

Breakwaters of 2000: From Ethnic to Civic Nationalism

A considerable part of world opinion has grown convinced that the end of history has led to a return of ethnic nationalism. The return is mainly a threat, and a permanent one in the sense that few can see any general cure for the fragmentation or anarchy now supposed to prevail. Empires and imperiums have gone for good. *Sinn féin* is universalized, as all existing and potential national groupings fall back increasingly upon their own resources. No longer a liberating mission to throw off colonial control, nationalism becomes the general fate: the (menacing) new way of the world.

I doubt if there is any good reason for such feelings. What reasons there are derive mainly from two situations of the early 1990s, in the former republics of Yugoslavia and in Rwanda. At stake here is not—of course—the frightfulness of what has occurred in these countries, but a generalizing verdict drawn, it seems to me, much too easily and indiscriminately from their sufferings. Nobody would make light of such events. However, it has been quite

easy to make dark of them, as if there lurked in the post-Cold War atmosphere a positive thirst for Apocalypse withdrawn. Sometimes people appear almost reassured by what they can imagine as the new abyss. The mediaeval hell-promise of nuclear war has gone. But don't feel too lost, things are not too good either—look, mini-hells all over the place. A collective imagination inured to the odour of sulphur is now unable to live without it. Everyone over twenty or so imbibed damnation with their cornflakes, and now a daily fix of ethnic or other conflict is required. Apollyon, Angel of Destruction and Lord of the Bottomless Pit, is no more. But don't worry, there are still plenty of Old Adams. Shattered Vukovar and the Hutu refugee camps in Burundi offer miniature consolations for what Armageddon might have been.

In an Amnesty lecture last year Eric Hobsbawm observed how post-1945 barbarization occurred against a background of 'the lunacies of the Cold War':

a period which will one day be as hard to understand for historians as the witch craze of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries . . . the extraordinary assumption that only the readiness to launch the nuclear holocaust at a moment's notice preserved the Western world from immediate overthrow by totalitarian tyranny was enough in itself to undermine all accepted standards of civility.¹

How did it do so? In part by retuning the popular world-view towards acceptance of death. Individually this is true anyway: recognition of inevitable demise and the brevity of personal existence conditions all social life and provides the soil of poetry as well as despair. But Cold War lunacy entailed something different. Its fated all-round demise was to come from *them*, and the cause was their evil empire. Hobsbawm's analogy with the time of witches is apt. Against the forces of darkness all means are justified, and any ruthlessness will eventually be pardoned. This supported a coarsening of the general imagination, a kind of all-conquering tabloidism. Sustained by wordly authority and consecrated by the nearing End of Things, comic-strip fantasy formed a grisly alliance with some of the deepest motifs in human culture—with the witches' Sabbath, Satan's domain and the Apocalypse.

The Age of Extremes lays most emphasis on the American side of the psychosis. It was—the author frankly admits—democracy which made the United States more dangerous and explains why 'the apocalyptic *tone* of the Cold War came from America . . . If anyone put the crusading tone into the *realpolitik* of international power confrontation, it was Washington.'² Unconstrained by the need to woo an electorate, he argues, the Soviet leaders could afford to be more pragmatic or frankly hypocritical about the prospects for war.

But what this contraposition ignores, surely, is the more serious theoretical weight which at that time seemed to attach to the communist version. The latter may have been less strident or populist. However, its

¹ Eric Hobsbawm, 'Barbarism: A User's Guide', *NLR* 206, p. 52.

² Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century*, London 1994, pp. 234–7.

quieter annunciation also derived from a supposedly scientific view of human destiny, to which grim matter-of-factness was, in any case, more appropriate. Prophetic presidents like Kennedy or Nixon were not needed to scream the message: every newspaper and arm of the educational apparatus did so routinely, dully but not necessarily without effect. And what was the message? Many years ago Norman Cohn pointed out how:

What Marx passed on to present-day communism was not the fruit of his long years of study in the fields of economics and sociology but a quasi-apocalyptic fantasy which, as a young man, unquestioningly and almost unconsciously, he had assimilated from a crowd of obscure writers and journalists . . . Capitalism as Babylon, now about to go under in a sea of blood and fire so that the way shall be cleared for the egalitarian millennium.³

Golden but Doomed

During the better boom-times of the fifties and sixties all emergent fun was coseted by the daily realization that death remained the soundest long-term bet. I remember returning home from a CND demonstration one day in the sixties with some London friends. They had a daughter who, at eight, had just attained the classical 'age of reason'. It used to be common for whole families to attend those events, sometimes with children in arms: a concrete gesture of the will to live, as well as reject 'insane' government policies. But the daughter hadn't come that day. She looked very withdrawn when we came back: a thoughtful, bookish girl already inclined towards—as people began to say then—'doing her own thing'. There was the usual talk about how good it had been, who wasn't there, how politicians would respond and so on. Later on, her mother returned from putting her to bed: 'D'you know what she said? She asked me quite seriously: "Mum, *isn't there any other world I could go to?*" I didn't know what to say . . .'

Nuclear weapons had been invented and—an axiom of that era's consciousness—could never be uninvented.⁴ Both sides were in that regard as materialist as one another. It was the forces of production which ruled, including those designed for efficient wholesale slaughter of *homo sapiens*. Hobsbawm's picture of these forces in action is one of the greatest since the *Communist Manifesto* first did capitalism the honours in 1848—a baroque cascade of multiplying statistics and mounting trends which concludes: 'The Golden Age from the fifties to the seventies . . . largely achieved the most dramatic, rapid and profound revolution in human affairs of which history has record'. In one sense, he also concedes, it was simply another Kondratiev long wave of development 'like the great Victorian boom of 1850-1873 . . . and the *belle époque* of the late Victorians and Edwardians.'

³ Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, London 1957, p. 311.

⁴ I happily refer readers at this point to 'Tacit Knowledge, Weapons Design, and the Uninvention of Nuclear Weapons' by Donald Mackenzie and Graham Spinardi, in *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 101, no. 1, July 1995.

But there is a striking difference too. Any memoir of the pre-1914 epoch will make one notice it. So will any reader keeping the 'Cold War' chapter in mind while enjoying Hobsbawm's evocation of the economic glory years. This profoundest of revolutions took place within a political framework of contrived stalemate, and under the aegis of MAD—the 'mutually assured destruction' used by both sides to repress unrest or dissent, and above all any changes upsetting to the balance of power. Its liberating potential was strictly rationed. Decolonization was allowed, mainly on condition that new regimes chose their ideological side and stuck with it. Third Worlders were allowed some nationalism but were expected to be careful what they did with it. Otherwise all collective or national expressions of the great ferment were ruled out. They were decreed anachronistic and backward-looking, and hence rightly subordinate to the existing forms of statehood clinging to their safe places in NATO or the Warsaw Pact.

Individual emancipation and family prosperity were different, of course—not only allowable but the measurable stake of the great contest. However, the implication was a narrowing and souring of identity and meaning. It transformed a welcome rise in consumption standards into precisely that blinkered '-ism' which, even as they lived off it, my friends rebelled against. 'Tory consumerism' they called it in the British context. It may be unfair: but the fact is that afterwards almost no one would gaze back upon this castrate era with the kind of nostalgia which the old *belle époque* could excite, even among those who had never known it. This is why Hobsbawm has to insist so strongly that the years were golden—that the fifties and sixties really meant far more, to far more people, than previous eras of expansion.

It was a materialist, forces-of-production transformation, held down inside a glacier and bereft of its full effects. Politically speaking, all that was solid by no means melted into air. Not until 1989, at least. 'Look out, the old world is behind you!', warned Situationist students in the Paris May of 1968. And it certainly was, threatening all-round cremation if things got out of hand.

The world was remade economically during that time, but the political changes which should have expressed the transformation were severely inhibited. A transnational market economy finally captured the globe, but no accompanying metamorphosis of nations was permitted. Stability was all, since that alone kept Apollyon at bay. Capitalism survived, then reigned, then triumphed; only as an economic order, however, while an international equivalent of the 'old bunch' retained its state and diplomatic ascendancy. I do not know how my friends from that time would have seen Thatcher's fall, but am quite clear what they would have thought about an old-fashioned toff like Douglas Hurd still impersonating England in 1995.

Illusion and Identity

Since Ernest Gellner's pioneering work in the sixties, a single paradigm has regulated most studies of nationalism, the 'modernization theory'. I will not attempt to rehearse his views here, but will concentrate on one central point. Perry Anderson puts it exceptionally well in a recent essay:

Gellner . . . explains the emergence of nationalism as a breakwater of differential industrialization . . . Contrary to received prejudices, the diffusion of nationalism throughout the globe is a salutary process, which has certainly improved the lot and perhaps bettered the conduct of humanity. For the nation-state . . . is the necessary general framework for the unitary culture—also preliminary protection—required by modern industry, which is in turn the only passport to prosperity for individuals, and equality between peoples.⁵

Another implication of the breakwater theory is that modernization—industrialization and all its concomitant changes—will go on giving rise to differential political and cultural mobilization. I choose this long-winded phrase deliberately, rather than ‘nationalism’. But my purpose is simply to stress what nationalism was and is really about. It may be that as the process goes on ‘nationalism’ may come to mean only a single formative phase of it—the one which lasted, say, from 1789 to 1989, before concluding in the fireworks display of the nineties. But the differentiation at its heart is certain to continue. New breakwaters will go on being built. The long-term reason is that all alternatives will continue to seem worse and hence be contested, *as long as democracy also continues*.

The economic glory years did not allow this process. On the contrary, they sat upon it: the great capitalist revolution was matched by a political fixity and stagnation worse than that of 1815–48. This modern Restoration degenerated constantly into dictatorship or apparently eternal corruption like that of Italy’s *Democrazia Cristiana*. For half a century it provided a twilight home to astonishing relics like the United Kingdom. Democracy was allowed out only on strict bail and caution in the West, and banned altogether from the lands of forced-march development in the East. There was a socio-cultural transformation, a mutation of *moeurs* sanctified in retrospect as ‘the Sixties’. But, since no political equivalent was tolerated, it inevitably sank back into the reflux of the seventies.

The construction of new breakwaters was throughout the period frowned upon, sabotaged or forbidden. ‘Petty-bourgeois nationalism’ was the Eastern taboo—not really so different from Western accusations of archaism, parochialism and so on. Two years before Gellner’s first work appeared, the great American anthropologist Margaret Mead propounded what is still the canonical view of the nineties in *Foreign Affairs*: ‘The nation state, which historically was concerned primarily with warding off attack and with attacking others, is an imperfect unit for the administration of human welfare, and is an even more imperfect one for the administration of economic development . . .⁶ Enough of it, therefore: ‘the world order’ required something less obstreperous and anarchic, tidier nation-units made according to a superior administrative and economic plan.

⁵ Perry Anderson, ‘Max Weber and Ernest Gellner: Science, Politics, Enchantment’, in *A Zone of Engagement*, Verso, London 1992, p. 204.

⁶ Margaret Mead, ‘The Underdeveloped and the Overdeveloped’, *Foreign Affairs*, October 1962.

The persisting spirit of the European Enlightenment has always been terribly disappointed by its firstborn, Capitalism. Its eldest grandson, Nationalism, remains even more of a nuisance. But it no longer has the faintest hope of getting rid of either of them. It was this hope which ended around 1989, not history. *The Age of Extremes* is the grandest memorial stone yet placed upon its grave. One reaction to post-1989 events is a lucid pessimism, the abandonment of hope by all who have approached them via this particular intellectual portal. Wry but more distant critics like Gellner have refused to panic over the supposed recrudescence of nationality-politics. They have a sociological perspective upon the changes which lets them assess its pros and cons more equably. Gellner's office window in his home town, Prague, has a northward vista of Žižkov Hill and the Czech National Monument, erected in the sixties to symbolize the indestructible union between communism and the Czech national spirit. Betrayed by defective socialist air-conditioning, the mummified corpse of Klement Gottwald rotted away there for many years until a more liberal political climate sanctioned its removal. The national aspect of the complex was provided by a vast equestrian statue of blind folk-hero General Jan Žižka (1376–1424). Nobody seems to be contemplating his removal. For centuries to come the old Protestant thug will go on sightlessly waving his club over Bohemia reborn—all the more vigorously since—like Gellner—he would almost certainly have approved of the 1992 break-up of Czechoslovakia.

Identity and Tragedy

Hobsbawm, by contrast, perceives mainly tragic consequences in this and all similar post-1989 events. In the 'User's Guide to Barbarism' I quoted from earlier, he concludes that 'unspeakable things are done by people who no longer have social guides to action'. Alas:

The old traditional England which Mrs Thatcher did so much to bury relied on the enormous strength of custom and convention. One did, not what 'ought to be' done, but what *was* done: as the phrase went, 'the done thing'. But we no longer know what 'the done thing' is, there is only 'one's own thing'.⁷

'One's own thing' has a collective aspect too, what Hobsbawm calls 'the self-serving jargon of the militants of identity politics'. These scoundrels are everywhere nowadays. The old world is behind us no longer, or not closely enough for comfort. The new world has taken much more seriously to 'doing its own thing' than in the sixties. 'The explosive collapse of political and social order on the periphery of our world system', snorts the author, 'coupled with the slower subsidence in the heartlands of developed society . . .' Sorry—*whose* world system? It looks awfully like Douglas Hurd's. This is also the trouble with *The Age of Extremes*. Its brilliance derives from Hobsbawm's imaginative power, fused with a degree of personal experience and memory: his own lifetime is also that of the book's subtitle, 'The Short Twentieth Century'. No one has shown greater capacity for empathy with outlaws, primitive rebels and other outcasts of the world system. He instinctively tunes

⁷ Hobsbawm, 'Barbarism', pp. 53–4.

into romantic and idealistic dissent—to the jazz of dissonance, as it were, rather than the measured strings and massed choirs of official bombast. And yet, this very sympathy carries him time and again to something like a rejection of his own greatest gift. As if terrified by the vividness of his apprehension, he ends by recoiling from it. Inevitably, this thrusts him back into the old world's arms. Disconcertingly, Robin Hood turns in the last reel into the Sheriff of Nottingham and ends up fulminating, above all about the 'self-serving militants' of Green Wood nationalism.⁸

A good example of this is given by the section of 'The Golden Years' where Hobsbawm looks at the odd phenomenon of 'off-shore' nationhood. Although Cold War order severely curtailed the evolution of sovereignty, it could never totally arrest it. Along with decolonization, the growth of transnational enterprise could not help favouring trading, or even producing, enclaves, free-trade zones and ports, and fiscally-welcoming mini-states. Hong Kong, Singapore, Liechtenstein, Andorra and Gibraltar flourished as never before:

All this . . . produced a paradoxical change in the political structure of the world economy. As the globe became its real unit, the national economies of the large states found themselves giving way to such offshore centres, mostly situated in the small or tiny mini-states which had conveniently multiplied as the old colonial empires fell apart.

Even before the floodgates were opened in 1989, in fact, globalization was generating more sovereign entities rather than less. New city-states began to appear—a form of polity last seen to flourish in the Middle Ages' and—one might add—not then without its own distinctive contribution to civilized development. If this is a genuine historical-materialist trend, is it entirely to be deplored? Mini-states may be 'incapable of defending their nominal independence in the international jungle'. On the other hand, is that so disastrous if 'they can obviously flourish as well as, and sometimes better than, large national economies'? Capitalism is increasing political anarchy, in a sense. What is not so clear is that 'anarchy' is bad, or all bad, or worse than the large national economies dear to socialism, custom and convention.

But this will not do. The author comes to with a shiver. Caught within an inch of issuing a licence for anarchy and being drummed out of the club, he scrambles to recant. A disclaimer is needed. It may *seem*—he warns the reader—that this situation 'provides the multiplying ethnic movements of late twentieth century nationalism' with arguments for the independence of everywhere from Corsica to Vanuatu. Not a bit of it. The done thing can still be saved. 'Separation', he sniffs, would merely render such places 'more dependent on the transnational entities which increasingly determine matters . . . The most convenient world for multinational giants is one populated by dwarf states or no states at all'.

⁸ In his article on *The Age of Extremes* in the *London Review of Books* (9 March 1995) Edward Said notes how 'a muffled quality surfaces here and there in the author's tone, and even at times a self-imposed solemnity . . .'

This is a dismissal rather than an argument. In fact it is almost an exorcism. Hong Kong and Andorra may indeed be convenient for multinational businesses. The more important question in a democratic world is—are they convenient and advantageous to the inhabitants of Hong Kong and Andorra? The reasons given by Corsicans, Shetlanders or Canary Islanders for wanting to emulate them may remain ‘unconvincing’ to all who have sunk back into their Douglas Hurd club armchairs—original designer, Prince Metternich. The more significant question is, surely, will they increasingly convince the growing mass of outlaws, rebels and nationalist ne’er-do-wells emerging from the new world disorder? An independent Wales? Quite out of the question—but Robin Hood would have loved it.

For the Professorial Sheriff’s posse, political independence in a multinational economy becomes ‘mere’—like alcohol-free wine, a form of collective vanity scarcely worth having. The implication seems to be that the real thing has gone permanently out of stock—genuine steel-mill-and-gunboat independence, ‘socialism in one country’, border-guards who meant business. So the Latvians and Andorrans shouldn’t have bothered: they were merely making life easier for multinational giants. The latter require seriously giant states to regulate them. Yet damnably enough the whole tendency of the age—even then, during the great boom-time—seems set against gigantism, and in favour of identity delusions. Instead of observing the blueprint, globalization is visibly breeding more differential and chaotic industrialization, a proliferation of dwarves and midgets.

The End of Ethnic Nationalism

The counter-argument goes this way. There never was such a thing as *real* nationalism—except in the minds of ethnic nationalists—and modern autarky was never either attained or attainable, on any scale of historical statehood. The ‘-ism’ of nationality politics was always first and foremost an international reality itself. It was the successive breakwater-effect of industrialization upon older agrarian and subsistence economies. The anarchy which this generated was always obvious—and obviously preferable to all attempts at controlling it by the gigantism of imperial short-cuts, from the Napoleonic Empire to Stalinist Socialism. The Cold War was only the fag end of that delusion. Its after-image of empire survived until 1989, increasingly at odds with the deeper socio-economic shifts generated by the last bit of the ‘short twentieth century’. Then the end of history came, in a day.

This was not the end of the Enlightenment, however, only the conclusion of an over-rational ‘short-cutism’—that is, of a foreshortened future vision mistakenly deduced from the Enlightenment, and which had persisted far too long. What ended, then, was history as a blueprint-process of metropolitan order—an order whose more exact description had in any case always been ‘pseudo-order’, the de facto or would-be domination of the world by centres of temporary ascendancy and power.

‘Ethnic nationalism’ was one part of that world now ended. It was essentially anti-metropolitan. What it represented was the ragged,

defensive–aggressive breakwater formation of first-shock industrialization, from the end of the eighteenth century up to 1989. With the end of metropolitanism, however, the likelihood is that this too will diminish. It was humanity’s antidote to the political imperialism which has constantly beset, distorted and tried to capture the formation of a single world market and economic system. The effects of an antidote may also be terrifying. To be effective, an inoculation may have to reproduce some features of the disease itself. I often think of Max Ernst’s great 1930s painting in this connection, *The Angel of Hearth and Home*—a vast barbaric monster clad in colourful rags, half-man and half-bird, screaming and stamping against a sky filled with storm-clouds. As an emblem of the age, it deserves its place alongside Paul Klee’s *Angelus Novus*, Walter Benjamin’s much-quoted image of progress.⁹

In the longer term, the 1989 climacteric of progress may calm down the ragged monster. What it is unlikely to do, however, is to diminish nationalism in the less restricted sense. As the modernists have always held, nationalism never grew straightforwardly from ethnic motifs and ancestral customs: it had to be ‘invented’ through the bias of modernization. As that bias alters so will the condition of all its effects. A much more likely result for the breakwater process is what we have to envisage as the move from an ethnic to a civic configuration of nationalism. Michael Ignatieff puts this very neatly in the conclusion of his book and tv series, *Blood and Belonging*: ‘There is a larger moral to be drawn . . . The only reliable antidote to ethnic nationalism turns out to be civic nationalism, because the only guarantee that ethnic groups will live side by side in peace is shared loyalty to a state . . .’¹⁰ The cure for the ills of nationalism is no longer the chimera of internationalism, therefore. It can only be a different sort of nationalism. Within the one-world development system now attained, nation-states have to become state-nations. But growing up in that sense does not imply the lessening of differentiation. Because peoples and communities—however originally defined—may now reach political sovereignty more easily, or in an other than life-or-death fashion, it does not follow that fewer of them will bother. Because the pressures, constraints and objectives of breakwater-construction are now in a general sense evened out, or have become recognizably and inevitably the same, it does not follow that the construction process either will or should diminish. Indeed it may hugely increase—and precursors were present during the sixties and seventies. Wherever differential advantages of development are identified and political action seems to offer a possible remedy, or a possible mode of exploitation, it is likely to be taken.

After all, even the most solemn and muffled of metropolitan watchdogs have usually conceded that variety ‘in itself’ is a good thing. They just wanted it to stay ‘in itself’—that is, confined to folk-dancing and free from politics. No one has, as far as I know, ever actively preached global uniformity of culture except imperialists of a kind now mercifully extinct. Deadening homogeneity is the commonest fictional form of dystopia. On

⁹ ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’, no. ix, in *Illuminations*, Verso, London 1973, pp. 259–60.

¹⁰ Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism*, London 1994, p. 185.

the other hand, the true meaning of the reverse pattern—a general liberation of unconfined diversity—did not begin to emerge until after 1989.

Yesterday I took a break from writing this article to watch *Assignment*, a television programme featuring short reports from BBC correspondents around the world. One was from Spain, on the ‘water war’ which has broken out between the northern region of Aragon and the neighbouring autonomous semi-state of Catalonia. Summarising very briefly, the Aragonese have become convinced that Catalans are stealing their water for industrial development. The Catalan government’s position is that rivers which happen to rise in the Aragon hills and flow out on the Catalan coast do not belong to Aragon. And in any case the Rio Ebro—the largest and most contentious case—rises far to the west, in the Basque Country. All-Spanish rules prevent Aragonese communes from interfering with the river for agricultural developments in ways that might affect down-stream users in southern Catalonia. One Catalan mayor objected strongly to paying extra for their water. It would, for example, seriously affect the construction of new golf courses near the coast, and hence the attractiveness of the area to multinational executives. An Aragonese mayor replied bitterly on how different things would be if the river happened to run the other way, from Catalonia into parched Aragon. The former is close to being an independent state, the latter only a region of the Hispanic state.

One could see that identity-politics militants had been busy along the Ebro. Their ‘jargon’ figured prominently in mass demonstrations in Zaragoza and at Fayon, where the river crosses the Aragon–Catalan border. This was confusing for the television cameras because of the similar red and yellow stripes of both the Aragon and Catalan flags. The government in Madrid seemed to have taken no action. It was unclear whether that was due to paralysis following the interminable corruption scandals of the González regime or—as believed in Zaragoza—to the crude political blackmail of Catalan leader Jordi Pujol in Barcelona.

What further theoretical comment on this item is needed? Multiply the conflict one thousandfold and the result may not be too unlike Europe early next millennium. Chaotic, I agree; but only disastrous if all such contentions are imagined as foundering into ethnic warfare, or the kind of heedless pseudo-ethnicity which Hobsbawm is so censorious about. Alas, the anarchists may have got it all wrong too. ‘Anarchy’ in this encroaching sense will need more politics and powers, not less. However, if a democratic context is maintained for capitalist economic development—which we now know to be the only sort there is—there is every reason why the politics should be civic and the new powers local. Catalonia and Aragon are ‘dwarves’ or tiddly-wink nations only in the debased jargon of an incurable metropolitanism.

Ignatieff was dubious about the ethnic-civic balance in 1993. He saw the battle going on everywhere he had visited:

What’s wrong with the world is not nationalism itself. Every people must have a home, every such hunger must be assuaged. What’s wrong is the kind of nation, the kind of home that nationalists want to create and the means they use . . . It’s the battle between the civic

and the ethnic nation. I know which side I'm on. I also know which side, right now, happens to be winning . . .

The Democratic Battlefield

But it is unlikely to go on winning. The circumstances of liberation post-shock are not those of the longer post-1989 *durée*. Three years on, it may help estimate the condition of the battlefield to glance briefly at three parts of it. Northern Ireland, Palestine and South Africa: these three cases were, up until 1989, always regarded as the most hopeless in the world order. They were like chronic ulcers, held back from bursting only by force and either tacit or formal international agreement not to stir them up. Otherwise, outright ethnic warfare was bound to erupt and bring a fight to the finish.

Now, no one would pretend they are cured yet. But equally, I do not see how anyone can deny the extraordinary alteration wrought by the post-Cold War climate. Far from collapsing into the long-predicted abyss, all three countries have witnessed a halting shift away from what seemed to be endemic conflict towards tentative political accommodation. The latter includes novel formulae of self-government in each case, intended to express ethno-national ambitions rather than divert or repress them. The new democratic structures have emerged partly from an internal will to change, given purchase over events at last by a more favourable international atmosphere. Also, this will has been partly the work of individuals and groups whom I suppose it would be quite possible to characterize as 'self-serving identity-militants'—notably in Northern Ireland. Whether the formulae will work out depends in each case upon the construction and maintenance of an apparatus of civic nationalism representing, again in Ignatieff's words, 'those who believe that a nation should be a home to all, and that race, colour, religion and creed should be no bar to belonging.'

Naturally, any list of this sort is open to accusations of special pleading—one chooses examples supporting the case and ignores those which do not. So what about other places in 'the explosive collapse of political and social order on the periphery of our world system', like Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda or Burundi? The horrors there are the consequence of this collapse, Hobsbawm argued in the lecture quoted above. They are the by-product of:

the collapse of political order as represented by functioning states—*any* effective state which stands watch against the descent into Hobbesian anarchy—and the crumbling of the old frameworks of social relations over a large part of the world—*any* framework which stands guard against Durkheimian *anomie* . . .¹¹

This is exaggeration which betrays its own sense. Fortunately, the places where ethnic massacres have occurred have been exceptional even within

¹¹ Hobsbawm, 'Barbarism', p. 53. I discussed the misapplication of Hobbesian anarchy to Bosnia in an article in *Dissent* entitled 'All Bosnians Now', Fall 1993, pp. 403–10.

the post-1989 collapse. Nor was that collapse generally 'explosive', if this means violent revolution or mass upheavals, or leading to warfare. The remarkable feature of the great change was the opposite. Over the astonishing areas and populations involved—all of the Second World, significant parts of the First and Third—there were few explosions or sustained insurrectionary movements, and border-war encounters have remained limited. As for Durkheim and *anomie*, I think that most sociologists would locate pre-1989 'late communism' as a classical location for that virus, rather than the tumult which ensued.

The places where 'any effective state' evaporated have been rare. And the deadly combination of this with a life-or-death ethnic confrontation have been rarer still. Abrupt delegitimation of state authority, its replacement by a moral void in which masses of people become genuinely terrified of a reimposed alien tyranny, and the simultaneous arrival of democracy, in the sense that populism alone now guides action and no 'outside' framework is any longer acceptable—the conjuncture was exceptional, and seems unlikely to recur often even in a more disorderly, anarchic world.

Overall verdicts upon Bosnia-Herzegovina and the much greater catastrophe of Rwanda vary essentially according to where the emphasis is placed: upon ethno-national divisions, or upon the failure and collapse of state power.¹² Hobsbawm rightly stresses the second, but does not trace this failure to its positive precondition, the eruption of democracy. Was the 1989 transformation essentially a reaffirmation of nationhood and ethnic rights, with democratic trappings; or was it a democratic revolution which in its initial phase inevitably—and *on the whole* rightly—followed ethno-national parameters? If one prefers the second interpretation then the 'guilty party' will no longer appear to be the abstract *Geist* of 'nationalism'. Rather, the plural and concrete guilty parties which present themselves are, in one case, the Serb-dominated former Communist Party of Yugoslavia, whose ghoulish after-life is now the Milosevic regime in Serbia and Montenegro. And in Rwanda, the Hutu-dominated *Mouvement Rwandais pour le Développement*, whose successors now rule the colossal refugee camps in Burundi and Zaïre. In both examples, travesties of democratic rule systematically prevented the establishment of the complex of attitudes and ideas which, since 1989, it has become fashionable to call 'civil society'. But I think this can be put more simply: ethnic nationalism erupted because civic-democratic nationalism was never given a chance. The weight of the past proved too great—but not the past of the blood, folk-memory or inextinguishable customs. Rather, the guilty 'tradition' was one-party tyranny, functionary rule and economic dead-endism. Democracy had been suppressed for too long.

¹² George Kenney, a former US diplomat who resigned in protest at American policy in Bosnia, has estimated the Bosnian death-toll as 'between 25,000 and 60,000'. Relying mainly upon Red Cross statistics, he recently pointed out in the *New York Times* the discrepancy between this and the figure of over 200,000 being commonly quoted (this was reproduced by *L'Evenement du jeudi*, Paris, 26 April–3 May 1995, p. 46). While no one yet knows how many died in the Rwandan massacres of 1994, it was undoubtedly far more than that. Robert Block estimated the number of victims at over half a million in the *New York Review* of 20 October 1994.

In that situation ethno-nationalist revival came out of the dead rather than the quick. Like the inability of European or United Nations intervention to deal with the collapse, it can be seen as an inheritance from Cold War barbarism or—in the Rwandan case—colonialism, rather than as a harbinger of disorder to come. It was the prolonged repudiation or distortion of democratic rule which led to ‘ethnic savagery’, not a fated return of human nature. Neither democracy nor nationalism should stand condemned as such because of specific calamities attending their conjoined development. What Said calls ‘the exhausting and somewhat joyless conclusion’ of *The Age of Extremes* derives from a sometimes wilful lack of faith in the potential of this development.

Is there really no possibility of a *reprise* of development beyond the second millennium, on the scale of Hobsbawm’s ‘golden years’ but—next time round—finding adequate political and human expression over the entire range of culture? No possibility of a post-apocalyptic time in which volcanic new expansion may consummate the post-1989 transition already strongly under way—that is, the general evolution from ethnic towards civic—political forms of sovereignty and nationhood? The militants of the ‘identity politics’ which annoy Hobsbawm so much might appear then as forerunners of such a transition—of the general shift from an inherited-ethnic to a more civic—political differentiation process. From the shadow of forgotten ancestors to the multifarious glory of a diversity encouraged and constantly increasing? For the first time in history, a conjunction of universal development and democracy might then permit something like what was envisaged in that old and too-much-mocked phrase: the ‘springtime of nations’.