, 'constructivist' conception of nations and nationalism. With regard to this, I will interpret and develop Smith's analytical concepts of ethnicity and the nation in accordance with the relational approach. By elaborating his conception of ethnicity and national sentiments, I hope to clarify the ethnosymbolist standpoint in order to avoid further misunderstandings of this school of thought. Moreover, I will try to show how Smith's theory can be interpreted in a way that reconciles and unites the more traditional, 'developmental' sociological canon with the 'discursive' and 'narrative' approaches of contemporary social theory. I will also try to demonstrate some problems associated with the postmodern approaches to nationalism in relation to ethnosymbolism. By that, I finally aim to explain how Smith's ethnosymbolist theory provides a more appropriate ground for a critical understanding of the reproduction of ethnic and national identities than the postmodern approaches I examine in this essay.

## **2. Divergent perspectives on nationalism**

I will now briefly present a number of theoretical perspectives on nationalism relevant to this study. From the 1960s to the 1980s the main theories of nationalism stressed the development of nations as a result of structural changes. I therefore present them as developmental approaches. I will then describe a more recent shift of perspective including postmodernist approaches and the relational turn. These approaches stress the subjective dimensions of the way ‘nation’ as a discourse represents the world as divided into nations. Finally I will more thoroughly present the relational turn.

### **2.1 Developmental approaches to the study of nationalism**

The sociology of nations and nationalism has been a relatively isolated branch from the main body of sociological theory. The classical theorists neglected to build a systematic theory of the nation. Nevertheless they furnished later theorists with concepts and perspectives. (see Thompson and Fevre 2001:297-300). According to Thompson and Fevre, Weber saw nationalism as a solution to the mechanical rationalisation and disenchantment of the modern world, and Durkheim conceived of nationalism as a necessary movement to combat the anomie of modern industrial society. Marx regarded nationalism as a false ideology serving bourgeois interests, and his aim was to reveal this reality. Still, he saw the nation as a historically natural and given form that eventually would pass into history and disappear. Classical sociological theory was concerned with the evolution of society, and to work out the laws of social order and change and tended to take nations and nationalism for granted. (ibid:301-304).

#### **2.1.1 Major modernist and ethnosymbolist theories**

In this thesis I will primarily consider some influential theoretical lines of development from the 1960s and onwards. From the 1960s to the 1980s, the scholars of nationalism were primarily brought together by their focus on long-term political, economic and cultural changes that led to the gradual emergence of nations. These scholars were all ‘developmentalists’ in this sense (Brubaker1996:19). Kedourie made a key contribution to the modernist school in 1960, by claiming that nations and nationalism were inventions of the modern period. Drawing from Kedourie, Gellner who has been very important to the modernist school, explains nationalism as a ‘by-product’ of modern social order according to Thompson and Fevre (2001:305). It becomes a necessity only in the modern world as the relationship between power and culture is altogether different in an industrial society. The industrial society with its division of labour requires standardised, homogenous populations provided by a state-organised education. Gellner shows how the nations emerge as a result of social change due to industrialisation. (Gellner 1983:35-38).

Anthony D. Smith, who is a former PhD-student of Gellner, followed him in exploring the sociological dimensions of nationalism. He explains modern nationalism as a reinterpretation of the symbols, myths and memories of pre-modern ethnic communities in order to provide a basis for social cohesion and political action in modern societies (Smith 1995:155).

### **2.1.2 Invented traditions and imagined communities**

Within the modernist paradigm, two theories both stemming from the Marxist tradition have been particularly central to some of the recent postmodern interpretations of nationalism, as they have integrated cultural and subjective elements into the modernist paradigm. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger locates nationalism within a specific period of high to late capitalism, a period of industrialisation, urbanisation and democratisation. They seek to demonstrate the designed and constructed nature of nationalism as a recent construct on behalf of the elite, serving the preservation of the order in the upheaval of capitalism. Hobsbawm and Ranger see nationalism as based on an invented tradition implying continuity with a suitable historic past (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

Benedict Anderson's theory stresses the cultural and subjective dimensions of nationalism. He defines the nation as an imagined political community. Anderson emphasises the print-technique and capitalism as fundamental to the rise of nationalism. Printed media encouraged the growth of national consciousness by fixing the vernacular language in a standard form, which, due to the rise of a free market of mass-printings, replaced Latin and helped to create a print-language mediated, imagined community. Through the circulation of printed media in the vernacular language people are beginning to imagine themselves as belonging to a national community (Anderson 1991).

## **2.2 The emergence of postmodern and relational approaches to nationalism**

Recent stages in the study of nationalism contrast to the developmental approaches in that they emphasise the subjective aspects of nationalism to a higher degree. Several different theoretical lines of development have been brought together and undermined the treatment of nations as stable entities. The increasing interest in network forms and network theory and the shift from broadly structuralist approaches towards a variety of more 'constructivist' perspectives have contributed to this development. Postmodernism has been influential as it stresses the erosion of fixed forms and clear boundaries, and has influenced analyses of the fragmentation of contemporary national identities. These developments are disparate and even contradictory, but they have contributed to "undermine the axioms of stable group being" according to Brubaker (1996:13).

Thompson and Fevre identify some principal differences between the developmental and these more recent approaches. In a period of criticism of the problems of grand narratives of social theory, theorists drawing from post-structuralism and deconstructionism have not in contrast to their predecessors developed general sociological models of the historical development of nationalism. Another distinguishing feature compared to former approaches is the shift towards a deconstruction of the way nationalist discourse represents the nation as a unified homogenous nation. There is an increased awareness of the need to avoid reifying the nation as analytic category or treating it as a homogenous entity. Nationalism is less and less seen as a force that meets some kind of basic human requirements. Instead, writers such as Brubaker or Billig investigate how nationalism as a discourse, ideology or practice represents the world as divided into nations according to Thompson and Fevre (2001:307-308). Thus there has been a shift from large-scale sociological theories that explore the development of the historical rise of nationalism, to small-scale studies of the way national identities are constructed through narratives or discourses (ibid: 308-309).

Postmodernists have interpreted Benedict Anderson's theory in a way that suggests a view of the nation primarily as text and discourse (Smith 1998:140). Homi Bhabha, for example, has outlined an influential postmodern conception of the nation. In this view, the nation is a narrative that has an imaginary component to it, and as such, it is a discursive construction that does not exist outside language according to Delanty and O'Mahony (2002:182). Postmodern approaches to nationalism have mainly been a continuation of the modernist paradigm, even though they stress cultural aspects to a greater extent. (see Smith, 1998:137-142, 218, 224). The theories of Anderson and Hobsbawm have been particularly influential to postmodern analyses, as the 'nation' is seen as an invented discourse or a discourse of imagination (See Calhoun 1997, Norval 1996, Özkirimli 2000).

### **2.2.1 The relational turn**

The relational turn represents a change of perspective regarding the nation as analytical category and it is not related to any of the predominant perspectives in the study of nationalism, that is, modernism and ethnosymbolism. However, a number of postmodernist scholars have adopted the relational approach on behalf of the modernist paradigm.

Thompson and Fevre note that the change of approach is particularly evident in Rogers Brubaker's eventful account of nationalism, in which he distinguishes his work from developmentalists such as Gellner or Smith (Thompson and Fevre 2001:307). I will now briefly present the theoretical development underlying Brubaker's influential perspective that has come to undermine the theoretical treatment of the nation as a stable unit. Brubaker is drawing from theories on relational settings and narratives by Margaret Somers, but also from the theorisation

of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu's methodological relationism suggests that human action should be explained, not by psychological assumptions of the human nature, but by analysing the social relations of the human being (Carle 2001:411). Bourdieu did not write specifically on nationalism but his themes and methodology have proved useful in this domain. He criticises researchers who claim the 'objective' existence of an ethnic or regional groups or classes (Bourdieu 1991:225). As Bourdieu stresses the symbolic dimensions of group-making, his work has been used to investigate the way nationalist discourses can succeed in creating what it seems to presuppose, namely the existence of nations as real, mobilised or mobilisable groups (Brubaker, 1996:15). It is Bourdieu's nominalist view of social theory that has been particularly influential to the analysis of nationalism. According to Bourdieu, social theory is a depiction of reality, and the social phenomena signified by the scientific concepts are not to be regarded as something real. The scientific description of reality is thus a product of a scientific interpretation. Bourdieu's methodological relationism is a way to avoid concept formation based on realist ideas of the social reality, that is, a belief that the concepts actually refer to real, substantial qualities of the social world. Instead Bourdieu demonstrates how individuals reproduce and express structures in their actions according to Korsnes (2001:206-207).

### **2.2.2 Somers' relational approach: narratives and relational settings**

I will now describe Margaret Somers theory upon which Brubaker has founded part of his influential approach. Somers proceeds from the concept narrative, which has for long been excluded from the social sciences and primarily been associated with the humanities. This division was variously formulated in binary terms such as idiographic versus nomothetic, particularistic versus generalisable or description versus theory. Recently a re-framing of the concept has taken place within the social sciences, as it provides a way to avoid the problem of identities referred to in the identity-politics sliding into essentialist singular categories such as race, sex, or gender (Somers 1994:613). Essentialism is a conception of identity as a natural given, accompanied by an idea of this identity as produced solely by acts of individual will (Calhoun 1995: 198). A way to avoid this has thus been to emphasise the embeddedness of any identity in overlapping networks of relations that shift over time and space (Somers 1994:605-607). The process of construction of any identity must be seen as embedded within, and constituted by relationships and relationality. Margaret Somers proposes a linking together of the concepts of narrative and identity, in order to generate a historically constituted approach to theories of social action, agency and identity. Basically, the narrative approach assumes that social life is storied, and that narratives are a basic condition of social life. Thus, people construct their identities by locating themselves within a repertoire of stories. They guide their actions on the basis of this limited repertoire of available social and cultural narratives. (ibid:612-614). In order to find the meaning of any social action in

relation to narratives, the analyst must determine the significance of any single event in relation to a social network of relationships. People make sense of single events through a narrative syntax, that is, we selectively appropriate the happenings of the social world, evaluate and arrange them in some order. This syntactic order arranges the event according to its relationships to other events in time and space into a causal 'emplotment'. Thus, to make something understandable in the context of a narrative is to give it historicity and relationality (ibid:616).

Somers distinguishes four dimensions of narratives. Ontological narratives are used to define who we are and often function as a guideline of what to do. Public narratives are attached to cultural and institutional formations larger than the single individual, such as 'the American dream'. Metanarrativity refers to the master narratives in which we are embedded as actors in history, as well as social scientists. Sociological theories are often encoded with meta-narratives such as 'Industrialisation' or 'Enlightenment'. Conceptual narratives refer to the concepts we construct as social scientists. The challenge of this concept is that the scientist can aim to reconstruct a plot over time and space in order to make sense of the relationships and ontological/cultural narratives of historical actors that informed their life (ibid:618-620). The importance of the conceptual narrativity is that it allows an overlapping of the rigid identity concept. While a categorical approach presumes internally stable concepts, the narrative approach embeds the actor within relations and stories that shift over time and space. This implies that identity can only be determined by empirical enquiry and not by a priori assumptions (ibid:621-622).

On the basis of the relationality of human identity, Somers criticises the common use of the concept society, since it implicates a social entity of some kind. When a sociologist speak of feudal society for instance, they refer to society as a whole. But, institutions may co-vary with each other. In periods of transition from one society to another, there occurs a 'lag-effect' and remainders of the old order persist against the pressures of the new. Society is not to be seen as an entity, but rather as a complex of contingent, cultural and institutional relationships. Somers proposes that the term 'society' should be substituted by the notion '*relational setting*'. This refers to a pattern of public narratives and social practices within which identity formation takes place (ibid:626). By taking a narrative perspective, one can avoid the shortcomings of the assumption of a universal agency. Class-formation theory traditionally explained action with reference to universal rational preferences. Deviants from such Marxist predictions were often labelled as reactionary or victims of a false consciousness. The narrative view does not deny materialist interests, but sees them as embedded in relationships and narratives that guide human action (ibid:633-634).

### **2.2.3 The relational approach to the study of nationalism.**

Rogers Brubaker was one of the first to apply Somers' definition of society in the study of nationalism. He argues that one should not begin the study by posing the question "what is a nation", but rather "how is nationhood as a political and cultural form institutionalised within and among states". Thus, influenced by Somers, Brubaker argues that the nation should be understood as an institutionalised, contingent, cognitive category, and not as a substantial, 'real' collective (Brubaker,1996:16-17). Brubaker sees the nation, or as he prefers to designate it, 'nationness', as a relational setting. Moreover, he contrasts between those who conceive of the nation as something that develops, such as Gellner or Smith, and those who think of it as something that happens. Brubaker advocates the latter 'eventful' perspective. According to this, 'nationness' is something that suddenly crystallises rather than gradually develops. Nationness is to be seen as a contingent, fluctuating frame of vision and basis for collective action, rather than a relatively stable product of deep developmental trends in economy, polity or culture according to Brubaker (ibid:18-19).

Brubaker criticises the substantialist treatment of the nation, that is, an understanding of the nation as a real entity of some kind, though difficult to define. This substantialist view is not only confined to primordialists according to Brubaker, it is even shared by many modernists. Nor is it limited to those who define the nation objectively, in terms of shared objective characteristics such as language or religion. Even those who emphasise subjective factors such as myths and symbols are equally taking a substantialist viewpoint. The problem with this view resides in that it adopts categories of practice as categories of analysis, Brubaker argues. They take a conception inherent in the practice of nationalism and the workings of the modern state and make this central to the theory of nationalism. This perspective brings about a reification of the nation. As an analyst of nationalism one should account for the social process of reification, but at the same time avoid to unintentionally reproduce or reinforce this reification of nations in practice and theory (Brubaker,1996:15-.16). According to Brubaker, nationalism should be understood without invoking nations as substantial entities. Instead of focusing on nations as real groups, we should focus on 'nationness' as a practical category, an institutionalised form, and a contingent event. Thus 'nation' is a category of practice and not a category of analysis (ibid:7).

### **3. The ethnosymbolist theory of Anthony D. Smith and postmodern criticisms**

#### **3.1 Pre-modern sentiments and modern nations: Smith's ethnosymbolist approach**

I will now briefly describe the subject of this thesis, the ethnosymbolist theory of Smith.

The Modernist scholars are brought together by their shared belief in the modernity of nations and nationalism. Anthony D. Smith also believes that nationalism is a wholly modern phenomenon, but he argues that the modern nation incorporates several features of pre-modern ethnic communities (Smith 1986:18)

Smith recognise the importance of factors like capitalism, urbanisation, bureaucratisation and science, but he holds that it is necessary to take ethnicity and ethnic revival into account in the study of nationalism (Smith 1983:x). His point of departure is that the nation is not a given of social existence, that is, a primordial, natural unit. Nevertheless he believes that the foundations of nations are not entirely modern (Smith, 1986:13).

Smith argues that national identities and ideologies must be located within a very long time period of group identities and sentiments (Smith, 1986:13). Although there is no historical continuity between the modern revival of ethnicity and all preceding ones, Smith claims that a 'sociological' continuity exists. Ethnicity forms an element of culture and social structure which remains over time and reappears in every generation to varying degrees in most parts of the world, according to Smith (1983:xxxii). He therefore contends that any study of the origins of nations must consider the structure and culture within which these meaning-systems transform. There can be no understanding of either nationalism or ethnic organisation without a theory of the role of ethnic sentiments in history. Therefore, he rejects the claims of both the modernists, who hold that there is a fundamental divide between pre-modern units and sentiments and the primordialists, who consider the nation merely as an updated version of pre-modern sentiments (Smith, 1986:13). Rather, Smith attempts to reconcile the two viewpoints. He maintains that such an outlook provides a possibility to recognise that cultural groups differ in the strength and richness of their cultural traditions, and the impact of traditional institutions and social structure. In some cases a modernist analysis is more appropriate, where elite manipulation is greater than the attachments to ethnic ties among the members of a given population (Smith 1983:xxix-xxx). Smith holds that modernisation theories solely emphasising the break with the past during eighteenth century in Western Europe, distort the significance and shape of the modern world (ibid:xxxii). Accordingly, he contends that the pre-modern structure of ethnic groups has an important bearing on how modern nations form. Leaders and elites do not have complete

autonomy from preceding ethnic cultures and customs in their attempts to create nation-states. Instead they are constrained by cultures and ideas of the particular communities in which they are operative, according to Smith (1998:180).

### 3.1.1 The ethnic community

Smith holds that any study of the origins of nations must consider the structure and culture within which these meaning-systems transform. In order to analyse such structures he presents a concept of the ethnic community or *ethnie*. This concept originates from a French term, which refers to a grouping that unites an emphasis on cultural differences with a sense of the group as a historical community. It is the particular interpretation of history and the feeling of cultural uniqueness, which distinguishes populations from each other and gives a population an identity, both through self-definition and by the definition of others (Smith, 1986:22). The *ethnie* preceded the nation, which later based part of its legitimacy on the ethnic past. Smith argues that the 'core' of ethnicity resides in the myths, memories, values, symbols and the characteristic styles of particular historic configurations. He emphasises what he calls a *myth-symbol complex* and the *mythomoteur*, which is the constitutive myth of the ethnic commonalty. Together these two form the body of beliefs and sentiments, which the defenders of the *ethnie* wish to preserve and pass on to future generations (ibid:15-16). The durability of the *ethnie* resides in the forms and content of the myth-symbol complex. Of pivotal importance for the survival of the *ethnie* is the diffusion and transmission of the myth-symbol complex to its unit of population and its future generations. The agencies of ethnic socialisation could be priests, scribes, local leaders or family networks (Smith 1997:29). The *ethnie*, once formed, tends to be durable for generations. It constitutes a form within which all kinds of social and cultural processes can develop, and upon which a number of circumstances and pressures can exert influence. Only in rare cases do external pressures together with internal transformations cause a complete breakdown of the particular qualities of ethnicity. It is much more common according to Smith, that the *ethnie* either adjusts its characteristics of ethnicity to the extent that one may conclude a change of ethnic community or that it adjust itself according to internal disagreement or external pressures of assimilation (Smith,1986:15-16).

Smith posits six attributes of an *ethnie*: a collective proper name, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more differentiating elements of common culture such as language, laws, customs or institutions. Moreover the *ethnie* needs an association with a specific homeland and a sense of solidarity for significant sectors of the population. Central to the persistence of ethnic identities is its fictive descent and putative ancestry. According to Smith, *ethnies* would not survive for any length of time without such descent myths. Language, religion, customs and pigmentation can be given significance that matters for ethnic identification. Only

when such criteria are assigned significance they come to be seen as objective, regarding ethnic boundaries. Since the ethnic is not a primordially given unit, it is formed mainly through unification or division. It is a purely historical and cultural construction and must be sharply separated from race, in the meaning of a social group that is considered to possess unique hereditary biological traits (Smith 1991: 20-24).

### **3.1.2 Early state-formation and the dual legitimation**

The national system is a result of a complex set of processes over time, rather than a product of fixed 'essences' Smith argues (1991: 43). The earliest nations, such as England, France and Spain, emerged in Western Europe. They emanated from an early form of political unit, designated as *the possessive state*, which was viewed as a personal possession of its ruler (Smith, 1983: 233). Through a process of modernisation, these units were gradually transformed into modern states (Smith 1986:139). Three crucial features of modernity, related to the emergence of the western state-system, underlie the formation of nations. The transition from feudalism to capitalism has received the most attention. Closely intertwined with the economic revolution is the transformation of military and administrative methods of control. Finally, there was a cultural and educational revolution, in which authority and tradition were replaced by a whole new apparatus in which the sovereign state itself took the place of the deity with a promise of practical salvation. In the West, territorial centralisation and consolidation conjoined with a growing cultural standardisation. Administrative language played a central role in creating a standard mode of communication. Only with the growth of mass-education, did the French population for example begin to feel loyalty to the state (Smith 1986:133-134). Smith designates the modern, standardising and homogenising polity as the *scientific state*, as it attempts to apply the latest scientific methods and techniques to the problems of government (Smith, 1983: 234).

Before the scientific revolution, religion constituted the basic framework upon which social and political institutions had been founded. Hence, the advent of the scientific state became a fundamental threat to the traditional society, since it challenged the traditional cosmic image of society and its corresponding ethic. Under these circumstances the rising intelligentsia became 'doubly socialised', according to Smith. Exposed to the influence of modern Western ideas through study, they became alienated from the traditional society, but still remained part of that society. They were affected by the scientific state but were already impregnated with a sense of loyalty to the traditional values of their group. This sense of loyalty, for example to the incarnation of Christ, made the deepest cognitive roots and sets of loyalties into which the intelligentsia had been socialised. It is this preceding socialisation to traditional ethics that makes the confrontation between the modern scientific state and the former religious so crucial according to Smith (1983: 236-238). The inescapable fact was that this homogenising state

undermined the beliefs and practices of traditional religion. The claims of the scientific state were not only superior force, but also a possession of rational knowledge. It thereby fused power with value since it seemed capable of delivering the benefits for the salvation of man. The intelligentsia was then confronted by two sources of authority, tradition and science, which created the situation of dual legitimation (ibid: 240-241). Smith argues that the intelligentsia could handle this situation in three ways. Traditionalists find religion and science incompatible and therefore reject the latter. Assimilationists embrace the modern discourse and proclaim universalism. Finally and most important in Smith's theory is the reformist who acknowledges both sources of legitimation, that is, both the divine order and the scientific state. The reformist holds both God and state as a ground for his thoughts and actions. They see God as working in the world through the scientific state (ibid: 243-245). The reformist forsakes the religious world-view for a secular one, which nevertheless holds on to certain ideas from the older world-view. This is an important aspect of nationalism. The reformist intelligentsia still has a need for a spiritual status revival, which would make them the ideologues of their chosen people, and thereby able to define their situation, and attract them to the ideal of ethnic distinctiveness and autonomy of their status. While embracing the modern world, the reformist defends and protects a core of values within the old heritage, reserving it for his/her fellow people. Hereby Smith schematises a process by which loyalty to the religious community is gradually transformed and replaced by allegiance to the ethnic community and its ethnocentric perspective. In this process the community has gone from being a chosen bearer of the divine word, to being praised for itself (ibid: 250-251). Nationalism is born among the intelligentsia when the assimilationists fail to the problem of dual legitimation and instead try to realise their former vision, by adopting the ethnicity solution of the defensive reformist. Therefore nationalism is both traditionalist and modernist (ibid: 254). Thus, there is a dual loyalty to the political unit, one expressed in terms of citizenship, and, on the other hand, a sense of affiliation and solidarity with the ethnic community into which one is born and socialised. In a homogenous state such dual attachments are unproblematic, but in multinational states it implies a careful balancing of forces, which, if interrupted lead to the danger of conflict (Smith 1986:151-152)

### **3.1.3 Various types of nation-formation and nationalism**

As the revolutions of modernity were (and still are) highly discontinuous and varied at different times and in different areas, the gradually formed 'nations' differed both in content and form. Smith distinguishes between two routes of nation-formation, both resulting in the dual concept of the nation, namely the territorial and the ethnic model (Smith 1986:130, 134-135). These two conceptions of the modern nation represent different historical experiences of modernity. The earliest form of nation-formation, described above, gradually emerged through the revolutions of

modernity. The dominant culture of the state remained that of the ethnic core and other ethnies were drawn into the ethnic culture of the state. These Western European ethnic polities were gradually transformed into *territorial* nations through the rule of their states (ibid:138-139). The territorial concept of the nation takes its basis from the territory. It is based on territoriality, citizenship, rights and legal codes. This concept is Western since nations first emerged in the West (ibid: 144). The historical trajectories of Central and Eastern Europe, and later in Asia and the Middle East, differed from the Western development. The revolution of modernity came later and the existing polities were different. The increasing tensions of state centralisation, the ideas of nationalism and neighbouring national struggles together with urbanisation and improved communications instigated a consciousness of ethnic separateness (ibid:142). In Germany for example, the boundaries were vague and the political memories unclear, which led to an increasing appeal to ethnic, particularly linguistic, criteria. Especially in the German case, the ethnic concept blended with the territorial in way that caused sudden changes of strategy (ibid:141). Hence, in the ethnic route to nation-formation, nations were gradually or discontinuously formed on the basis of pre-existing ethnic or ethnic ties. It then became a question of transforming ethnic into national ties through processes of mobilisation and politicisation. Thus, ethnic nationalists appeal to customs and linguistic ties which they then seek to standardise and refine (ibid:137-138).

The Western national model was taken up by the political elites in Asia and Africa in their striving to build nations. But, the gap between the ideal of the civic model of the nation found in the West and the reality of states without nations in Asia and Africa made the leaders to search for alternative models of the nation, and other modes of national integration (Smith 1986:145). In both Asia and Africa, religion was utilised in the service of ethnic nationalism in those cases where the customs were embedded in traditional ethnic religion, which had served to identify communities with their cultures (ibid:137-138). It was found that forming a nation of the population in a state only worked in the context of implicitly shared meanings and values with common myths and symbols. Where these meanings, myths and symbols did not resonate among the population there was a limit to the nation, and where there were no common myths at all, these would have to be invented. This implicates that even territorial nations must be cultural communities, as the solidarity of citizenship requires some form of common 'civil religion'. Therefore, the territorial nation came to depend on a system of mass education. The 'cultural revolution' of the educator-state completed the economic and political revolutions of the West and by that it conjoins with the ethnic concept of nationhood. (ibid:136). Where 'nations-to-be' could not be based on previous ethnic ties, there was still a need to forge out whatever cultural components were available to form a coherent mythology and symbolism of a community (Smith 1991: 41-42). All modern nations are influenced by both territorial and ethnic principles. The first

Western nations could take their ethnic elements for granted, even though later internal division and external pressures forced both England and France to reconsider their ethnic principles which resulted in the rise of a strong integral nationalism in France (Smith 1986:149).

### **3.1.4 The dual character of national identity**

Formally, citizenship is a legal identity regarding rights and duties to a particular political unit. But along with this legal identity there grew up an assumption that the will to participate was founded upon some attachment to the community (Smith 1986:136). This implies that there is a dual attachment to the political community of the nation. On the one hand there is a loyalty to the political unit, expressed in terms of citizenship rights and obligations, and on the other hand, a sense of affiliation and solidarity with a cultural community (ibid:151). Therefore Smith suggests that nationalism is a “political ideology with a cultural doctrine at its centre“ (Smith 1991:74). As such, it often fails to distinguish a clear boundary between the private realm and the public sphere. This implies that the national identity comprises both a cultural and a political identity, which means that any attempt to create a national identity will have political consequences. Thus, nationalist politics are complex, due to the dual character of national identity, since it consists of both an ethnic and a civic-territorial model. The complexity of this duality resides in its implication of two different kinds of national political identity and community. (ibid:99). As a modern formation and conception, the nation must accept the legacy of modernity and become a territorially centralised, politicised, legal and economically unified unit bound by a common civic outlook and ideology. But as a mobilising force, the ‘nation’ must take over some of the distinctive characteristics of the pre-existing ethnic and assimilate many of their myths, memories and symbols, or invent one of its own. This dual orientation towards a political future and a cultural past is an important subject of any examination of the main features and trends in the creation of nation in the modern world, according to Smith (1986:151).

Finally, Smith argues that his approach most adequately captures the relationships between modern nations and more ancient ethnocentrism. It is impossible to comprehend the formation of any national identity without exploring its socio-cultural matrix, which in many cases spring from pre-modern ethnicities he argues (Smith 1991:71-72). Such an approach allows an analysis of a variety of modern situations that involves ethnicity and nationalism, he contends (Smith, 1986:17).

## **3.2 Postmodern criticism of Smith’s theory in light of the relational turn**

In the light of the relational turn and postmodernism, Smith’s ideas have undergone harsh critique. Ethnosymbolism and particularly the theories of Smith have been presented as

essentialist in contrast to the social constructivist, relational theories of nationalism. I am now going to show how three scholars have interpreted and criticised Smith, influenced by postmodern and relational approaches in the study on nationalism. A common denominator of these critics is that they hold that Smith is conceiving of ethnicity as an objective, substantial quality of a particular grouping, and not as a discursive, social construction (see Hall 1998, Norval 1996 and Özkirimli, 2000). This criticism of Smith is based on modernist assumptions, combined with Foucault's analyses of modernity.

Political scientist Patrik Hall holds that Brubaker's dealing of post-Soviet nationalism is applicable everywhere. Brubaker shows how nationality has been ascribed and institutionalised by the Soviet-state within its different territories. Hall therefore implies that all national or ethnic identities are creations of modern institutions (Hall, 1998:140). Drawing on Somers, Brubaker and Foucault, Hall holds that nationalism is a discursive practice shaped in relational settings "of here and now" (ibid:147). Therefore, he criticises Anthony D. Smith as he makes nationalism dependent on cultural categorisation and pre-modern sentiments. The self of the nation or the ethnic community is always articulated in a political context, Hall contends. In Smith's theorisation nationalism becomes reified, or it is conceived of as a natural expression of ethnicity or culture according to Hall, who holds that Smith's theory can be used as nationalist political rhetoric (ibid:40).

Aletta Norval, lecturer in politics and ideology, conceives of national identities as invented or imagined discourses. Since Smith insists on the ethnic legacy of several modern nations and distinguishes between purely invented aspects of nationalism and the rediscovery of pre-existing elements from the past, Norval holds that he founds his theory on a substantialist treatment of the nation:

"On this reading the theorization of the construction of communities as invented or imagined is rejected as misleading and as fundamentally wrong, for there is ultimately an objective basis which determines the form of community construction." (Norval 1996:61).

Smith's theorisation is therefore ultimately founded on essentialist assumptions, as it refers to an objective basis outside the realm of discursive formation, according to Norval (1996:62). Even though he accepts the modernity and artifice of nations, he still holds on to a sense where the nation always draws on something more primordial. Smith treats groups in an objectivist manner and only accepts some forms of group-identification as constructed whereas others remain objectively valid in his theorisation, Norval argues (ibid:61-62). Instead she asks for an analysis questioning the very construction of discursive horizons of meaning (ibid:62-63).

Finally the assistant professor of international relations Umut Özkirimli, founds his criticism of Smith on Norval and Hall. In a recent overview of the theoretical debate on nationalism he

claims that the theories of Anthony D. Smith points to the need of a new classification of the existing theoretical categories. He holds that ethnosymbolism should be labelled as essentialism, whereas the modernist approach is to be regarded as constructivism (Özkirimli 2000:215-16). Özkirimli criticises Smith's belief that many nationalist movements were constructed around particular ethnic traditions. This lead to essentialist modes of theorising, he argues:

To put it another way, there is an ethnic/national 'essence' (a myth-symbol complex) underlying many, if not all, contemporary nationalisms. And what impels so many people around the world to lay down their lives for their nations is precisely this 'essence'. (Özkirimli, 2000:216).

In contrast to this essentialism, Özkirimli posits the modernist outlook, since the modernists suggest that it became necessary to imagine or invent nations as a result of changing economic, political or social conditions (ibid:217).

## 4. Assessments of Smith's theory and the postmodern criticism in light of the relational turn

What underlies the opposition between ethnosymbolism and these postmodernist scholars of nationalism? Smith has disapproved of the idea of the nation as a narrative of imagination, or a textual discourse to be deconstructed. He has also objected to the understanding of ethnicity as a fiction of the discourse, as he finds this view neglectful and inaccurate. He maintains that the postmodernist treatment has undermined the ontological status of the nation as a real community, grounded in the historical life of cultural collectivities (Smith 1998). But does he really establish his theory on objectivist, substantialist or essentialist assumptions?

### 4.1 Subjective conceptions and objectified representations

Both Norval and Özkirimli have interpreted the ethnosymbolist emphasis on pre-modern myth-symbol complexes as a reference to an objective ground, ultimately defining the formation of any nation. I will argue that this criticism is founded on a misinterpretation of the concept of the myth-symbol complex, and the interdependence between subjective representations and its objective expressions.

The application of the term 'socially constructed' in contrast to 'essentialism', is often used to describe the intersubjective character of any seemingly concrete or externally given fact. According to Tilley, proponents of a social constructivist approach often argue for an understanding of ethnic identity as an idea or discourse rather than as an empirically observable social unit, defined by features such as dress, language and customs (Tilley 1997:511). However, a distinction between subjective and objective criteria regarding collective identities can be problematic, since subjective conceptions often have exterior expressions. Even though the contents of consciousness are qualitative, their exterior expression can be coded and classified. Bourdieu for example, conceives of objective criteria relevant for ethnic identity as the products of mental representations. People invest interests and presuppositions in objectified representations such as emblems or flags (Bourdieu 1991:220).

When classifying nationalist movements, Smith refers to two different sets of criteria. First formal or external criteria and secondly, subjective or internal criteria. The subjective criteria are most important and most complex according to Smith (1983: 211). Smith makes clear objective criteria, such as customs or pigmentation can be *given* significance that matters for ethnic identification. When Smith uses the term 'ethnic core' or myth-symbol complex, he refers to subjective criteria such as myths, memories and values and objectified representations like symbols and characteristic styles of particular historic configurations. Consequently, the myth-symbol complex or the ethnies do not constitute objective grounds outside the realm of social construction. Rather Smith asserts that they form socio-cultural 'webs', mainly referring to

perceptions, feelings and attitudes (Smith 1991:71). Smith's ethnosymbolist theory is thus not founded on essentialist assumptions when referring to a pre-existing myth-symbol complex.

## **4.2 Social change within ethnic and national parameters**

Another misinterpretation of ethnosymbolism regards the fixity of the myth-symbol complex. Özkirimli motivates his categorisation of Smith's theory as essentialist by referring to his insistence on the durability of myths and symbols within ethnic groupings. Özkirimli finds his arguments on a definition of social constructivism as based on two crucial points. First, knowledge and value-systems are continually reshaped as groups react to changing environmental and social conditions. Secondly, meanings attributed to national culture are continually redefined and revised (Özkirimli 2000:217). However, when Özkirimli presents Smith's theory as opposed to a relational, 'constructivist' approach, he neglects the fact that Smith makes clear that the ethnic community is shaped and reshaped according to circumstances and environmental changes. Ethnicity, according to Smith, is characterised by the co-existence of change and durability within particular parameters. In this respect, Smith bases his assumptions on the research of the anthropologist Fredrik Barth and his theories on symbolic border guards and boundary mechanisms that separates different social groups in their attitudes and perceptions (Smith, 1986:10). Barth's anthropological model centres on the interactions and perceptions of members of social groups, defined by self-perceived boundaries. For Barth, ethnicity is a socially limited type of category, and furthermore one that is both ascribed by others and self-ascribed. Hence, symbols are crucial to Barth because they act as border guards distinguishing us from them. Therefore symbols are a form of communication. Myths, symbols and communications are the three major components in any attempt to analyse the persistence of ethnic identities (Smith, 1998:182-183). Barth shows that ethnic boundaries may persist despite social interaction with other groups. Ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of mobility, but often entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby particular categories are maintained. Interaction in a social system does not necessarily lead to a decline of group boundaries and cultural differences can persist despite inter-ethnic contact (Barth, 1969:295). As Eriksen notes, ethnicity is essentially an aspect of a relationship (Eriksen 1997:39). Smith states that the parameters within which ethnies may change consists of traditions passed on from one generation to another in a slightly altered form, which nevertheless sets limits to the community's perspective and culture (Smith 1991: 38). Thus, Smith acknowledges that value-systems reshapes as groups react to changing environmental and social conditions, and that meanings attributed to national cultures are continually redefined and revised. But he asserts that these changes might occur within the parameters of group-memberships that may last for generations (Smith, 1986:7).

### **4.3 Ethnic habitus and nationalist discourses**

I will now try to show how it is possible to avoid further misunderstandings of Smith's ethnosymbolism by 'translating' its concepts into a more contemporary discourse.

Smith developed his theory of ethnicity and nationalism before the break-through of Bourdieu, but I contend that the notion of ethnic comprises traits similar to those in Bourdieu's analytical concept habitus. The habitus denotes a lasting regulated form of social activities. It is a system of dispositions integrating past experiences into a matrix of perceptions and actions. This may be implicit knowledge agents are unable to put into words. With the notion of habitus, Bourdieu wanted to show how patterns of the social life could be reproduced even when such reproduction was not itself an intention. Crucial to the accounts of habitus is that it allows for a process of change or correction. It is precisely because it can be adjusted that traditions embodied in the habitus can change together with other aspects of a society (Calhoun, 1995:145-150). The myths, memories and traditions of Smith's theorisation provide constellations of meaningful relationships embedded in time and space as well as lasting forms of social activities. I therefore contend that the ethnic or national myth-symbol complex could be seen as a communal habitus intertwined with narratives. In the contemporary debate it is more common to describe nationalism in terms of discourse, but this have lead to misinterpretations since the concept has been associated primarily with linguistics (see Calhoun 1997, Smith 1998). With the concept discourse, Foucault referred to regularised representations involving statements, concepts, theses and theories. Discourses exist through a discursive practice, such as the way science expresses knowledge about its subjects (Lindgren 2003:352). In order to avoid confusion due to the varied use of the concept of discourse, I propose a more marked distinction between ethnic or national habitus and nationalist discourses. The habitus in this sense refers to a more wide-ranging lasting practice expressed in customs and traditions, than the statements of the discourse. This implies that the ethnic habitus can be exploited by a nationalist discourse. Thus, a given population does not necessarily have to be self-aware, or rather, discursively aware of its communal habitus in a political sense, until it is exploited by a political discourse of some kind. In order to shape an imagined community out of a pre-existing communal habitus, some form of modern mass-media is required. In this way it becomes more apparent that ethnosymbolism can be compatible with Brubaker's eventful approach for example, as a nationalist discourse can 'erupt', drawing from a pre-existing ethnic habitus. With this distinction it is possible to avoid misinterpretations of ethnosymbolism as a theory irreconcilable with discourse analyses, and it hopefully furthers an understanding of the occasionally complex relations between pre-modern ethnic sentiments and modern political discourses.

#### 4.4 The ontology of nations and ethnic groups

I will proceed from the foregoing usage of Bourdieu's concept of habitus and by that try to clarify and elaborate Smith's conception of the nation, as his postmodernist critics claim that he is reifying it. Smith has objected to the postmodernist understanding of the nation as a discourse in a linguistic sense, possible to deconstruct through literary categories and devices. He does not overlook that nations do provide historic and linguistic narratives, but he contends that national practices comprises much more besides this, such as symbols, values and memories, attachments, customs and traditions, laws, institutions, routines and habits. Hence, Smith's definition of the nation comprises a whole range of practices. He contends that the 'reality' of nations resides in the fact that many people *feel* the bonds of allegiance and the powerful cultural resources and traditions that underpin so many nations and endow them with a *sense* of tangible reality (Smith, 1998:137-138). In this sense, Smith's definition implicates that the nation is reproduced in the practices, routines and customs of individuals. Therefore, he does not commit the objectivist mistake, that is, of reifying the analytic notion of the nation by treating it as existing as such in the world. Based on this reading of Smith and the foregoing comparison with the concept of habitus, I suggest a relational, ethnosymbolist definition of the nation as a habitus, embedded in a matrix of narratives and discursive practices. This relation definition implies that the nation is a wide-ranging web of lasting practices, reproduced in people's actions. Conceived of as a habitus intertwined with national discourses and narratives, the nation is 'real' in its *consequences*, even though it cannot be directly observed.

#### 4.5 Divergent views on social constructions

The divide between Smith and the proponents of the postmodern approach derives from different understandings of how the ethnic habitus and nationalist discourse is constructed, than being a matter of essentialism versus constructivism. The divide refers to on the one hand a more anthropological perspective on nationalism such as Smith's, and on the other hand a more political perspective, conceiving of ethnicity as a result of political 'rhetoric' (Tilley 1997:512).

Foucault's analyses of modernity have influenced the postmodern approaches to nationalism. One explanation to this may be that Foucault in his early works emphasises deep ruptures between historical epochs and focuses his attention on the birth of modern power. But in his later works on sexuality, he implies that the mutuality of power and knowledge is universal, not distinctive to modernity, and that similar analyses can be developed for all cultures and historical periods according to Calhoun (1995:119). Thus, the postmodern approach draws inspiration from Foucault's analyses of modernity, but postmodernist scholars of nationalism sometimes seem to neglect that habitus, discourses and narratives existed even in the pre-modern era. The question that has to be asked is why the nationalist discourse resonated with the masses. An approach

which assumes that all the criteria of distinctiveness on behalf of the national grouping were invented, ignores and simplifies the relationships between old and new cultural traditions, Smith argues (1998:129). When conceiving of nationalism as based entirely on invented criteria, one neglects the fact that even the intellectual engineers of the scientific state were embedded in a cognitive substratum that exerted influence on his/her plans. Beliefs and practices were interlaced with many other ideas and values, so as to resist attempts of a complete manipulation as Tilley contends (1997:513). Therefore, one of the problems with the postmodern approaches to nationalism considered in this essay is that they solely emphasise the role of politicians and intellectuals, and that they do not assign pre-modern elements of culture any political dimension of its own. This dismissive view of primordial sentiments often results in a tendency to dismiss its very existence. By treating ethnic identity as something that ethnic entrepreneurs have made up, it is a short step to the position that pre-modern sentiments exist only as a fictive discourse, Tilley asserts (1997:508). This is why Smith considers the modernist and the postmodern viewpoints much too one-sided. To see the nation as wholly invented and designed by elites is to assign to large a role to the fabricators, he argues. According to this instrumentalist view the masses are passive and manipulated by the elites for political ends, but their cultures and social networks have no political relevance. Instead Smith maintains that nationalist leaders in order to be successful, had to base their appeals on relevant pre-existing social and cultural frameworks (Smith 1998:127-130). Patrik Hall for example, neglects the possibility that the self of any community is not *only* articulated externally for political purposes. Important to note is that the individuals also make use of available narratives in order to give meaning to their social world. A problem with the kind of modernist or instrumentalist approach advocated by the postmodernists is its inclination to functionalist and teleological argumentation. According to several postmodernist explanations of nationalism it is solely a function of political interests, but as Breuilly points out, it is clear that nationalism initially was one aspect of an unintended modernity (Breuilly 1996:156). Smith maintains that nationalism is modern as an ideology, but that nations and nationalism are no more invented than other kinds of culture, social organisation or ideology (Smith 1991, 71-72).

When Smith uses the term primordial, he refers to pre-modern socially constructed webs of meaning or myth-symbol complexes. His critics, such as Norval or Özkirimli seem to have interpreted the notion 'socially constructed' exclusively in terms of modern inventions or fabrications. In that way they neglect the fact that all social constructions are not intentionally invented or fabricated to serve a function for society, but may instead be unintended consequences of various historical processes. Therefore, the understanding of the concept of social construction advocated by Norval and Özkirimli is much too narrow. Such an understanding conceives of social construction in a literal sense, but the concept of social construction is not

limited to pure inventions or fabrications. Routines, customs and practices accumulated during vast periods of time are still social constructions, and not necessarily fabrications made up by intellectuals.

#### **4.6 The continuity of relational settings**

Postmodern approaches to nationalism have stressed the discontinuity and great rupture between pre-modern and modern times. By that they leave out the possibility of any co-existence or continuity of pre-modern elements in the modern era. Consequently this brings about the mistake Margaret Somers wanted to avoid. When excluding the possibility that discourses of nationalism may have incorporated pre-modern element, postmodern approaches to nationalism treats society as a coherent entity. As Somers notes, the synchrony between for example feudal and industrial society is not always perfect, and remnants of the old order persist into the modern era. Understanding society as a relational setting makes it possible not to treat modern and pre-modern institutions as mutually exclusive. When Smith refers to a pre-modern socio-cultural matrix, this could be seen as a relational setting of persistent traditionalist ties. This relational setting did not just disappear in times of modernisation, but prevailed in large segments of the population even in times of modernity. Therefore I argue that Smith demonstrates how nationalism emerged as a way to deal with this traditionalist socio-cultural lag-effect, or what might be described as the discrepancy between modern and traditional narratives. Thus, the reformist intellectual merges a traditionalist narrative with a modern one. S/he partly forsakes the old religious narrative, but tries to integrate some traditional narrative components into the modern narrative of the scientific state in order to gain legitimacy on behalf of the state. The role of myths in Smith's theory is in many respects equivalent to the role of narratives. I maintain that Smith's theory combines a small-scale narrative approach with a large-scale historical and sociological account of nationalism, as the myths as well as the narratives provide constellations of meaningful relationships embedded in time and space. Smith states that "phenomena like ethnicity or national sentiment are so largely bound up with expressions of attitude, perception and feeling that purely structural approaches will inevitably seem remote from the objects of their explanation"(Smith 1986:7). The dual legitimation could be interpreted as a merging of traditional and modern meta-narratives into a rhetoric that resonated with large numbers of the population within the territory of the already existing 'nation-state' or 'the nation-to-be', due to embeddedness of the community in the remnants of traditionalist relational settings. In this way Smith demonstrates how nationalism emerges as a 'narrative' way to deal with the disenchantment of modernity. The modern nationalist discourse exploits pre-existing habitus and narratives in order to authorise claims for statehood. A modern nationalist discourse can assign new meanings to a pre-existing habitus. Pre-existing traditional narratives may also be

incorporated into the nationalist discourse. Religious fundamentalism could then be seen as the outcome of a failure to integrate traditional and modern narratives.

The advantage of Smith's theory is that it does not mutually exclude ethnicity and political rhetoric as important components of nation-building. Political rhetoric can reinforce some ethnic identities and undermine others. It is moreover important to note that Smith's ethnosymbolist approach does not exclude the possibility that a nationalist discourse constructed identities to varying degrees.

#### **4.7 The significance of general accounts of nationalism**

The structural accounts of nationalism have tended to be neglected by recent theorists, but the need for them still reverberates in the debate. Postmodernists are reluctant to offer general explanations of nationalism or the continuous presence of ethnicity. However, even a postmodernist scholar such as Norval asks for a more general analysis that determines those orders of truth within which people make sense of their realities (Norval 1996:63). This would require an investigation of the historical conditions from which the existing forms of identification have emanated she argues. A more or less explicit objective of these approaches is similar to that of critical theory, in that they seek to explore the ways in which categorical identities reduce the freedom of the human being. Consequently, clarifying the social and cultural histories by which they have been constructed has become the main way of trying to challenge the persistence of these essentialist identities and the problems that goes with them. Eric Hobsbawm and several postmodernist followers have thus tried to break the endurance of such identities by showing them to be based on pure inventions. However, merely bringing to light a process of fabrication is to over-simplify a much more complicated process (Calhoun 1994:14). Such an account cannot fully explain why ethnic or nationalist identities continue to be invoked and deeply felt. Calhoun contends that a critical theory must be able to look behind the seemingly natural or primordial categories, without imagining that simply showing these categories to be constructed will reduce their force or explain why they are reproduced (Calhoun, 1995:234). Taking a 'constructivist' perspective in such a simplistic sense have far reaching implications, as it might indicate that ethnic or national identities are as easily changed as one might change one's job or dress, Tilley contends (1997:513).

The critical task of Norval consists of a call for a re-thinking of the very imagination which would frame the horizon of identification. She wishes to construct an identity that can cut across differences and particularities and not commit the modernist fault of denial of all specificity (Norval 1996:68). However, Norval's vision points to a dilemma that follows the postmodernist approach when it is used for critical purposes. In order to establish a ground for critical engagement, critical theorists have to claim a basis of a more or less undifferentiated human

condition. Foucault for example, criticises modern forms of hegemony but he does not suggest any alternative direction. Therefore, like most postmodernists, he can only advance resistance and not emancipation. The postmodern emphasis on difference and particularity undermines a common basis for mutual engagement according to Calhoun (1995:120-24). The problem is that this emphasis on difference even appears in violent forms of ethnic nationalism, racism and religious fundamentalism as in movements of gender or sexual orientation. The debate has thus been divided between postmodernist and poststructuralists who would base an identity politics on the impossibility of full communication across lines of cultural difference and defenders of the Enlightenment universalism and rationality as a basis for communication (Calhoun, 1995:xi). Even Norval is unable to entirely reject the universalism so specific of the Western intellectual tradition in her appeal to an identity that cuts across all particularities. The underlying risk of such views is that the 'universalism' rather mirrors an ignorance of one's own embeddedness in a particular setting. As Michael Billig points out, nationalism has been inhabited and routinised in the West (Billig 1995:42-43). Therefore mixing postmodern theory with critical theory is difficult, since critical theory must appeal to some form of basic human condition which postmodernism opposes. Conceiving of national identity according to my reading of Smith, that is, as a habitus embedded in a socio-cultural matrix, can be a way to elucidate this problem. Habitus is then seen as a 'universal' phenomenon and as such, it becomes obvious that even the researcher or theorist is embedded in particular settings of different kinds. I argue that Smith's theory enables awareness of such embeddedness, yet maintaining a balance between rationalism/relativism and universalism/particularism. It is attentive of historical and cultural particularity, and at the same time it provides a more general understanding of nationalist, ethnic or religious upsurge. Smith states that tracing the often discontinuous formation of certain national identities back to pre-modern cultural substructures is a matter for empirical observation rather than a priori theorising (Smith 1998:197). However, his theory is useful as a general basis for small-scale studies of the way national ethnic or religious identities continue to be used by humans in giving meaning to their social world, as well as for more structural, historical accounts. Smith neither excludes subjective, narrative factors nor structural processes of modernity in his account.

As postmodernists offer no general explanation for the presence and significance of ethnicity, they tend to tacitly espouse the general explanations of the modernists or instrumentalists according to Smith (Smith 1998:218). This implicates an inescapable need of some kind of general understanding of the character, formation and diffusion of nationalism since we either implicitly or explicitly will lean towards some structural understanding of the phenomenon. What gives the scientific approach its unique position is precisely that the researcher accounts for her/his perspective. I maintain that Smith's ethnosymbolist theory constitutes a refined framework, mindful of a wide range of historical trajectories of nationalism. This analytic framework allows

for a historical depth that tends to be neglected by the postmodern approach. Therefore, I contend that Smith's outlook provides a more appropriate basis for a critical theory seeking to grasp the ways through which ethnicity and national identity continue to be reproduced and invoked.

## 4.8 Conclusion

One of the purposes of this essay was to criticise the postmodernist understanding of the ethnosymbolist theory of Anthony D Smith and I set out to show how a number of postmodernist scholars have misinterpreted Smith's ethnosymbolism. Smith's postmodernist critics have all posited his ethnosymbolist theory as contradictory to a relational, constructivist account of nationalism. They conceive of the myth-symbol complex as an essence or an objective and unchanging ground, determining the formation of any nation. I have argued that this criticism is based on a number of misinterpretations. First the myth-symbol complex does not constitute an objective ground. Smith's concepts 'ethnic core' and myth-symbol complex refer to subjective criteria such as myths, memories and values and objectified representations like symbols and characteristic styles of particular historic configurations. Smith's ethnosymbolist theory is thus not founded on essentialist assumptions when referring to a pre-existing myth-symbol complex. Smith's postmodernist critics have also misunderstood the way social change may occur within the parameters of group membership. The concepts of ethnic or nation do not refer to unchanging entities in Smith's theorisation.

Another purpose of this study was to reclaim the relational turn on behalf of ethnosymbolism and demonstrate how this approach is compatible with the relational outlook. In order to reconcile the ethnosymbolism with the relational approach, and to avoid further misinterpretations, I have translated some concepts of Smith's theory into a more 'contemporary' terminology. Smith contends that the 'reality' of nations consists of the *feelings* of affiliation underpinned by the cultural resources that endows the nation with a *sense* of tangible reality. By that it is clear that Smith's conception of the nation is reconcilable with a relational view of the nation, as it is 'real' only in its *consequences*. The concept of habitus denotes a lasting regulated form of social activities. I have suggested a relational, ethnosymbolist definition of the nation where it is seen as a habitus, embedded in a matrix of narratives and discourses.

As I intended to show how it is possible to avoid further misunderstandings of ethnosymbolism, I have proposed a marked distinction between ethnic or national habituses and nationalist discourses. The concept *discourse* refers to regularised representations involving statements, concepts, theses and theories, whereas *habitus* in this sense refers to a more wide-ranging lasting practice expressed in customs and traditions. This implies that ethnic habituses can be exploited by a nationalist discourse. It is therefore possible to combine ethnosymbolism

with Brubaker's 'eventful' approach for example, as a nationalist discourse can 'erupt', drawing from a pre-existing ethnic habitus. A particular population does not have to be self-aware, or rather, discursively aware, of its communal habitus in a political sense, until it is assigned new meaning by a political discourse of some kind.

I also intended to argue that ethnosymbolism constitutes a more appropriate framework in order to enable a critical understanding of the reproduction and exploitation of national, ethnic or religious identities than postmodern approaches to nationalism. I have therefore discussed some of the major problems associated with the postmodern approaches considered in this essay in relation to ethnosymbolism. First, Smith's postmodernist critics seem to have interpreted 'social construction' in a literal sense but the concept is not limited to pure inventions or fabrications. Routines, customs and practices accumulated during vast periods of time are still social constructions, and not necessarily fabrications made up by intellectuals. Moreover, by stressing the discontinuity and great ruptures between pre-modern and modern times, they leave out the possibility of any co-existence or continuity of pre-modern elements in the modern era. The postmodern approaches therefore tends to treat society as a coherent entity when they exclude the possibility that discourses of nationalism may have been founded on pre-modern sentiments. Understanding society in accordance with the relational approach, that is, as a relational setting, makes it possible not to treat modern and pre-modern institutions as mutually exclusive. Furthermore, postmodern approaches tend to over-simplify the social and cultural histories by which ethnic or national identities have been constructed. Merely showing a process of fabrication in the modern era is to over simplify a much more complicated process, and such an account cannot fully explain why ethnic or nationalist identities continue to be invoked and deeply felt. I have therefore argued that Smith's ethnosymbolist approach continues to be valid and highly relevant, as it is mindful of a wide range of historical trajectories of nationalism. Smith's ethnosymbolist theory is useful as a general basis for small-scale studies of the way the national, ethnic or religious identities are put to use by humans when they give meaning to their social world, as well as for more structural accounts of nationalist, ethnic or religious upsurge.

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