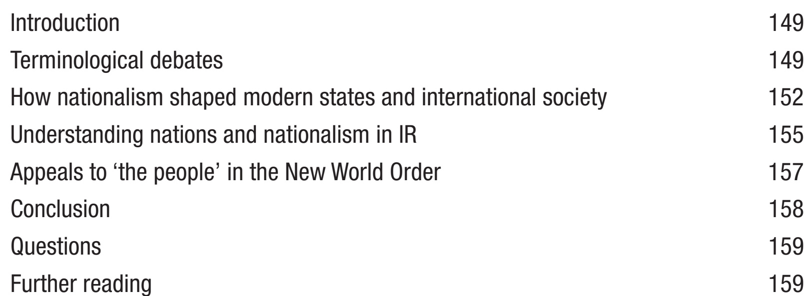
10 Nations and Nationalism

Gavin Mount



Introduction	149
Terminological debates	149
How nationalism shaped modern states and international society	152
Understanding nations and nationalism in IR	155
Appeals to 'the people' in the New World Order	157
Conclusion	158
Questions	159
Further reading	159

Introduction

In this chapter we will see that understanding the meaning and political importance of **nations** and **nationalism** in world politics is a challenging task. One recent survey of concepts in International Relations (IR) said of the term '**national interest**' that it was 'the most vague and therefore easily used and abused'; of nationalism it said that 'there is a lack of consensus about what it is and why it has maintained such a firm hold over so much of the world's population'; and that 'Nations and states seem identical but they are not' (Griffiths and O'Callaghan 2002: 202–13). The following discussion will survey debates on nation and nationalism around three broad questions. The first concerns debates around terminology and their contemporary relevance for the study of IR. The second relates to questions of nation formation and the origins of nationalism, particularly in terms of how it came to shape modern states and **international society**. The third illustrates how the ideas of nations and nationalism have been important in IR theory and practice.

The focus here will be on how interdisciplinary debates on nationalism have informed our understanding of this complex issue in IR. As a **discipline**, the field itself has made a surprisingly modest contribution to this scholarship (see Carr 1945; Hinsley 1973; and Mayall 1990). Nationalism is often not addressed explicitly but it has a significant tacit presence in all of the major schools of thought in the discipline. However, mainstream IR theories have compounded some of the analytical problems associated with understanding nationalism. For example, classical **realists** have tended to conflate nation and state into the concept of 'national interest', while **liberal** and **Marxist** theorists have been internally conflicted over the merits of nationalism versus its potential to undermine ideals of internationalism. The study of nationalism should be a central consideration for any analysis of the major issues in contemporary global politics because taking questions of national interest, values and identity seriously is one way of invoking the idea that culture and 'people' matter.

Terminological debates

The terms 'nation', 'nationality' and 'nationalism' are all notoriously difficult to define. Scholars disagree on whether the most important characteristic of a nation should be its physical, spiritual or social characteristics, whether it is old or new, whether it is imagined or real, whether it is separate from the **state** or not, and so forth (see Box 10.1). As political ideologies, nationalisms have been characterised as democratic or authoritarian, imperial or anti-imperial, forward looking or backward looking, state-led or state-seeking, and pre-modern or **postmodern**. In fact, the only thing that scholars on nations and nationalism seem to agree upon is that the concepts are 'impossibly fuzzy' (Kamenka 1975: 3) and that attempts to arrive at a coherent universal definition of these words are at best 'foolish' or at worst, 'a bootless exercise of definitional imperialism' (Nash 1989: 125; also see Seton-Watson 1977 and Connor 1994).

Regardless of whether academics can define the terms, nationalism is a real force in the sense that it has had, and continues to have, a very real impact on the lives of millions of people throughout the world. There are at least four main reasons why the concept seems to be so resistant to definition.

The first point of confusion is the conflation of the terms 'state' and 'nation'. As a legal entity, a state refers to the internationally recognised political institution comprised of a population, a territory and a government capable of entering into relations with other states (see Chapter 9). A nation can be broadly defined as 'a named human community connected to a homeland, and having common myths and a shared history, a distinct public culture, and common laws and customs for all members' (A. D. Smith 2010: 13). While there are similarities between these two entities – both refer to human groups, have a geography and a set of binding institutions – it is the subtleties that separate them.

Defining human groups as 'populations' versus 'communities' implies a distinction in terms of the formal categorisation of the collectivity as an empirically known and legally constituted entity. While the term 'peoples' is often used in international law, it is a very malleable concept. Distinctions between formally recognised 'territory' and a more symbolic concept of 'homeland' refer to different types of relationships between people and place. One is a notion of formal borders and control; the other is one of attachment and belonging. State archives, libraries, museums and memorials express different means of forging memory from the myths, folklore, art and traditions transmitted through culture. State institutions which facilitate a formal government that is recognised by others are different from the customs and laws of a nation, which tend to be more introspectively binding to the community.

A second reason for the confusion is that nationalism is a mass phenomenon but its formal expression is defined and refined by elites such as lawyers, politicians, historians, novelists, artists, sportspeople and others. Vernacular understandings of what it means to belong to a national identity draw upon a range of cultural ideas and practices. They are dynamic, contested, changeable and difficult to define. However, in formal terms, nationality is presented in more tangible ways through its associations with criteria for citizenship, the dominant symbols such as anthems, flags, currency, public holidays or monuments and the narratives of national memory. On this issue of elite versus mass

BOX 10.1: TERMINOLOGY

Nations and nationalism

'A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present' (Renan [1882] 1996: 52).

'A nation is a community of people, whose members are bound together by a sense of solidarity, a common culture, a national consciousness' (Seton-Watson 1977: 1).

'[A nation] is an imagined political community … because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (B. Anderson 1991: 6).

'A nation can therefore be defined as a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members' (A. D. Smith 1991: 14).

'[Nationalism] is a very distinctive species of patriotism, and one which becomes pervasive and dominant only under certain social conditions which in fact prevail in the modern world, and nowhere else' (Gellner 1983: 183).

'Nationalism has been both cause and effect of the great reorganizations of political space that framed the "short twentieth century"' (Brubaker 1996: 4).

'Nationalism is a political expression of group identity often coupled with a country or state. It is an intense, subjective feeling reflecting elemental ties of individuals to groups. This bonding has existed in many forms long before the group to which such passionate loyalty is given became the nation-state' (Hough 2003: 48).

views of nationalism, a seasoned scholar such as Eric Hobsbawm (1997: 11) concluded that 'official ideologies of states and movements are not guides to what it is in the minds of even the most loyal citizens or supporters'.

Third, nationalist ideology seeks to be simultaneously exceptionalist and universalist. As Tzvetan Todorov (1993: 93) notes, nationalism is 'paradoxical because while it is a perspective inherently based upon the centrality of one cultural perspective, it espouses a universal doctrine of humanity'. State-seeking national movements in particular seek recognition by the international community as having a legitimate claim for **self-determination**: 'the right for peoples to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development' (*International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, Art. 1.1). A good example of this is the case of the East Timorese who, for twenty-five years, sought recognition for their claim of self-determination until it was finally recognised, through the **UN**, by the former colonial powers of Indonesia and Portugal in 1999. More recently, the longstanding and extremely violent struggle in Sudan underwent a surprisingly peaceful referendum process, creating the world's newest nation-state.

Fourth, while nations claim to have objective geographical, historical and social ties, it appears that the subjective or imagined qualities are the most important. Empirical social science research must grapple with the paradox that while objective evidence of national and ethnic identity may be difficult to document, the members of these groups have very real perceptions that these ties are part of their physical, psychological, sociological or political experience in everyday life. Max Weber expressed this paradox when he observed that even though the idea of nation was an 'entirely ambiguous' empirical category it was 'a community of sentiment that would most adequately manifest itself in a state' (in A. D. Smith 1983: 25, 32).

What the above observations suggest is that just because an idea is vague and difficult to define doesn't mean that it lacks any substantial force as a concept. On the contrary, the invented character of national symbols and arguments on the national interest can increase the enthusiasm of patriots for sacrificing their lives 'with the satisfaction of serving eternal truth' because 'Men don't allow themselves to be killed for their interests; they allow themselves to be killed for their passions' (Connor 2004: 32, 206). Even faced with rational counter-arguments, the default nationalist position is invoked in the form of 'my country right or wrong'. As George Orwell (1945) reflected: 'Every nationalist is capable of the most flagrant dishonesty, but he is also – since he is conscious of serving something bigger than himself – unshakeably certain of being in the right'. The problem is that nationalists on both sides of a dispute or a war believe passionately not just in being 'right', but in giving authentic voice to the nation.

Analytically, the terminological confusion associated with the terms 'nation' and 'nationalism' should not be dismissed but needs to be understood as part of the complexity, character and allure of the phenomenon. Whenever the idea of 'nation' is deployed, consider how the term might be being used in a conflated sense; ask 'who is claiming to represent the idea and for whom are they speaking?' Consider how these claims might be translating corporate or elite interests into broader **normative** statements that appear to reflect the core values of a people. Are these claims inclusionary or exclusionary in nature?

How nationalism shaped modern states and international society

The idea of *nation* has a long lineage in Western political thought. The Ancient Greeks referred to the deep relationship between people and place as *patras*, much as we would use the term 'patriotism' today; the Romans used *natio* to describe peoples such as the Germans and the Britons who inhabited the outer provinces of the empire, and there are several references to the term in the Bible as God's chosen people – *And I will make of thee a great nation* (Tonkin et al. 1989; Genesis 12: 2). The contemporary uses of 'nation', 'nationality' and 'nationalism' have a different meaning associated with state authority in the conjoined term 'nation-state'. All of the terms prevail in modern political thought. A nation can be simultaneously understood to be a deep ancient cultural community connected to a homeland, a problematic regional identity and a spiritual or sanctified political community. From an IR perspective, we must add one more important meaning. To manage relations with frontier peoples, the Romans developed a set of principles called *jus gentium* (law of nations) which would leave an important legacy in international law. These principles regulated the rules of **peace** and **war** and negotiated territorial boundaries.

The greatest debate in nationalism studies concerns the relationship between nationalism and modernity (see Box 10.2). Arguably the strongest appeal of national identity is that it provides its members with a profound sense of continuity to the past, but nationalism is also understood to be a distinctly modern phenomenon. The so-called 'primordialist' school argues that national identity draws upon these deep affective ties through symbols and traditions which give national and ethnic identity its pre-given character; the attachment seems to 'flow from a sensual or natural – some would say spiritual – affinity' (Geertz 1963; Connor 1994). The 'perennialists' acknowledge the deep ethnosymbolic character of national identity but argue that it acquires different characteristics in the modern context (A. D. Smith 1986). 'Modernists' argue that nationalism is a 'functional component' of modernisation or even 'the blueprint' of a distinctly modern consciousness (Greenfeld 2006: 204). Some modernists argue that this identity was formed as early as the sixteenth century as the Reformation movements in Protestant countries began to challenge the political supremacy of the Catholic Church (Greenfeld 1992; Hastings 1997). For others, the process occurred later in the eighteenth century and was brought about by the demands of the Industrial Revolution (Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1997).

BOX 10.2 DISCUSSION POINTS

The modernity of nations? Three schools of thought

Primordialists, such as Clifford Geertz and Walker Connor, argue that national identity draws upon deep affective ties through symbols and traditions which give national and ethnic identity its pre-given, organic character. The attachment seems to 'flow from a sensual or natural – some would say spiritual – affinity' (Geertz 1963; Connor 1994).

Perennialists, such as Anthony Smith, acknowledge the deep ethnosymbolic character of national identity but argue that it acquires different characteristics in the modern context (A. D. Smith 1986).

Modernists, such as Ernest Gellner and Liah Greenfeld, argue that nationalism is a 'functional component' of modernisation or even 'the blueprint' of a distinctly modern

consciousness (Greenfeld 2006: 204). While some modernists believe this identity was formed as early as the sixteenth-century Reformation (Greenfeld 1992; Hastings 1997), others believe the process occurred in the eighteenth century and was brought about by the demands of the Industrial Revolution (Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1997).

Notwithstanding these important theoretical debates, there is a broad consensus among nationalism scholars that the events of the American and French revolutions formalised the idea of national or popular **sovereignty** in the late eighteenth century. Both the American Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen leave no doubt that 'the people' are the only legitimate foundation for sovereign statehood (see Box 10.3). National consciousness may claim a heritage that extends before this revolutionary period in the late eighteenth century but the formal normative shift from dynastic to popular sovereignty is widely regarded as having occurred in this period (Wight 1977: ch. 6; Hinsley 1973; Mayall 1990).

BOX 10.3 DISCUSSION POINTS

American and French revolutions

'Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed, that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it . . .' (Declaration of Independence, United States of America, 1776).

'The nation is essentially the source of all sovereignty; nor can any individual, or any body of men, be entitled to any authority which is not expressly derived from it' (Article 3 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, National Assembly of France, 1789).

Some of the most interesting research on nation formation has examined the way that the ideas of nation have been disseminated and constructed into a national consciousness. Two aspects that deserve mention here are the way that nationalism came to replace religion as the dominant form of political culture, and the special role that language has played in constructing this identity.

The concept of civil religion as a foundation for national identity has a long history in social and political thought. Drawing upon early work by Rousseau, Comte, Durkheim and Max Weber, contemporary scholars (Hayes 1960; Daniel Bell 1960; Bellah 1970; and Chatterjee 1993) have all examined the proposition that in replacing religion as the dominant means of defining political culture, nationalism reproduces, and is infused by, many of the characteristics of religious order (A. D. Smith 2000). As Robert Bellah puts it, nationalism underwent a process of 'sanctification'. Even if a civil religion is not

people. Through this process, smaller groups previously separated by differences in dialect, religion or region were bound together into what Anderson described as ‘imagined communities’. Print capitalism may have been a primary medium, but the message that was being distributed was one concerned with the rights of nations.

National languages are also essential for the creation and functioning of public institutions, which in turn play an important role in reinforcing national identity. In his seminal work, *Peasants into Frenchmen* (1976), Eugen Weber demonstrated how national cohesion, and indeed the prevalence of the French language, was quite weak among the French peasantry throughout much of the nineteenth century. It was not until the 1880s that the state more effectively integrated language and identity through the public ‘agencies of change’ such as the transport infrastructure, the military, schools and the church. Control of languages remains a fundamentally important mechanism and symbol of state authority. It is manifested in constitutional decrees and public services such as health and education systems. It is also worth noting that the establishment and spread of national language can be intensely destructive of minority ethnic identity. By one estimation, the spread of global languages and vigorous defence of national languages is causing the ‘language death’ of as many as half of the world’s six thousand languages (Crystal 2000).

In the realm of international diplomacy, the idea of nationalism spread throughout Europe such that, with the defeat of Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the sixteenth-century doctrine of *cuius regio eius religio* (whose region, his religion) was adapted to the norm of *cuius regio eius natio* (whose region, his nation). Sovereignty now rested neither with popes nor with princes, but with the people. In this sense, nationalism formalised a *humanist* premise in international society by insisting that the source of real power and justice of states can only be built upon the representation and protection of peoples imbued with individual **human rights** and responsibilities.

Significantly, these ideas were also forged in the context of revolutionary warfare (in America and Europe). In the following centuries nationalism continued to be deeply implicated in the deaths and forced displacement of millions. Both state-led and state-seeking nationalists have been prepared to kill others and sacrifice themselves for the ideal of protecting or acquiring political independence for their people. While Western Europe experienced an ‘age of nationalism’ during the nineteenth century, it would be another century before the norm of self-determination began to be accepted as a universal right for all peoples across the globe.

In the early twentieth century, the inherent assumption in international legal and political instruments such as Woodrow Wilson’s 14 Points and the League of Nations was that a politically demarcated territory should contain peoples who were racially, linguistically or culturally homogeneous, but even these ideals resulted in the mass relocation of peoples (Preece 1997). With the advent of the UN, self-determination of colonial peoples became a more developed norm, propelling a process of **decolonisation** which brought about the **emancipation** of millions of non-European peoples and allowed for a fundamental expansion of international society (Bull and Watson 1984; see also Chapter 17). But this process came at a great cost in human life. Independence struggles and post-independence repression caused many millions of deaths throughout the **Cold War** period.

Nationalist struggles continued to be highly significant in the post-Cold War period. Indeed, the last decade of the twentieth century witnessed widespread *ethnonationalist* struggles, particularly in the Balkans and sub Saharan Africa

(Connor 1994). Much of the commentary on ethnonational struggle in the post-Cold War period was alarmist, characterising the phenomenon as a threat to regional and international stability. In an age of globalisation, ethnic conflict came to be viewed as the dominant symbol of the counter forces of fragmentation (Mount 2000; 2010). While the international community failed to prevent tragic genocides such as those in Rwanda and Srebrenica, the longer term response of international society has been to develop norms for protecting minority peoples (Preece 2005). Even the norms relating to indigenous peoples, whose status as nations had always been questioned on the ground that they had not developed their political identities in adherence to European steps of nation-building, were addressed in a formal sense in the newly formed Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Keal 2003). The progressive ideal of self-determination remains one of the most important principles in contemporary international society.

Understanding nations and nationalism in IR

Inquiries into the nature of nations and nationalism have been a traditional area of study in IR, but the modern discipline has tended to treat the subject tacitly rather than explicitly. Most contemporary scholarship on the subject occurs in the disciplines of sociology, history, political theory and anthropology. Moreover, especially since the end of World War II, the field of IR has been engaged in an act of collective wishful thinking, anticipating the demise of nationalism. This was not always the case.

A century ago, a student of international affairs could expect their curriculum to begin with the study of nations; their role in shaping international society, their potential to cause war, and the significance of their main components – descent, geography, language and religion (see Moon 1925). For the first half of the twentieth century, it would continue to be normal for the study of our discipline to begin this way. A popular theme found in early IR textbooks was the 'Family', 'Society' or 'World' of Nations (see Burns 1915; Lawrence 1919; Newfang 1924; Potter 1929; Bailey 1932). The study of nations was part of an imperial mindset which required diplomats and colonial administrators to have an understanding of cultural differences between 'tribal' peoples and 'civilised' society. The focus was also typically very legalistic; but even so there was a conscious effort to understand the politics of cultural dynamics. For example, IR scholars in the 1930s examining the 'domestic, religious and national problems' in Iraq were interested in and aware of the 'unceasing conflict between the Sunnis and the Shiah' (B. Carpenter 1933: 375).

In the aftermath of the Great Depression, and on the eve of World War II, the family of nations was breaking up, and the civilised ideals of an international society were not being upheld or enforced. Emblematically, as the League of Nations appeared doomed to collapse, a more despairing tone began to emerge. The noble and *civilised* idea that nationalism 'should claim not its own aggrandisement, but its right to serve humanity as a distinct group' (Mazzini, cited in Burns 1915: 11) seemed to be losing traction. Liberals such as Norman Angell observed that the idea of nationalism was being distorted into narrow-spirited and parochial forms of militarism, Hitlerism and balkanisation (the breakup of a region or state into smaller, often hostile, ethnic or national groupings). Even newly formed nations in Europe had 'repudiated the principle of nationality' (Angell 1932: 255). The rise of this un-international nationalism was held to account as the root cause of the international order's collapse (Keeton 1939).

Hans Kohn's 1944 study, *The idea of nationalism*, explained the problem in terms of a conflict between 'civic' and 'ethnic' nationalisms. He argued that countries that defined national membership on the basis of 'blood' were more conflict-prone than those based on 'soil'. Improving citizenship laws would encourage greater loyalty to political instutions rather than one's ethnic community. Kohn's analysis is still regarded as highly pertinent in contemporary IR. In particular, it has been used to propose democratic solutions to avoid problems such as **ethnic cleansing** (Brubaker 1996 and Snyder 2000).

Another important contribution to current understandings of nationalism was made by E. H. Carr in his 1945 publication, *Nationalism and after*, which celebrated the achievements of the welfare state while repudiating pernicious nationalism for its exclusionary treatment of racial and ethnic minorities and as a cause of war. Carr's hope was that following the devastation of two world wars, a world *after* nationalism could be constructed; one where more open forms of political community would suppress the inward looking and exclusionary politics of nationalism. This analysis was recently revisited by **Critical Theorist** Andrew Linklater, who described Carr's work on nationalism as a significant contribution to resolving the political and moral questions of our epoch (Linklater 1997: 321).

For our purposes, it is important to recognise that prior to the end of World War II the study of nations and nationalism was considered as both the foundation and the most critically topical subject of study in the field. After World War II there appears to have been a strong desire to understand international politics through a state-centric lens. The postwar period did not culminate in the demise of nationalism, but IR became consolidated into a profoundly state-centric discipline with a marked 'lack of curiosity about different political identities, including nationalism' (Pettman 1998: 149).

The neglect of nationalism as an analytical category has meant that it is quite routine in world politics for the terms 'nation' and 'national' to be used as synonyms for the 'state'. We can observe this in the discipline of IR itself, global institutions such as the United Nations (UN), policy doctrines that appeal to the national interest, armed struggles for recognition of statehood characterised in terms of national independence and even the designation of an individual's legal citizenship status on passports as their nationality. In each of these cases, the term 'nation' refers predominantly to state agency. For instance, the UN is comprised of 192 legally recognised member states, not the estimated 5000 or so distinguishable ethnic groups in the world (Eller 1990: 4). Likewise, governmental policies that are rationalised as being in the national interest are generally informed by an overt set of material interests and legal entitlements rather than the more vague symbolic values of a cultural identity.

IR scholars can become very frustrated with this slippage between nation and state, in which the distinction between legal and cultural conceptions of bounded human communities is blurred. And yet it is possible that the uses of 'nation' in these instances are at least partially intentional. After all, the overarching aspiration of the UN goes beyond the idea that it is simply 'a club of states' when the preamble to its Charter, echoing the American Declaration of Independence, begins with the phrase, 'We the people of the United Nations'. Similarly, governments and political leaders are astutely aware that references to the nation and national interest are ways of summoning the power of the concept to speak of, and to, the deep cultural attachments of human communities. Internally, citizens can be reassured by justifications of a national security

policy which is framed in terms of defending traditions and a 'way of life'. Externally, a diplomatic statement referring to another nation intuitively reaches out to the people of a country, not just the political institutions of government.

Appeals to 'the people' in the New World Order

We can observe this rhetorical device of invoking the 'people' as a required component in political addresses to the nation prior to the onset of war. Consider the following excerpt from a televised address to the American people made by President George H. Bush on 16 January 1991, delivered as the first phases of Operation Desert Storm were beginning:

> We have no argument with the people of Iraq. Indeed, for the innocents caught in this conflict, I pray for their safety. Our goal is not the conquest of Iraq. It is the liberation of Kuwait. It is my hope that somehow the Iraqi people can, even now, convince their dictator that he must lay down his arms, leave Kuwait, and let Iraq itself rejoin the family of peace-loving nations.

The above appeal involves an intentional separation of nation and state in order to express solidarity with a people while politically isolating a belligerent political elite. Notice how the innocents are protected and 'prayed for' and that the justification for the war is in terms of repelling an aggressor not the conquest of a nation. The US president appears to be speaking directly to the Iraqi people, *bypassing* the state. Even if the loyalty (or fear) of Iraqi peoples proved too strong to be convinced by such an appeal, the other target audience is, of course, the American people and 'the family of peace-loving nations'.

President Bush's justification for the Gulf War was framed in liberal terms. Indeed it was emblematic of his New World Order doctrine that espoused a world of open borders and free markets; a world where the rule of law not the law of the jungle would prevail. It illustrates how the liberal tradition, though suspicious of the dangers of extreme nationalism, depends heavily on the idea that a nation embodies the inalienable right for peoples to be liberated from tyranny. Democratic constituencies demand this kind of justification from their leaders if they are to support acts of war. They will tolerate, and sometimes enthusiastically support, war against tyrannical governments, but 'people' are presumed innocent friends, not enemies. The problem for liberal nationalism and its support for self-determination is that it is all too often conditional on helping 'people who believe the way we do' (Dean Acheson, cited in W. A. Williams 1962: 10). Liberal internationalism places similar conditions on this so-called universal right when peoples pursue their freedom in ways that are insufficiently deferential to higher ideals such as universal human rights, or are simply anti-Western.

It would be remiss not to briefly mention the counter-arguments that IR scholars have made on this issue of justifying war in terms of its benefit to a 'people'. A realist analysis of Bush's New World Order doctrine might question its lack of reference to the material strategic interests of the US and its allies. While realists have always understood that political rhetoric may be necessary, the test of success lies firmly with an impartial analysis of material interests. In this sense, most realist analyses evaluated the 1991 Gulf War positively, not because the people of Kuwait were liberated, and only nominally because American values were upheld, but because the US adhered to a coherent and decisive strategy: US national interests were clearly defined and effectively defended (see Gelb 2009).

In contrast, a Marxist analysis of the above justification would highlight that the political economy of oil was critically important for a corporate elite and that the 'liberation' was not of an oppressed people but of a highly autocratic Kuwaiti monarchy. The war did not uphold 'any high principle in the Gulf' and, contrary to the rhetoric, **diplomacy** was obstructed and the 'people' of Iraq abandoned. The real, albeit disguised, goals – protecting 'incomparable energy resources' and reinforcing a dominant superpower position in the region – were achieved (see Chomsky 2003: 60–7). That the popular uprisings of Shi'ites in the South and Kurds in the North were unsupported by the coalition and abandoned to brutal suppression by a dictator left in power yields further evidence for Marxists and others who remain sceptical of the liberal rhetoric.

Postmodern IR theorists have focused on the politics of representation. Here the analysis of nation or people is either treated reflexively or rendered invisible. Some commentators characterised the Gulf War as a 'virtual war' because it all seemed (to Western audiences) to be occurring on CNN (Baudrillard 1995). So much of this coverage was focused on new military technologies that it became difficult to contemplate these events in terms of real people: the lead actors on stage were the superpower's hi-tech weapons. Viewed from this perspective, the broader strategic goal of the Gulf War was to project an image of the omnipresent and infallible character of US weapons as a means of discouraging dissent, reassuring allies and impressing an electorate. The overarching message was not the liberation of an unseen people, but the articulation of the US nation as *liberator* (Campbell 1992).

By asking how the concept of 'nation' is being used to justify policies or practices, we can understand a great deal about the way that the 'people' are conceptualised. Doing so also illuminates the way that significant markers of identity become sites of struggle in international politics. Some analysts of IR have discovered the importance of language as they looked more carefully into their subjects. For example, in his wide-ranging study of post-Cold War ethnic conflicts, Michael Ignatieff (1994: 7) concluded that the politics of language was more important than land or history in cultivating national belonging: 'To belong is to understand the tacit codes of the people you live with … People in short, "speak your language".' Earlier IR scholars would also have understood the political significance of language to nationalism.

Conclusion

Nations are the dominant means of expressing and defining political culture in modern states and international society. Alternative forms of political culture such as empire, monarchy, religion, principality or city have been dominant in the past; and over the past two centuries, nationalism has withstood rival appeals for loyalty orientated around international class, political regions or cosmopolitan ideals. Sub-national tribal and ethnic loyalties have also challenged national authority and loyalty, and in a globally networked information age we may speculate that new digital communities may supersede the appeal of national identity. In spite of these alternatives, nationalism has endured and thrived as the most distinctive means of organising human communities into culturally defined, politically discrete, units.

In broad terms, nationalism does not seem to be disappearing in our late modern context. Interdisciplinary studies in the field have observed that while globalisation is having a significant impact on national and ethnic identity, the effect of these changes

is a strengthening of cultural identity and a weakening of the relationship between the citizen and the state (Young et al. 2007). Nationalism will adapt to the challenges of the coming century, and political struggles associated with stateless nations (a form of civil war) or nationless states (a form of tyranny) will continue. While these conflicts will be viewed as a source of fragmentation of the **international system**; they will also reflect the principle that peoples have a right to freely determine their political status and pursue their own form of economic, social and cultural development; a principle that has been extremely important in shaping and defining international society.

QUESTIONS

1. What is a nation and how does it differ from a state?
2. How did nationalism shape international society?
3. Why have language and print capitalism been regarded as important in nation formation?
4. Are nations secular or sacred?
5. Do you think nationalism is a progressive or regressive force in international relations?
6. Why do political leaders need to speak to the 'nation'?
7. How do international theories conceptualise 'the people' as analytical categories?
8. Will nationalism thrive or decline in the future?

FURTHER READING

Gurr, Ted R. 2000, *Peoples versus states: minorities at risk in the new century*, Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press. Wide-ranging analysis of ethnic and nationalist conflicts since the 1990s.

Hutchinson, John and Smith, Anthony (eds) 1994, *Nationalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Valuable collection that includes some classics in the field.

Mayall, James 1990, *Nationalism and international society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Important book on the role of nationalism from an IR perspective.

Preece, Jennifer Jackson, 2005, *Minority rights: between diversity and community*, Cambridge: Polity. Excellent survey of the international politics of racial, religious and linguistic minority rights.

Websites

The Avalon Project: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/default.asp. Provides a comprehensive archive of significant documents in international law such as the Covenent of the League of Nations and the United Nations Charter.

The Nationalism Project: www.nationalismproject.org. The most comprehensive online collection of summaries and anlaysis of nationalism studies.

Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization: www.unpo.org. A body that was established in 1991 to address the concerns of a wide range of stateless nations and peoples that have many different characteristics but share in common a lack of formal representation at the United Nations.