Cultural Difference as Denied Resemblance: Reconsidering Nationalism and Ethnicity

SIMON HARRISON

School of Sociology and Applied Social Sciences,
University of Ulster, Coleraine

INTRODUCTION

The most important advance in the understanding of ethnic and national identity has surely been the realization of its deeply relational nature. A nation or ethnic group is not a self-defined monad of some kind, but exists in and through its interactions with others (Duara 1996; Eriksen 1993:9–12, 111; Schwartz 1975:107–8).

To regard ethnicity and nationalism as relational phenomena poses the question of the nature of the relationship. The prevailing view is that it is one of difference. A nation or ethnic group is defined by the dissimilarities (of culture, history, mentality, physical appearance and so forth) imagined or perceived to exist between itself and others (Roosens 1989:12, 16–18; Smith 1986:22). Barth (1969) was the first to develop this perspective, viewing ethnicity as the use of signs of cultural difference to mark social boundaries and structure interactions across these boundaries.

The tendency to view identity as contrastive in this way has been taken to its most radical extreme in studies influenced by poststructuralism. Here, the notion of difference carries a sense given it by Derrida (1978), suggesting that categories are constructed negatively and have no intrinsic content. In this vein, Handler (1988) portrays Quebec nationalism as grounded upon a contrast between Quebec and 'not-Quebec' (principally, the external world of Anglophone North America). The nationalists' Quebec is not so much a positive entity, but rather everything that is not not-Quebec. R. Cohen, discussing British national identity, argues similarly that "one only knows who one is by who one is not" (1994:198; see also Hall 1989). From this type of perspective, nations and ethnic groups depend for their reality on processes of exclusion that produce marginalized "Others." These subaltern categories, in turn, can form a basis from which oppositional identities emerge, mobilizing themselves through resistance (Hall and du Gay 1996; Wilmsen and McAllister 1996).

In a number of senses, then, difference, or felt difference, is widely under-

stood to lie at the heart of ethnicity and nationalism. The important insight that all perspectives of this kind share is that social groups exist only by having outsiders, and by having boundaries to keep them out. In this, albeit perverse, respect groups rely on one another for their existence. Each can sustain a sense of separate identity only in the context of relationships with others, however much these relationships may be conflict-ridden and unequal (A. P. Cohen 1985; Collier 2000; Fabian 1983; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Said 1978; Thomas 1992; Wolf 1982).

I want to suggest, nevertheless, that a certain feature of ethnic and national identity appears a little puzzling from perspectives of this kind: namely, that identities ostensibly "different" from one another are often remarkably similar. For example, Schneider, researching American family life in the 1960s, was told by his Irish-American respondents that the key to understanding their identity lay in understanding the special role of the "Irish mother": "The interesting point, however, is that the assertion about the crucial role of the mother was repeated for group after group. You could not understand Jewish family life unless you understood the Jewish mother, similarly with Italian, similarly with Polish, and so on . . . [T]here seems to be a striking uniformity with respect to focusing on the mother as the symbolic guardian of the ethnic identity" (Parsons 1975:65–66).

The respondents all viewed their ethnicities as distinctive, and ascribed this distinctiveness to the peculiar role of their mothers. Yet in sharing this notion they were indistinguishable. Such a pronounced disjunction between imagined difference and objective similarity calls for explanation. One wonders, for a start, by what process these groups came to acquire the same self-constructs. It was as though American culture possessed a generic schema of "The Ethnic Minority Family," a single model for conceptualizing any ethnic group and the 'distinctive' attributes it ought typically to have.

As Simmel (1955:42–47) pointed out long ago, resemblances of this kind can exist even between mutually hostile groups. They even seem sometimes to be generated or deepened in the course of violent conflict. A case in point is the symbolism of political identity in Northern Ireland. Here, particularly since the 1960s, Catholic and Protestant working-class communities have evolved a rich visual symbolism for demarcating territory in the politics of urban space. These emblems of identity are strikingly similar in their style, iconography, and expressive conventions. The most visible include prominently displayed national and paramilitary flags, kerbstones and lamp-posts painted in the Irish or British national colors, and large painted murals depicting a variety of historical and political themes (Buckley 1998:6–7; Jarman 1998). Through mostly unacknowledged mutual emulation, these communities have together developed a unique shared genre of political folk art. Although in conflict, they are united in one respect at least: by a common visual language for expressing differences.

This situation, like those resemblances reported by Schneider among ethnic

minorities in the United States, is obviously more complex than a case of groups simply portraying themselves as distinctive. Rather, one needs to try to understand why they have come to share the same ways of portraying themselves as distinctive, and what these commonalities reveal about the nature of their identities.

Certainly, cases such as this, and other similar ones which I discuss below, remind us that people of purportedly 'different' ethnicities and nationalities can in reality have much of their culture in common. They remind us too that borrowing and emulation can occur across even the most formidable social boundaries. But far more importantly, they suggest that cultural commonalities may play a key role of some kind in the creation and maintenance of the boundaries themselves, and that imitation, and identification with the Other, might be deeply involved in some way in the construction of difference.

I shall argue that situations such as these are most readily explained if ethnicity and nationalism are conceptualized as relationships, not of difference or perceived difference, but of denied or disguised resemblance. In other words, ethnic and national identities are best understood as emerging through processes in which certain kinds of felt similarities, and shared features of identity, are disavowed, censored, or systematically forgotten. To understand ethnicities and nationalities, then, involves understanding the ways in which they are constructed, in part at least, from devices for the elision and undoing of resemblances.

From this perspective, a nation or ethnic group represents itself, not simply as distinct from others, but as distinct in regular, and quite specific ways that imply some form of identification with those others. Ethnicity and nationality are, then, relational identities indeed, but the relationship is an ambivalent one in which constructs of difference and of shared identity always exist together. Groups define themselves through contrasts, not just with any others at random, but with specific others with whom they represent themselves as having certain features of their identities in common. For it is only when people identify with one another that a felt need can arise to differentiate themselves. Paradoxically, it is the commonalities between groups that create the conditions that make ethnic distinctions necessary—indeed, that make them possible. What appear as ethnic or national 'differences' are, at another level, more or less elaborate and effortful attempts by groups to forget, deny, or obscure their resemblances. This perspective implies, among other things, that the most elaborate and extreme forms of ethnic 'othering' are more likely to occur in relationships that are in some sense close, rather than in distant ones. The more intense the identification with the Other, the more radical the measures needed to counter it.

ORIENTALISMS AND THE OTHER

I will begin this argument by unpacking the notion of cultural difference into three separate strands. Differences, in the context of ethnicity and nationalism,

are of course not neutral. They are evaluations, differences of value and esteem. They are judgments about the Other's inferiority, superiority, or equality in relation to the Self. The cultural Other may differ in several attributes, some perhaps valorized positively and others negatively. Of course, these kinds of evaluations can also be made of groups as totalities, as is the case, for instance, in ethnically stratified societies.

My point is that the cultural Other can present three broadly distinguishable relations to the Self, either separately or in combination: it can embody difference-as-inferiority, difference-as-superiority and difference-as-equality. I discuss each of these in turn, and compare them in the conclusion. As we will see, they have an important feature in common: they all involve the concealment or denial of commonalities.

I begin with processes of valorizing other groups negatively. These representations of cultural inferiority are best approached by way of an idea often understood to be implicit in Said's (1978) analysis of Orientalism (see Grossberg 1996:91, 95–96): namely, that the "Orient" of the European colonial imagination (exotic, sensual, cruel, decadent, and so forth) was a kind of mirror, in which colonial society expressed preoccupations of its own in a disguised form, projecting onto the societies of the East attributes which it sought to deny in itself. Kuper makes a similar point explicitly, in his analysis of the way the idea of "primitive society" was constructed in nineteenth-century anthropology: "The anthropologists took this primitive society as their special subject, but in practice primitive society proved to be their own society (as they understood it) seen in a distorting mirror. For them modern society was defined above all by the territorial state, the monogamous family and private property. Primitive society therefore must have been nomadic, ordered by blood ties, sexually promiscuous and communist" (1988:5). A construct such as "primitive society" is an implicit self-portrait by its authors. Carrier (1995) argues that every Orientalism entails in this way a corresponding "Occidentalism": stereotyped and essentialist representations of the cultural Other are linked inextricably to similarly distorted, tendentious, and simplified representations of the cultural Self.

Such arguments suggest, then, that the cultural Others of colonial Europe came to embody censored and disowned aspects of the colonial society itself. The discourses of Orientalism (and its accompanying Occidentalism) ignored, denied, or suppressed aspects of European society, and made them reappear in overt and extravagant forms in other societies. The cultural Other seemed to express precisely what was muted in the Self. In the very act of representing the Other as essentially different in this way, these discourses defined specific similarities or commonalities—but ones which they were unable to acknowledge—between the Other and certain dimensions of the Self.

Sax recognizes this when he argues that all constructions of difference are inherently ambivalent. They do not simply valorize the Self positively, and negatively valorize the Other, but involve "a double movement, where the Other is

simultaneously emulated and repudiated, admired and despised, and the source of this ambivalence is the recognition of Self in Other. That is to say, the Other represents a kind of screen upon which both the despised and the desired aspects of the Self can be projected, so that the dialectics of sameness and difference is resolved into a kind of difference *in* sameness" (1998:294).

This, to me, is the most interesting and potentially productive implication that may be drawn from a consideration of Said's *Orientalism*. It is not simply that the West fantasized the East as its Other, but that certain kinds of subterranean identifications with that imagined alterity were intrinsic to the fantasy, and to reproducing it over time. Of course, the literature on ethnicity and nationalism is depressingly full of depictions of prejudice, xenophobia, and racism. Some studies even seem to suggest that stereotypes of cultural others as inferior are intrinsic to the construction of national and ethnic identity (see, for example, R. Cohen 1994). My point is that to ascribe to some other social group attributes forbidden or unacceptable to one's own group is to define it, not as different, but as ambivalently different-and-alike. It is to make that group appear alien in such a way that it evinces towards one's own group submerged and distorted likenesses.

THE NARCISSISMS OF MINOR AND MAJOR DIFFERENCES

I want now to outline a second pattern of muted resemblance that can underlie apparent national and ethnic differences. This pattern involves representations of similarity and parity between Self and Other. Let me begin with the Australian nationalism analyzed by Kapferer (1988). To these nationalists, the key characteristic of Australia is an egalitarianism differing deeply from what they conceive as the hierarchical and class-ridden nature of English society. This is an ideologically central contrast in Australian nationalism, but one that also implies a strong identification with the English.

Australia, or the nationalist egalitarian ideal, discovers its form in relation to its conceptualized opposite, that of inegalitarian, hierarchical, England. Historically and ideologically, many Australians understand their social world as having a strong identity with England but simultaneously as being its inverse. Australia, through its progress to independence, succeeded in effecting a transformation of the English scheme of things. While inequality, the ideals of aristocratic birth, the privileges of socially produced position, and so on are the unifying principles of England, equality metaphorized by the underclasses of England, constitutes the organizing principle of Australia. Ideologically, England and Australia are bound, together composing a unity of the strongest similarity and difference.

This conception of Australian nationalist thought extends an understanding of the reason many Australians express identity with England even as they assert a distinct Australian identity. The latter reproduces the former . . . The sense of a historical identity with England is produced ideologically, as it is emotionally, in the very constitution of an Australian identity (1988:199–200; see also pp. 14, 167).

As one can see, this nationalism shares certain features with Orientalism. It defines itself in relation to an Other that inverts certain aspects of its collective

Self. And England, as the arch-embodiment of class hierarchy, embodies every-thing which Australian nationalism most seeks to mask and deny in Australian society itself. But it differs from Orientalism in one crucial way. Australian na-tionalism strongly and overtly identifies with its Other in certain respects. This is alterity, then, but within the context of an overarching relationship of com-monalities and shared cultural identity. The explicit connection with England is an essential component of this form of Australian nationalism, because, as Kapferer makes clear, it alone provides the felt common background (of histo-ry, culture, religion, language, and so forth) on which 'differences' can be made to appear. This is why Australian nationalism defines itself by a contrast with the English and not with the Peruvians, Icelanders, or other unrelated peoples. One can distinguish oneself only from those with whom there is a relationship in the first place.

A strongly felt background of shared history and culture can provide a con-text, then, from which strong claims to difference are able to emerge. Lowen-thal (1994) suggests a similar process among ethnic groups in the United States. Ethnic minorities there often claim to possess their own unique cultural 'her-itages,' distinct from mainstream American culture and deserving the same es-teem. But, as Lowenthal points out, these assertions of cultural difference are all couched within the same, culturally and historically quite specific, concep-tions of 'heritage,' and in this respect these groups are identical. For example, minorities may claim to have 'their own' Tolstoys, Prousts, and other literary and artistic figures. Although these are meant as claims to have their 'own' cul-tures, equal to the dominant Euro-American tradition, Lowenthal argues that the claims implicitly conform to Western notions of the individuality of the cre-ative artist (1994:46). Far from representing an alternative to the dominant cul-ture they replicate key aspects of it and, in this respect, are clearly part of it (see also Handler 1998:157–58, 195). What these ethnic actors take to be manifes-tations of cultural dissimilarity, or even of a clash of incompatible cultures, are, at a deeper level, signs of a shared culture. The conceived differences are sur-face expressions of underlying commonalities.

Horowitz (1975) describes how ethnic groups in colonial India crystallized out of an earlier social context in which boundaries had been highly fluid and permeable:

Even during the colonial period some groups were differentiating themselves from others who had earlier been regarded as members of the same group. In nineteenth-century India, for example, one of the effects of religious revival movements was to sharpen the lines between Hindus and Muslims. A side-effect was to differentiate Sikhs from Hindus. The reformism of the Hindu Arya Samaj was not very different in content from the Sikhs' own movement, the Singh Sabha. But the Arya Samaj emphasized Hin-di as the language of a revitalized Hindu culture, whereas the Sikhs were attached to the Punjabi language. Gradually, the Sikh movement sought to 'purify' Sikhism by excis-ing Hindu influences, thereby creating a sense of a distinctive Sikh identity. This, it should be said, was a development that proceeded in the face of centuries of ritual and

social interaction, as well as intermarriage and conversion, between Sikhs and Hindus. In short, the earlier boundary was exceedingly fluid, and now, for the first time, an ascriptive Sikh identity emerged (1975:135; footnotes omitted).

Here, ethnogenesis was clearly a process of mutual disengagement among communities once deeply imbricated in one another. To define themselves as ethnically separate and different, people who viewed themselves as barely if at all distinct had to act to overcome and undo their historical commonalities. They constructed ethnic identities in a process, as it were, of cultural dishomogenization, the deliberate, systematic, and effortful production of dissimilarities among themselves.

Simmel and Freud are among those who have pointed out the way that claims to difference can arise—indeed, are particularly likely to arise—among groups that share a common identity at another, more inclusive level. Freud noted a strong tendency among neighboring states, and closely related peoples, to exaggerate their distinctiveness from each other, in what he called the narcissism of minor differences (Freud 1930:114; 1945:101; 1957:199; 1964:91; see also Simmel 1955:42). Their similarities seem perpetually to threaten each group's sense of identity, and so each clings to some small distinguishing marks, investing them with disproportionate significance. Freud's important insight here was to realize that only people with much in common develop these intense needs to differentiate themselves. It is the commonalities between them that drive them to seek differences. This insight is echoed today by those analysts who view globalization, and perceptions of a growing world-wide homogenization of culture, as key factors provoking resurgences of ethnonationalism and other particularistic assertions of difference (see, for instance, Featherstone 1990; Friedman 1994; Hughes-Freeland and Crain 1998; Meyer and Geschiere 1999). It is those who imagine they have the most in common—or fear that they have, or fear that they may come to have, the most in common—who are most likely to categorize each other as different, as opposites or inversions of one another. It is they who have the most at stake in differentiating themselves.

But I would slightly amend Freud's insight in one respect. The resemblances which give rise to the narcissism of minor differences are, of course, socially constructed perceptions of resemblance and not necessarily objective resemblances. This narcissism is therefore not just a matter of exaggerated perceptions of difference, but must also involve the construction of these threatening perceptions of resemblance which provoke, in reaction, the overstated claims of distinctiveness. To understand how a narcissism of minor differences might arise, one must first understand the discursive production of cultural claustrophobia—the stifling resemblances and excessively close commonalities—which the narcissism, as it were, attempts to deny and negate. These images of oversimilarity might need to be actively reinforced, or even deliberately created, before they trigger the sorts of chauvinism Freud had in mind. Hence many nationalist ideologies draw force not just from rhetorics of distinctiveness, but

also from complementary rhetorics of corrosive homogenization which portray the nation's distinctive culture and identity as under threat from the outside (see Forbes and Kelly 1995; Handler 1988). Whether these are in some sense 'real' threats is another matter.

MIMESIS AND IDENTITY

This, then, is a second form of muted or denied resemblance involved in the production of difference: namely, resemblance negated, diminished, or elided when a nation or ethnic group differentiates itself against a background of commonalities shared with some other or others. This brings me to the third and final way in which, so I will try to show, disguised commonalities can underlie assertions of distinctiveness (see also Harrison 1992; 1995; 1999a; 1999b; 2002). I want to discuss this particular pattern of muted identification with the Other in some detail, because its role in the construction of ethnic and national identity is the least adequately recognized. It is connected with processes Taussig (1993) refers to as mimesis, and involves the attribution of certain kinds of cultural superiority to the Other.

Armstrong (1982:297), discussing the emergence of ethnically based monarchies in Europe during the Middle Ages, suggests that this form of political organization did not diffuse purely as an abstract idea or theory, but also, much more concretely, through the emulation of the identity-symbolism and mythologies of particular nations, especially those of France. France represented a prestigious model for the growing national consciousness of elites in the peripheral polities such as Poland and Hungary, not just because it was powerful politically but because it had a potent and richly developed symbolism of national identity, focused on its status as a sacral monarchy legitimized by the Papacy. In short, the French were endowed with an ideologically powerful 'mythomoteur' as Armstrong calls it, following Abadal i de Vinyals (1958; see also Smith 1986:15, 16, 25, 57, 201–2), a driving or constitutive national myth. It was this identity-myth in particular that nascent national elites elsewhere in Europe sought to borrow (see Armstrong 1982:227, 287, 293–94, 296–97).

Their relationship with France seems to have involved, in other words, something of that intense identification with the Other—especially an Other conceived as a source of appropriable power—that Taussig (1993) terms mimesis: an imitation that seeks merger with its model, overcoming the distinction between Self and Other. Of course, the aim was not to replicate French national identity exactly, to actually become French. It was to copy partly, to adapt the French national myth to 'their' particularities, so making that copy distinctively their own. If they wanted to relive the French past, they wanted to relive it in their own way, distinct from that of the French. In short, they sought to imitate France in such a way as to identify with France as a prestigious model, and also set themselves apart from France. Borrowing of this sort is neither pure imitation, nor pure differentiation of Self from Other, but something in between.

It is imitation intimately involved in the production of difference. It is a kind of mimetic appropriation, an attempt to re-enact the identity-myths of others so deeply as to make them completely, and genuinely, one's own.

Gellner (1983) and Anderson both note how the strongly "modular" character of nationalism made it readily "pirated" (Anderson 1983:67, 80–82) by new nationalist movements. The borrowing of other nations' ways of defining or individuating themselves does seem to be a widespread feature of nationalism. For example, let us take the use of language to symbolize national identity. Some states attach great symbolic significance to preserving the conceived 'purity' of their national language (Edwards 1985:27–34, 161–62). A state may purge its language of supposed foreign 'adulterations' while standardizing it, and legislate to protect it thereafter from external contamination. So, for example, the Turkish state under Atatürk, seeking to rid itself of the legacy of the Ottomans, acted to remove Persian and Arabic loan words from the language (Mango 1999:496–97; Robbins 1996:68), echoing the measures taken earlier by the Greek nationalist movement to remove Turkish admixtures from Greek (Herzfeld 1987; 1995)—the Greeks themselves reiterating similar nationalist legislation in France and Germany aimed at ridding their respective languages of foreign impurities.

A standard language may well be a functional requirement of a nation state (Gellner 1983), but the excision of foreign loan words is hardly necessary for language standardization or for effective communication. It can, however, be a powerful symbolic device with which a state can portray itself as having achieved full cultural and political independence. Of course, by no means all nation states link their sovereignty and language in this way, and many are quite unconcerned with issues of language purity and contamination. The choice to follow the model of the Académie Française (see Ball, Hargreaves, Marshall, and Ridehalgh 1995) and employ this particular symbolism of national self-definition seems largely a matter of convention and historical accident. One wonders how common it might nowadays be for states to have laws to protect the purity of their musical or architectural traditions, or of national dress or cuisine, if the seventeenth-century French academicians had established this precedent.

For another example of a shared practice of generating and preserving national differences, let us take European nationalisms in the nineteenth century. Their close connection with the Romantic movement gave these nationalisms a strongly marked common set of themes: the search for the nation's historical roots in its rural folk culture, the idealization of the nation's landscape, the imagining of its peasantry as the truest embodiment of the national character. The essence of a nation was to be found above all in its rural heartlands, uncontaminated by the kinds of modern, external influences to which—as Lash and Friedman (1992:23) remind us—Romanticism itself of course belonged. The elites of one nation after another drew on the same ideas as they sought to de-

fine their separate national identities (Burke 1992; Nairn 1996 [1974]; Smith 1986:172–208).

Obviously, the forms of discourse through which nations and ethnic groups define themselves, and develop their constructions of collective selfhood, tend to be widely shared. These groups may imitate each other's ways of 'othering' one another. They may construct symbolic boundaries between themselves and others in ways obtained at second-hand—from those others. Hence Morris-Suzuki (1998:79–109) suggests that early twentieth-century Japanese nationalism drew on an imported discourse of racism (originally, in the nineteenth century, in the form of Social Darwinism) with which to distinguish themselves and claim superiority over other 'races,' including the putative races from whom these ideologies had been acquired (see also Henshall 1999:78).

Ethnic and nationalist movements may construct exclusionary and particularistic identities. But they do so, in part, using symbolic practices which they have appropriated mimetically, copying others with whom they identify or seek to be identified, outsiders to whom they attribute power and prestige and whom they value positively as exemplars. Some peoples are more a focus of this kind of mimesis than others. French national identity, for example, seems to have been highly attractive mimetically to many others since its emergence in the Middle Ages. My point is not simply that elites collaborate and borrow from each other, as they clearly often do, in constructing their respective ethnic or national mythologies. It is that these types of mimetic relationships should be viewed as intrinsic to nationalism and ethnicity, because they are the channels along which many of the devices circulate with which actors constitute their own particular national or ethnic identities.

MIMETIC COMMUNITIES

Today, it would be wholly unsurprising to find some nation state possessing an anthem, or a cenotaph, or its own official holidays. Nor would anyone think it odd if it had its own national sport or traditional folk costumes. On the other hand, if it claimed descent from a Trojan warrior—a fashionable national attribute in the Middle Ages (Burke 1969:8, 73–74)—or possessed its own state pantheon or tutelary god, these would appear rather less normal differences. Such attributes belong to other, vanished, communities of conventions about how people should differ from one another intelligibly (see Harrison 1995:260–63).

The groups that individuate themselves within a community of this sort are connected to each other by shared principles of individuation. They are related and alike in the respects in which they create dissimilarities among themselves. Of course, shared conventions for the production and understanding of differences change over time, and are therefore inherently partial, provisional, and contingent, as the following case shows.

The emergence of one such mimetic community can be seen in ethnopolitics

in the Soviet Union during the 1920s and 1930s. The policy of the Soviet state at the time was to promote the ethnic cultures within its borders, and "all officially recognized Soviet nationalities were supposed to have their own nationally defined 'Great Traditions' that needed to be protected, perfected and, if need be, invented by specially trained professionals in specially designated institutions" (Slezkine 1996:226). These constructed Great Traditions seem to have tended to take on a marked symmetry with each other. Slezkine describes the 1934 Congress of Soviet Writers:

Pushkin, Tolstoy and other officially restored Russian icons were not the only national giants of international stature—all Soviet peoples possessed, or would shortly acquire, their own classics, their own founding fathers and their own folkloric riches. The Ukrainian delegate said that Taras Shevchenko was a 'genius' and a 'colossus' 'whose role in the creation of the Ukrainian literary language was no less important than Pushkin's role in the creation of the Russian literary language, and perhaps even greater.' . . . The Azerbaijani delegate insisted that . . . Mirza Fath Ali Akhundov was . . . a 'great philosopher-playwright' whose 'characters [were] as colorful, diverse and realistic as the characters of Griboedov, Gogol and Ostrovskii' (Slezkine 1996:225; parenthesis in the original).

Similarly, the Armenian, Turkmen, Tajik, and Georgian delegates all praised their own literary traditions in very similar terms. Each delegation in turn claimed to have literary giants equivalent to those of Russia and the world at large, in what Slezkine describes as a "curiously solemn parade of old-fashioned romantic nationalisms" (1996:225). What I find notable about this orchestrated celebration of unity-in-diversity is that the more these nations were presented as distinct and unique at one level, the more they seemed to become similar at another. By the end of the 1930s, all the Union republics had "their own writers' unions, theaters, opera companies and national academies that specialized in national history, literature and language" (Slezkine 1996:226) and in these respects had in a curious way become clones of each other. They had become tokens of a single type, variants that all conformed to the same model of official culture. And the model to which they had all come to conform seems to have been, implicitly, Russian. To have one's own high culture, one's own literary Great Tradition, meant, it appeared, having above all one's own Pushkins, Tolstoys, and Gogols, and being able to claim equality—and symmetry—with Russian high culture. Clearly, it did not mean possessing writers who could match Mirza Fath Ali Akhundov or the Turkmen poet Makhtum-Kuli (see Slezkine 1996:225).

The processes of ethnonational identity formation that occurred during those decades involved, certainly, the promotion of ethnic differences. But they also involved the simultaneous development of an historically highly specific framework of commonalities within which to cultivate and exhibit this diversity. The Soviet ethnonations became, culturally, increasingly individuated at one level, and increasingly disindividuated at another. The delegates at the Soviet Writers' Conference, for instance, could not have prided themselves on

having their 'own' Tolstoys and Pushkins unless—or until—they had much in common, including an esteem for Tolstoy and Pushkin, or at least an outward willingness to pay homage to them. In order for ethnic groups or any other entities to differ, they must resemble each other in some way, sharing some dimension on which they can be contrasted and compared (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1973; Radcliffe-Brown 1951). In this respect, differences always presuppose similarities, and can exist only against a background of resemblance. To create diversity, one has to ensure the existence of the background similarities against which the differences can appear.

The creation of differences in this way seems implicitly to summon into existence the shared background attributes which the differences presuppose. To possess one's own Proust or Tolstoy is to construct both a difference and a resemblance. And if groups multiply these surface variations—generating, besides their own Prousts and Tolstoys, their own Beethovens, Einsteins, Platos, and Shakespeares—so they also multiply and deepen their resemblances. When actors differentiate themselves in these sorts of markedly constrained ways, they make themselves in certain other respects more closely alike.

MIMESIS HIDDEN AND DENIED

A feature of ethnicity and nationalism, then, are mimetic communities, or networks, in which actors circulate among themselves—sometimes, perhaps, impose on one another—common practices and understandings about how to differ. Their identities are defined in ways acquired from each other, so that they do not just imagine themselves to be dissimilar, but imagine their dissimilarities in similar, more or less standardized terms. A mimetic community thus creates a kind of domesticated cultural diversity (cf. Gellner 1983:50–52). It enables a more or less bounded set of groups to differ from each other in structured and meaningful ways by generating a specially restricted form of cultural variation. It replaces mere random, uncoordinated heterogeneities with stable, normalized, socially significant relationships of difference.

An important aim of every nationalist movement, of course, is to make emphatically visible precisely these apparent 'differences.' On the other hand, it is less likely to have a goal of making visible the mimetic processes involved in producing these differences, or the close similarities between its own ways, and other nations' ways, of being different from each other. So, for example, the Soviet ethnonations differed culturally, and their representatives certainly understood them to differ. Each with its own Tolstoys, Pushkins, Gogols, state opera companies, and national academies, they were all—from the point of view of their members—uniquely different. The fact that in regard to having their own Tolstoys, Pushkins, Gogols, and so forth they were all highly symmetrical, and were furthermore all modeling themselves after the exemplar of a dominant Russian culture, was perhaps less likely to be acknowledged or celebrated.

If ethnicity and nationalism are a process of domesticating cultural diversi-

ty, its products are very conspicuous, but the process is less so. The mimetic dimension of ethnicity and nationalism tends to be, from the actors' point of view, underacknowledged, and at times denied.

The political philosopher Chatterjee (1986; 1993) has explored what he sees as a central contradiction faced by nationalist movements in Asia and other formerly colonized parts of the world: namely, that they claimed freedom from European domination using European forms of political thought (see also Eley and Suny 1996:29). As he shows, a very common way in which Asian and African nationalist thinkers have sought to resolve this dilemma is by arguing that 'their' nationalisms are 'different' from Western nationalisms, indeed superior, emphasizing spiritual values as opposed to the materialistic nationalisms of their colonizers, or ex-colonizers. To these nationalists, the colonized peoples needed to assimilate Western "techniques of organizing material life" before they could free themselves from Western domination.

But this could not mean the imitation of the West in every aspect of life, for then the very distinction between the West and the East would vanish—the self-identity of national culture would itself be threatened. In fact, as Indian nationalists in the late nineteenth century argued, not only was it undesirable to imitate the West in anything other than the material aspects of life, it was even unnecessary to do so, because in the spiritual domain, the East was superior to the West. What was necessary was to cultivate the material techniques of modern Western civilization while retaining and strengthening the distinctive spiritual essence of the national culture. This completes the formulation of the nationalist project, and as an ideological justification for the selective appropriation of Western modernity, it continues to hold sway to this day (1993:120).

In this way, Chatterjee argues, the "imagined communities" (Anderson 1983) of anticolonial African and Asian nationalisms were predicated on the idea of a 'difference' from the West, representing themselves, in certain respects, as the diametrical opposites of those of Europe. The colonized developed forms of nationalism authentically their own, not derivative ones; they were not merely passive consumers of a Western modernity (1993:5).

Of course, there are historical instances of large-scale and quite open imitation of Western models. Japan in the Meiji period (Westney 1987) and Atatürk's Turkey are particularly notable cases in which modernizers imported Western practices and institutions as entirely deliberate and explicit state policy. To Atatürk, a modern mentality needed to be demonstrated outwardly by practices such as the adoption of modern Western attire. Hence his Hat Law of 1925, which outlawed the fez (symbol of Ottoman and Moslem orthodoxy) and made hats the compulsory national headgear for Turkish men (Kinross 1964:411–17; Macfie 1994:136, 140–41; Mango 1999:433–38). Even before the Hat Law, the hat riots, and the ensuing executions, a Moslem cleric had been hanged for publishing a tract decrying such "imitation of the Franks" (Mango 1999:436).

Evidently, there are situations in which the role of mimesis in the formation of ethnic and national identity is quite open. But I would suggest that it is perhaps more likely to be denied, or rapidly elided from national memory, the more

markedly and overtly oppositional the borrowers' identities are toward those from whom they borrow. For example, Kiberd (1989), discussing the emergence of Irish nationalist "traditions" in the nineteenth century, describes what he calls the "device of national parallelism" through which these traditions seem to have been constructed in a kind of oppositional counterpoint to perceived English or British equivalents. "For every English action, there must be an equal and opposite Irish reaction—for soccer, Gaelic football; for hockey, hurling; for trousers, a kilt" (Kiberd 1989:320).

For each perceived major icon of English identity, each attribute appearing to distinguish the English, it seems to have been important to the Irish nationalist movement to be able to reciprocate with an equivalent Irish icon of their own. Hence the emergence of Gaelic football as a 'traditional' national sport, an occurrence which Kiberd describes as a piece of "instant archaeology" not known to the legendary Celtic hero Cuchulain (1989:320). In this way, Kiberd seems to imply, the presence of England as Ireland's Other had an important formative influence on Irish national identity. To use poststructuralist terminology, England represented a key part of Irish nationalism's "constitutive outside" (Hall 1996:4). Irish identity came to reflect certain aspects of Irish perceptions of Englishness, precisely to the extent that it was constructed as a counter-identity, devised to oppose and exclude its Other. To create a maximal 'difference' between the two nations required first contriving an isomorphism between them, maximizing the points of contact between them where differences could be generated.

I referred earlier to a puzzling feature of ethnicity and ethnonationalism: namely, that groups can have strong mimetic attractions to those with whom they are in conflict or whom they oppose in some way, and can imitate them. Hence, nineteenth-century Irish nationalism replicated aspects of its colonizers' cultural identity, as it saw it, in the process of establishing an identity of its own. At least part of the explanation of this seems to lie in the need to first put similarities in place in order to be able to generate differences. The initial problem faced by a group that seeks to make itself dissimilar to another is to find a particular way of resembling it, or perhaps of resembling it more closely. In a sense this is precisely what ethnicity and nationalism offer: ready-made ways of resembling others so as to be able to begin the process of becoming different from them.

CONCLUSION

I began this article by questioning the view that ethnicity and nationalism are relations of perceived difference. The problem with this view, I have tried to show, is that representations of difference and alterity, though of course central to ethnicity and nationalism, nevertheless always seem to be bound inextricably to perceptions of similarity. In fact, they seem to be elaborated specifically in antithesis to certain kinds of resemblances. The Other, as Sax (1998) argued, always appears to embody aspects of the Self.

It is perhaps not surprising that this should be so. In the context of ethnicity and nationalism, cultural differences are social relationships. They are not mere ethnological dissimilarities, like those that might be found to exist between the French, say, and the Hittites. Rather, as Barth showed long ago, they are distinctions conceived, valorized, and communicated by people interacting with one another, as ways of structuring their interactions. In this context, cultural difference is a particular idiom of sociality. Ethnic and national 'differences,' in this sense, are much better conceptualized as muted or broken resemblances. I have outlined three broadly distinct configurations which these muted similarities seem often to take, configurations in which the Other is valorized respectively as inferior, superior, and equal to the Self.

In the first configuration, which I called difference-as-inferiority, the cultural Other is made to represent censored and disclaimed attributes of the Self. On the surface, the Other therefore appears essentially alien. But behind this facade of radical alterity lurks a hidden identity between Self and Other, in which the Other represents what Said called "a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (1978:3, see also p. 95). To imagine an Other that inverts the Self, that embodies everything the Self disowns, is to simultaneously create and repress an intimate resemblance.

A second configuration, difference-as-superiority, is the pattern of muted and denied identification with the Other that occurs in the emulation of other, powerful and prestigious, ethnic or national identities. Here, a culturally foreign Other is valorized positively rather than negatively, attributed with that superiority Armstrong (1982:296) calls "cultural ascendancy." It offers models, rather than anti-models, for the Self. Instead of a projection that ascribes unwanted attributes of the Self to the Other, this is a process of covert introjection, the surreptitious mimetic appropriation of desired attributes of the Other.

In the third configuration, difference-as-equality, the Other is conceived as essentially similar culturally to the Self, indeed in some respects far too much so. Here, actors define their ethnic or national identities by marking themselves off contrastively from others with whom they are categorized as sharing common features of identity at some more inclusive level. This situation corresponds roughly to Freud's portrayal of the narcissism of minor differences, in which groups differentiate themselves from those with whom they are also closely identified, doing so by negating or diminishing these commonalities in some way. So, Australian nationalists define their national identity by fracturing a felt similarity to the English, their deep ties with class-ridden England providing the foil against which they contrast their own nation as egalitarian. In a stronger disavowal of similarity, ethnic minorities in the United States claim their own separate and distinctive cultures in a language that masks their cultural commonalities.

The feature that these three configurations of Self and Other have in common are perceptions of an oversimilarity of some kind. In each case, the key characteristic of the Other is that it embodies some excess of resemblance to

the Self, and these felt resemblances provide a kind of background on which ethnic boundaries and national differences are engraved. Actors may etch these distinctions lightly, setting themselves off from one another by cultural microdifferences ('our' Tolstoys, Prousts, national sports, opera companies etc., versus 'theirs'). At the other extreme, they may posit radical contrasts, inversions, and categorical oppositions among themselves: dichotomies of spirituality versus materialism, equality versus hierarchy, reason versus emotion, and so forth. But in every case, these constructs seem to be sustained over time as attempts to counteract, diminish, or repress an awareness of shared identity. They are intimately linked to perceptions of too much similarity.

Viewing ethnicity and nationalism in this way—as processes of generating denied, muted, and fractured resemblances—may go some way to answering a question to which I referred at the start of this article: namely, why we find so little variety in the ways nations and ethnic groups symbolize their identities. Far from exhibiting infinite creativity, the symbolism of ethnic and national differences seems much more like what Bernstein (1971) called a "restricted code," generating mostly repetitions, parallelisms, and small variations on the same themes. The point is that these recensions, which ethnicity and nationalism call cultural diversity, irreducible differences, unique cultural heritages, and so forth, are actually specially attenuated forms of shared identity. They are the residue of reducing or counteracting felt resemblances.

A vital issue needing further investigation is to understand the precise ways in which these representations serve the interests of power, in particular the interests of the elites which characteristically play the leading roles in nationalist movements and in the construction of national identities. Let me merely note in closing that ethnicity and nationalism seem to be, at one level, ways of altering cognition, even of distorting it, in a very specific direction. They act upon an unwanted consciousness of shared identity, and shift it towards a consciousness of unlikeness. This is why, in creating certain kinds of relations of dissimilarity among people, ethnicity and nationalism also create their own underworlds of disguised resemblances, denied commonalities, and submerged identifications with the Other. These distortions are not just a feature of ethnicity and nationalism, but seem to have influenced their study as well. In trying (as one must) to understand them from within, from the perspective of actors and their discourse, one tends to see differences more readily than the processes which produce and support these differences and keep them visible. For actors to imagine themselves different, they have to imagine resemblances—and may have to work to reproduce resemblances—against which they can make differences continue to appear.

ful comments on earlier drafts of this article, as did members of the Department of Anthropology at the London School of Economics, to whom a version of this article was given as a seminar in May 2002.

REFERENCES

Abadal i de Vinyals, R. d'. 1958. A propos du Legs Visigothique en Europe. *Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Ait. Medioevo* 2:541–85.

Anderson, B. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* London: Verso.

Armstrong, J. 1982. *Nations before Nationalism.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Ball, R., A. Hargreaves, B. Marshall, and A. Ridehalgh. 1995. French in the World: From Imperialism to Diversity. In J. Forbes and M. Kelly, eds., *French Cultural Studies.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 264–89.

Barth, F., ed. 1969. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organisation of Cultural Difference.* Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.

Bernstein, B. 1971. *Class, Codes and Control, Vol. 1, Theoretical Studies towards a Sociology of Language.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Buckley, A., ed. 1998. *Symbols in Northern Ireland.* Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies.

Burke, P. 1969. *The Renaissance Sense of the Past.* London: Edward Arnold.

———. 1992. We, the People: Popular Culture and Popular Identity in Modern Europe. In S. Lash and J. Friedman, eds., *Modernity and Identity.* Oxford: Blackwell, 293–308.

Carrier, J. G. 1995. Introduction. In J. G. Carrier, ed., *Occidentalism: Images of the West.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1–32.

Chatterjee, P. 1986. *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World.* London: Zed Books.

———. 1993. *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Cohen, A. P. 1985. *The Symbolic Construction of Community.* London: Tavistock.

Cohen, R. 1994. *Frontiers of Identity: The British and the Others.* London and New York: Longman.

Collier, M. J., ed. 2000. *Constituting Cultural Difference through Discourse.* London: Sage.

Derrida, J. 1978. *Writing and Difference.* A. Bass, trans. London: Routledge.

Duara, P. 1996. *Historicizing National Identity, or Who Imagines What and When.* In S. Eley and R. G. Suny, eds., *Becoming National: A Reader.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 151–77.

Edwards, J. 1985. *Language, Society and Identity.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Eley, S., and Suny, R. G., eds. 1996. *Introduction: From the Moment of Social History to the Work of Cultural Representation.* In S. Eley and R. G. Suny, eds., Becoming National: A Reader. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3–37.

Eriksen, T. H. 1993. *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives.* London: Pluto Press.

Fabian, J. 1983. *Time and the Other.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Featherstone, M. (ed.). 1990. *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalism and Modernity.* London: Sage.

Forbes, J. and M. Kelly, eds. 1995. *French Cultural Studies.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Freud, S. 1930. *Civilization and its Discontents.* London: Hogarth Press for the Institute of Psycho-analysis.

———. 1945 [1921]. *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego.* London: Hogarth Press for the Institute of Psycho-analysis.

———. 1957 [1910]. *Five Lectures on Psycho-analysis, Leonardo da Vinci and other Works.* London: Hogarth Press for the Institute of Psycho-analysis.

———. 1964 [1937–1939]. *Moses and Monotheism, An Outline of Psycho-analysis, and other Works.* London: Hogarth Press for the Institute of Psycho-analysis.

Friedman, J. 1994. *Cultural Identity and Global Process.* London: Sage.

Gellner, E. 1983. *Nations and Nationalism.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Grossberg, L. 1996. *Identity and Cultural Studies—Is that all there Is?* In S. Hall and P. du Gay, eds., Questions of Cultural Identity. London: Sage, 87–107.

Gupta, A. and J. Ferguson. 1992. *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Hall, S. 1989. *Ethnicity: Identity and Difference.* Radical America 23(4):9–20.

———. 1996. *Introduction: Who Needs Identity?* In Hall, S. and P. du Gay, eds., Questions of Cultural Identity. London: Sage, 1–17.

Hall, S., and P. du Gay, eds. 1996. *Questions of Cultural Identity.* London: Sage.

Handler, R. 1988. *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Harrison, S. J. 1992. *Ritual as Intellectual Property.* Man (n.s.) 27(2):225–44.

———. 1995. *Four Types of Symbolic Conflict.* Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (n.s.) 1(2):255–72.

———. 1999a. *Cultural Boundaries.* Anthropology Today 15(5):10–13.

———. 1999b. *Identity as a Scarce Resource.* Social Anthropology 7(3):239–51.

———. 2002. *The Politics of Resemblance: Ethnicity, Trademarks, Head-hunting.* Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute 8(2):211–32.

Henshall, K. G. 1999. *A History of Japan.* London: Macmillan.

Herzfeld, M. 1995. *Hellenism and Occidentalism: The Permutations of Performance in Greek Bourgeois Identity.* In J. G. Carrier, ed., Occidentalism: Images of the West. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 218–33.

———. 1987. *Anthropology through the Looking-Glass: Critical Ethnography in the Margins of Europe.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Horowitz, D. L. 1975. *Ethnic Identity.* In N. Glazer and D. P. Moynihan, eds., Ethnicity: Theory and Experience. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 111–40.

Hughes-Freeland, F. and M. M. Crain, eds. 1998. *Recasting Ritual: Performance, Media, Identity.* London: Routledge.

Jarman, N. 1998. *Painting Landscapes: The Place of Murals in the Symbolic Construction of Urban Space.* In A. Buckley, A., ed., Symbols in Northern Ireland. Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 81–98.

Kapferer, B. 1988. *Legends of People, Myths of State: Violence, Intolerance, and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia.* Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Kiberd, D. 1989. *Irish Literature and Irish History.* In R. F. Foster, ed., The Oxford Illustrated History of Ireland. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 275–338.

Kinross, Lord. 1964. *Atatürk: The Rebirth of a Nation.* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Kuper, A. 1988. *The Invention of Primitive Society: Transformations of an Illusion.* London and New York: Routledge.

Lash, S., and J. Friedman. 1992. *Introduction: Subjectivity and Modernity's Other.* In S. Lash and J. Friedman, eds., Modernity and Identity. Oxford: Blackwell, 1–30.

Lévi-Strauss, C. 1973. *Totemism.* R. Needham, trans. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Lowenthal, D. 1994. *Identity, Heritage, and History.* In J. R. Gillis, ed., Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 41–57.

Macfie, A. L. 1994. *Atatürk.* London and New York: Longman.

Mango, A. 1999. *Atatürk.* London: John Murray.

Marcus, G. E. and M. J. Fischer, eds. 1986. *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Meyer, B., and P. Geschiere, eds. 1999. *Globalization and Identity: Dialectics of Flow and Closure.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Morris-Suzuki, T. 1998. *Re-inventing Japan: Time, Space, Nation.* New York and London: M. E. Sharpe.

Nairn, T. 1996. *Scotland and Europe.* In S. Eley and R. G. Suny, eds., Becoming National: A Reader. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 79–105. [Reprinted from New Left Review 1974, vol. 83:57–82].

Parsons, T. 1975. *Some Theoretical Considerations on the Nature and Trends of Change of Ethnicity.* In N. Glazer and D. P. Moynihan, eds., Ethnicity: Theory and Experience. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 79–105.

Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. 1951. *The Comparative Method in Social Anthropology.* Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute 81:15–22.

Robbins, K. 1996. *Interrupting Identities: Turkey/Europe.* In S. Hall and P. du Gay, eds., Questions of Cultural Identity. London: Sage, 61–86.

Roosens, E. 1989. Creating Ethnicity: *The Processes of Ethnogenesis.* London: Sage.

Said, E. W. 1978. *Orientalism.* London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Sax, W. S. 1998. *The Hall of Mirrors: Orientalism, Anthropology, and the Other.* American Anthropologist 100(2):292–301.

Schwartz, T. 1975. *Cultural Totemism: Ethnic Identity, Primitive and Modern.* In G. DeVos and L. Romanucci-Ross, eds., *Ethnic Identity.* Palo Alto: Mayfield, 106–31.

Simmel, G. 1955. *Conflict, and the Web of Group-Affiliations.* K. H. Wolff and R. Bendix, trans. New York: Free Press.

Slezkine, Y. 1996. *The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism.* In G. Eley and R. G. Suny, eds., Becoming National: A Reader. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 203–38.

Smith, A. D. 1986. *The Ethnic Origin of Nations.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Taussig, M. 1993. *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses.* New York and London: Routledge.

Thomas, N. 1992. *The Inversion of Tradition.* American Ethnologist 19(2):13–32.

Westney, D. E. 1987. *Imitation and Innovation: The Transfer of Western Organisational Patterns to Meiji Japan.* Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press.

Wilmsen, N., and McAllister, P., eds. 1996. *The Politics of Difference: Ethnic Premises in a World of Power.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wolf, E. 1982. *Europe and the People without History.* Berkeley: University of California Press.