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National Symbols and Ceremonies: The Construction and Authentication of Boundaries

Considerable activity is currently found in the sphere of national symbolism and ceremonials in multicultural states and connected to debates on nationality, citizenship and integration. Many governments seem to have adopted a Durkheimian approach hoping that celebrations of and participation in ceremonies of various kinds ultimately will contribute to cohesion. The British *Citizenship Review* of 2008 suggested that a British National Day (national citizenship day) be introduced as a permanent annual feature (Rimmer, 2008) in order to bring people together. This suggestion was part of a chain of initiatives as the Home Office had already introduced a Citizens' Day as a low key initiative in 2005 with the intention of breaking down barriers and providing an opportunity for people from all backgrounds to come together – in the first instance in ethnically mixed parts of Britain encouraging people to interact as British citizens and celebrate Britishness. The issue was perceived of in a comparative light which highlighted the lack of an all-inclusive and large-scale national celebration in Britain. As laid out below:

> Indeed, while Britain does commemorate the fallen on Remembrance Sunday, it is relatively unusual in not having any great public days of national celebration, such as Bastille Day in France, Independence Day in Greece, Constitution Day in Norway, Liberation Day in Bulgaria, or 4th July in the USA. (Heath et al., 2007, p. 28)

In line with the above, the former Prime Minister Gordon Brown suggested that Remembrance Sunday – the only existing day in Britain which commands a substantial amount of participation in one form

or other – would be a suitable Britain Day. Remembrance Sunday commemorates Britain's fallen soldiers and, since 2000, has officially invited several faith communities and acknowledged their sacrifices. Drawing on existing ceremonial structures the government thus debated how to encourage the celebratory elements of Britishness. Closely related to such ceremonial initiatives are the recently introduced *citizenship ceremonies*, in Britain in place since 2004, marking the new status for new citizens. These ceremonies indirectly define British citizenship in terms of being earned, learned and celebrated (Andreouli and Stockdale, 2009; Elgenius, 2008). As acted out within the ceremonial sphere of nations, the celebration of citizenship is becoming more tied to the 'important underlying assumption of the earned citizenship discourse' which indicates that 'justice claims are grounded in a territorially bounded view of the world which supports the superiority of the entitlements of the native population' (Andreouli and Stockdale, 2009, p. 164). Citizenship ceremonies thus mark the approval for new graduating citizens and constitute in effect a nationalization of the citizenship debate.

Similar community-building projects are in operation world-wide and in a Durkheimian vein employed to celebrate, recognize, promote, (re)negotiate, (re)create and (re)enforce identities (Elgenius, 2008, 2011). Thus, participation in the same ceremonies is understood to (re)create a sense commonality and hereby strengthen communities, in which ceremonial imagery and performance is narrated in such ways that it justifies the current social order.

Something eternal in religion

It has long been recognized that social life is an important repository of symbols, whether in the form of totems, golden ages, flags, heroes, icons, capitals, statues, war memorials or football teams, which are – at the core – various forms of symbolic markers of social groups. Symbols provide short cuts to the group they represent and symbolism is by nature referential, subjective and boundary-creating. A Durkheimian departure is helpful but must be challenged on its functionalism and claim that symbols and ceremonies produce unity and cohesion. However, while national days may provide a unifying narrative, cohesion and solidarity do not necessarily follow their introduction. Whereas national day ceremonies are expressions of societal worship and affirmation of values, the effect of this worship continues to be assumed rather than proved. Having said this, in a much quoted passage Durkheim

highlights the eternal forms of religious life as characteristic also of secularized ceremonies:

> there is something eternal in religion which is destined to survive all the particular symbols in which religious thought has successively enveloped itself. There can be no society which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which make its unity and its personality. Now this moral remaking cannot be achieved except by the means of reunions, assemblies and meetings where the individuals, being closely united to one another, reaffirm in common their common sentiments; hence come ceremonies which do not differ from regular religious ceremonies, either in their object, the results which they produce, or the processes employed to attain these results. (1976, p. 427)

This 'eternal something' refers to the systems of practices, rites (cult) and ideas explaining the world (faith) and the eternal forms of religion in secular forms and guises can be revealed. Continuing in the forms of ritually active religious communities, national ceremonies are today understood as 'symbols of collective unity' used 'in more secular vein as the celebration of political ideals' (Giddens, 1991, p. 207). In line with this argument the nation has been perceived as 'a community of faith and as a sacred communion' (A.D. Smith, 2003, p. 24). National symbols have thus been described as modern totems as they merge the mythical sacredness of the nation into forms experienced by sight and sound by blending of subject and object beyond simple representations of nations: 'In a very real sense, national symbols become the nation' (Cerulo, 1995, p. 4). Along these lines, Durkheim had questioned the difference between an assembly of Jews commemorating the Exodus from Egypt, Christians celebrating Christmas, the honouring of a new political system or remembrance of significant historical events. Every society uses symbolic and ceremonial activity to attempt moral remaking. Many studies of political symbolism (Gusfield and Michalowicz, 1984) have built on these Durkheimian assumptions and have explored ceremonies as symbols of moral values (Shils and Young, 1953) whereas others have highlighted the impossibility of assessing the interpretations and feelings of the public (Lukes, 1975). The evidence highlights these dimensions and that ceremonies represent authoritative interpretations of society and contribute to the assertion of power. The participation in ceremonies may reinforce a feeling of social location as

people come together on national days, carnivals, fairs, religious holidays, saints' days, joyful celebrations or solemn commemorations. The success of national days also provides evidence to the effect that they *can* constitute a shared experience and raise awareness of imagined communities and thus constitute building blocks in the making of nations. Therborn writes:

> A collective identity is not just an identity held in common in their souls by an aggregate of individuals. As a rule it is also a public thing, manifested in and sustained by public rituals. (1995, p. 223)

Perceptions of commonality, boundaries, us and others

Symbols are effective precisely because they are ambiguous, imprecise and their meanings are 'subjective' without undermining their collective nature. They 'exist as something for people to think with', to make and express meaning without imposing a static one. Nevertheless, they express social values in ways that allow for a common form to be retained and shared without compromising individual beliefs and associations linked to communities. So, 'rather than thinking of community as an integrating mechanism it should be regarded instead as an aggregating device' and commonality need not be uniformity (A. Cohen, 1995, pp. 19–20). Moreover, this does not mean that the interpretations of communal symbols are arbitrary or remain uncontested. On the contrary, they are formed in line with encouraged notions of traditions, ideology, power, beliefs, culture and social expressions that by nature can be highly divisive. It is true that individuals participate in ceremonies for all sorts of reasons, but whatever their motivations, the use of symbols are prominent in the repertoire of communal symbolism where boundaries are heightened and reinforced.

The transactional process of boundary creation has primarily become a matter of differentiation from others (Barth, 1969). Boundary-making ceremonies are multi-referential and multi-vocal by nature and revealed on a variety of levels to the members of a community (Turner, 1967, 1969) as they communicate the relationships of this group to other groups and to the world outside it. The construction of symbols and ceremonies help transform the reality of diversity into an appearance of commonality (of cultural forms and ways of behaving) contributing to the understandings of nationhood and membership. Thus, boundaries are simultaneously oppositional and relational and turn community itself into a boundary-expressing symbol (A. Cohen, 1995).

Ethno-political symbols related to language, culture, art, music, geography, ethnicity and religion contribute to mythic structures and to *mythomoteurs* that systematize and justify membership in relation to other groups (Armstrong, 1982). Religious symbols have been argued as particularly important for ethnic border guards as groups define themselves not (only) by reference to their own characteristics but by exclusion of strangers and in comparison to outsiders, which constitute part of the process of identifying with the in-group (Armstrong, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 2004). When the variability of meanings become too encompassing and when geo-social boundaries are undermined, blurred or weakened (Alba, 2005; A. Cohen, 1995) notions of 'community' depend on the manipulation and embellishment of its symbols. Boundaries constitute in this manner and by nature 'sociologically complex fault lines' or systems of social distinctions that are 'imposed by the ethnic majority' (Alba, 2005, p. 20). Blurred boundaries are associated with ambiguity about membership whereas bright boundaries are not. It is the context of the former that national flags and national days help facilitate the brightening of these. Conflicts, struggles and wars have therefore been noted as significant in the process of raising boundaries and as characterized by considerable flag-waving (Colley, 1992; Eriksen and Jenkins, 2007; Marvin and Ingle, 1999; A.D. Smith, 2003). Sacrificial boundaries ultimately define boundaries by which nations become known, characterized by the commemorations of particular sacrifices and the lack of recognition of those of others.

Boundary creation is also related to perceived rights of cultural production, property rights and copyright protection and addresses notions of boundaries related to culture as owned by particular groups or traditions. This discussion is related to *the perceived rights* of defining culture and artifacts, protecting culture from infringement and benefiting from commercialization. 'Native essentialisms' have been highlighted as part of such political and commercial discourses. Cultural copyright is a phenomenon that has been held in connection with the production and use of national flags, the production of regional costumes (*bunad*) in Norway or the highland tradition in Scotland (T.H. Eriksen, 2005; Trevor-Roper, 1992) as has various forms of the musealization of cultural production (Knell et al. 2011).

Using national symbols and ceremonies

Since *blurred* boundaries are reinforced with the embellishment of symbolic content, symbols and ceremonies have come to constitute tools

through which nationalist regimes attempt to mobilize populations in pursuit of power. It is beyond any doubt that a variety of elites are active in various stages and at various times in the nation-making context. However, it is also true that their attempts do not always work. Moreover, symbols (flags) and ceremonies (national days) also constitute powerful counter-instruments in the hands of people protesting against such authorities.

The *aesthetics of politics* and the work of Mosse (1975, 1993b) is an appropriate place to commence when exploring the nexus of myths, symbols and the new ceremonial styles linked to nationalism (Mosse, 1975, p. 20). In brief, during the eighteenth century allegiances to royal dynasties had begun to decline and populations emerged as a political force with the concept of popular sovereignty. The manifestation of a general will was transformed into a new form of politics and into conditions in which people worshipped themselves and hopes and fears were controlled within ceremonial and liturgical forms. A sense of permanence was hereby introduced or at least attempted and integrated into the daily life of people. National symbolism has a special reserve of *self-reference* distinguishing it from religious symbolism.

> Nationalist movements, like all mass movements, make use of symbols and ceremonies. These give nationalist ideas a definite shape and force, both by projecting certain images and by enabling people to come together in ways which seem directly to express the solidarity of the nation. Nationalist symbolism is able to do this in particularly effective ways because it has a quality of self-reference which is largely missing from socialist or religious ideology. Nationalists celebrate themselves rather than some transcendent reality, whether this be located in another world or in a future society, although the celebration also involves a concern with transformation of present reality. (Breuilly, 1993, p. 64)

It is through inventing traditions that elites attempt to establish continuity with a suitable past that, in turn, justifies the regimes of the present. The establishment of repeated practices, of a symbolic and ritual nature, help to enforce values and norms (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1992). As new forms of national loyalties emerged, new traditions were invented and linked to new institutions that were required with rapid social transformations. Inventing traditions thus constitute tools by which the past can be controlled and the theatrical idiom of

nationalism and related formation of ceremonial spaces contribute to maintaining social order. The mass production of public ceremonies and public monuments from 1870 to 1914 in the Third Republic of France and in the Second German Empire are examples of enforcing historical legitimacy. However, such perspectives do not explain all dimensions of national symbolism in nation building nor the appeal of symbols of nationhood or their importance for *nations-to-be*. National flags and national days are created for a number of reasons and not by elites only, but once established they are deliberately formalized and perceived as central to nation formation.

Symbols and ceremonies can be significant to nation building because they place the past – a foundation for nation-making – in the present where it can be directed towards the future. Thus the past constitutes a powerful resource in the making of boundaries raised against other nations. Celebrations and commemorations of historic events can also be emotionally charged reminding people of why they belong together. Scholars such as Smith, Stråth, Hutchinson, Hastings and Armstrong emphasize the importance of foundation myths – visible through symbols chosen to represent nations. Smith highlights the significance of historic landscapes with reference to 'golden ages' in the formation and in the maintenance of national identities as symbols, memories, myths and traditions constitute the core of nations (A.D. Smith, 1986, 1988, 1998). He states:

> Symbols such as flags, emblems, anthems, costume, special foods, and sacred objects, give expression of our sense of difference and distinctiveness of the community [...] myths of origins, liberation, the golden age, and chosenness link the sacred past to a sense of collective destiny. Each of these elements articulated a vital dimension of the culture-community. (A.D. Smith, 1995)

The notion of a national destiny is linked to the founding myths of communities (Stråth, 2000). Historical images root communities in territories and sites for mythologies and references to golden ages link nations with respective myths of heroism. Notions of national birth, growth, maturity, decline and rebirth may also be central as they provide communities with a sense of direction and references to the past, present and the future (Hutchinson, 1994; A.D. Smith, 2003). However, as demonstrated further on, founding myths are crucial in the formative years of national ceremonies but as a sign of true success for those that survive over time we may even say, on the contrary, that the opposite

is true. Successful national days that have survived over time have, as a rule, been drained of their original meanings but nevertheless achieve a sacred status. Many national day celebrations and commemorations were in their origins exclusive and pitted against others and the transformation of boundary-related matters are crucial for survival over time. Moreover, the nostalgia for the past has often been explained by the waning of religious beliefs and the need for new measures of immortality through posterity. However, the significance of history in the building of nations must also be considered with reference to the potentially divisive nature of its interpretations within nationally or ethnically-divided territories. Whereas national symbolism in Europe – as a rule – makes references to a distant, glorious or suitable past justifying the existence of the states in the present – a post-historical and counter-nationalist narrative has emerged, forced to avoid historical references altogether.

Moral direction

The glorification of nations in the present provides fuel in nation making as the (re)constructed relationship between the past, present and future contributes to (an illusion of) unity in the present. The glorifying of nations also contributes to the formation of moral communities as moral remaking takes place through ceremonies and symbols referring to significant events, heroes, wars and sacrifices. A moral stance naturally follows when related norms and values are uncovered and involved by the honouring of certain historical events, birthdays, enterprises, personifications and sacrifices but not others, as in the remembering *our* fallen and by definition *not* the fallen killed by these. Remembering, we understand in the imagined sense of the word. National symbols constitute in this fashion master or dominant symbols (Wright in Dillistone, 1986; Turner, 1967, 1969) or moral symbols that by nature provide moral codes of justification. Nationalism, death and sacrifice are intimately linked with their equivalent religious constellations enforced by sacrifices given willingly for a worthy cause and that involves saving the group by leaving it. The nation thus achieves its morality directly created from 'the flesh of its citizens' (Marvin and Ingle, 1999, p. 75) and sacrifical boundaries are established on the basis of these. It is in such contradictory contexts that ceremonies are employed to justify and exhort people to war and violence and that conflicts are perpetuated (Kertzer, 1989, p. 129). It is not only in context that the notion of 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1991) is useful. The

commemorations of fallen soldiers are highly significant in the creation of moral communities and have strong affinity with religious imaginings as aptly linked below:

> No more arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers. The public ceremonial reverence accorded these monuments precisely *because* they are either deliberately empty or no one knows who lies inside them, has no true precedents in earlier times. To feel the force of this modernity one has to imagine the general reaction to the busybody who 'discovered' the Unknown Soldier's name or insisted on filling the cenotaph with some real bones. Sacrilege of a strange, contemporary kind! Yet void as these tombs are of identifiable mortal remains or immortal souls, they are nonetheless saturated with ghostly *national* imaginings. (Anderson, 1991, p. 9)

Nations become distinctive through their particular style of imagination and their persuasive power is manifested in the citizens' willingness to die for their communities (Anderson, 1991) and act against their self-interest. Remembrance ceremonies also help shed light on the nature of commemorations related to sacrifice (Moriarty, 1991) and on the justification of existing social structures.

The politics of (non)recognition and protest: victory and defeat

In the process of challenging the direction of nations, existing symbols and ceremonies are replaced, discovered, re-discovered, constructed, re-constructed, invented and re-invented. Since national flags and national days express meanings about nationhood they are therefore also contested. The altering of city names has throughout history been a legacy of new political regimes. St Petersburg (called Petrograd in 1917) was given the name Leningrad in 1924 to mark the victory of the Bolsheviks over the Provisional Government. The city retrieved its name – St Petersburg – in 1991 with the shift away from Communism. The city Tsaritsyn, founded in 1589, became Stalingrad for the period 1925–61 and has been known as Volgograd since 1961 (Arvidsson and Blomqvist, 1987; Overy, 1997). The revival of national symbolism in Eastern Europe following the collapse of the Soviet Union after 1989 produced new sets of national symbols, flags, anthems and national days to celebrate the new nations and states – a course, at times, long

and complicated as symbolic battles ensued. Innumerable changes were made to the designs of national flags and days as a result of such socio-political conflicts. The reverence for national days and flags and their continued associations to nationhood are illuminating with reference to the politics of recognition and protest; whereas national elites attempt to protect national symbols and their relationship to the nation by laws and regulations, national flags and days remain double-edged or counter instruments. As such they express dissent as flags are defaced and burned in protests against political systems, ideologies and regimes, both within and outside nations.

Part of the politics of recognition, regret and apology is the re-invention of existing ceremonies and the introduction of new ones that acknowledge previously marginalized groups. The federal government in Canada has introduced a National Aboriginal Day (21 July) as has Australia with Aboriginal Day. However, Australia Day (26 January), in contrast, commemorates the landing of the first fleet in Sydney Cove in 1788 and has as such been challenged by the association of the Australian Aboriginal Sovereign Nations as a day of British colonialism. In Britain a monument to Women of World War II was unveiled in Whitehall (in 2005) on the ceremonial route of remembrance at the Cenotaph (dedicated to fallen soldiers) in London. This monument was dedicated to the seven million women who contributed to the war effort, their work recognized in this form *60 years* after the end of the Second World War (BBC, 9 July 2005).

Community-bridging strategies visible in these examples above stand in sharp contrast to strategies of *non-recognition* and exclusion employed during and after the Second World War. In Nazi Germany 1933–45, Jews were forbidden to fly the Swastika flag from 1935 but by 1945 the flag had become an (im)moral symbol tainted as it was with the results of Nazism. Finding an anthem and a national day in the aftermath of the Second World War was therefore a challenge. The ramifications of the nation's moral boundaries being undermined resulted in an absence of symbolic expression in Germany after the Second World War. The symbolism of the victorious nations was equally exclusive as one may expect. In the Moscow Victory Parade on 24 June 1945, 12 000 soldiers participated in honour of the millions who never returned. The regiments that had most distinguished themselves paraded with the 36 banners of their units. At a poignant point the music accompanying the military parade stopped and was replaced by a drum roll increasing in volume as a column of soldiers carrying 200 captured Nazi banners appeared. As the column drew up to Lenin's Mausoleum

in Red Square each rank made a sharp right turn and a soldier flung his Nazi banner to the ground at the steps of the Mausoleum. The Victory Parade was carefully documented and photographs subsequently appeared in countless Soviet textbooks and journals. The most publicized scene was that of the contemptuous throwing down of the Nazi banners and standards, their eagles and swastikas crashing to the ground (Clayton, 1995). The imagery represented a new era of iconography – the people's triumph over fascism and the glorification of the Soviet Union, its leaders and military power. By defiling the Nazi banners – the enemy was crushed at the foot of the founder of the nation – and the gloves of the soldiers holding the banners were ceremonially burned (RussiaToday, 2010a).

As a result of colonialism and related wars, similar symbolic battles fought over names of streets, districts, towns, cities and provinces are found, for example, in Vietnam during the latter half of the twentieth century. Many places have been known by three or more names in the wake of colonialization, divisive political struggles and the renegotiation of nationhood and ideology. Round one attempted to erase the French colonial past by replacing all French names except those of Albert Calmette, Marie Curie, Louis Pasteur and Alexandre Yersin. New names were also allocated to South Vietnam in an attempt to erase references to the Viet Minh's anti-French exploits from 1956 onwards. As we may expect, names associated with the United States established during the Vietnam War were also replaced after the formal reunification of North and South Vietnam in 1976. The victorious North Vietnamese communists changed the name of the capital from Saigon to Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) in 1975, significantly on the first day of their victory (Florence and Jealous, 2003). In 2000 a People's Committee originally set out to rename 25 new streets in order to redefine parts of Ho Chi Minh City; however, this generated considerable debate so the committee decided to rename another 152 streets. In the midst of the battle in Iraq, with the claiming of victory the new political regime was quick to erase all previous national days and establish new ones. With the fall of Saddam's regime in Iraq, the first decision made by the interim council (July 2003) was to abolish all previous holidays (Podeh, 2010). A new Iraqi national day (9 April) was adopted as a celebration of Saddam's ousting, a decision significantly taken on the 45th anniversary of the revolution that annihilated the Hashemite monarchy – a date celebrated by all Iraqi regimes.

Successful national days and national day design

A sense of commonality in modern nations can thus be produced through the use of the same symbols and participation in the same ceremonies. The diverse reality is, at least temporarily, transformed by participation into an appearance of similarity, something which alone does not necessarily produce cohesion. Simmel (1964) drew attention to the role of threats, external war and conflict as a form of *sociation* that makes boundaries more distinct. Cohesion, in this context, does not refer to an absence of conflict or to national idyll. In nineteenth-century Norway the national day became part of the struggle for democratization in times of internal disunity. In Britain during the First World War expressions of unity were found in the war effort and conflict with the external world created a national bond. At the same time, domestic disunity was channelled through strikes and demonstrations for peace. According to Nairn (1977) the First World War virtually saved England from civil war.

While national symbols and ceremonies can serve as convenient means of analysing nation building and raise awareness of membership some remain contested and others go unnoticed. Comprehensive studies of the French Revolution and its festivals highlight the fact that the attempt by the revolutionaries to restructure French society by re-ordering the celebratory year was ultimately unsuccessful (Ozouf, 1988). However, the annual celebrations of Bastille Day turned into a popular national day celebration at the centenary in 1880, in the age of nationalism and at a time when Bastille Day could be drained of the violent associations of the revolution. As a sharp contrast, the lack of celebrations on Unification Day in Germany demonstrates that national days must be seen within their historical context. German national days have throughout history constituted a source of conflict and, today, Unification Day has attempted but not yet succeeded in drawing people into the celebrations of unification, except for those in 1990 and 2009. Some ceremonies do not even create consensus as to what is commemorated. In Russia, the former national day, the Day of the Great October Socialist Revolution, after the collapse of the Soviet Union became known as the Day of Accord and Reconciliation, but was exchanged for Russia Day in 2004 (12 June) on the grounds of being ideologically outdated.

The findings of ceremonial success with reference to Norway's Constitution Day are in particular illuminating in its context of encompassing participation over time. This is attributed to a number of factors that

include the existence of unifying narrative: the historical genesis and the Day's status as a symbol of independence before statehood had been achieved. Successful national days are as a rule public holidays and official and private celebrations are integrated or follow each other. Whereas historical complexities are understood as particularly important in the formative years, the design of national days is crucial for continued success and appeal. Many successful national days have emerged against 'others' and transform over time with regards to the ceremonial message and corresponding national day design. One sign of truly successful national days is that they have been drained of their original meaning so that nationhood is celebrated with changing associations. Moreover, many national days have acquired a sacred status and are not easily criticized in the public sphere.

Symbolic regimes and narratives

Symbolic regimes are built on the formation of successful symbolic codes. This study distinguishes between pre-modern, modern and post-imperial symbolic regimes. The pre-modern regime refers to symbolism introduced before the French Revolution, the modern regime from 1789 to the First World War when the post-imperial regime appears, three periods used as pivots for categorization of symbolic expression. This framework is not exhaustive, but different narratives become visible when comparing these periods to the designs of flags and to the celebrations of national days. Something can also be said about the context of nations that in the modern period required tricolours and celebrated days of revolution and independence. The context in which the many pre-national cross flags survived is also significant as is the context of the heraldic flags, designs adorned by historical devices and colours, introduced in a post-imperial age after the First World War with many new state formations. It is interesting that the retained pre-modern cross flags actually demonstrated dissent from papacy at the time. Whereas the modern tricolours became symbols of revolution and change, the many post-imperial heraldic flags staked out claims for nationhood against empires and foreign rulers with displays of colours and devices from the middle ages. Nation making relies on the standardization of cultural expressions associated with the status of independent states, something which is also seen with the relative standardization of national flags and days, flag types and ceremonial styles.

The call to display a Christian cross on the Italian tricolour flag in 2009 following the decision to ban the construction of minarets in

Switzerland is thus significant when we consider that the early cross flags were once chosen to justify conflict during the crusades. Swiss voters had approved a proposal to ban the construction of minarets after a campaign that labelled mosque towers symbols of militant Islam. The latter used posters displaying the Swiss flag pierced by minarets (*Guardian*, 29 November 2009). Following the Swiss vote, the conservative deputy minister of infrastructure and transport in Italy – Roberto Castelli of the Northern League – argued that 'Europe has the right to safeguard its own identity . . . it is necessary to return to our roots' (Adnkronos International, 30 November 2009).

What do national symbols and ceremonies mean to people?

It is difficult to appropriately assess individual sentiments associated with national days, anthems and flags in the absence of adequate or comparative qualitative or quantitative data. It is arguable that national ceremonies may create a feeling of community but that this sense of community is dissolved as soon as the crowd or audience is dissolved (Uzelac, 2010). However, we cannot assume that national ceremonies mean the same to everyone. Nationals marching through the streets may have a sense of 'being in this together' but their experiences will be multi-faceted. The degree to which ceremonies have a spill-over effect in everyday life is also hard to assess as is when and how national fervour is dissolved. It is, however, possible to determine that national symbols and ceremonies have been adopted alongside the process of nation building and re-adopted in new socio-political conditions. In observing the procedures associated with national days and flags, we may also say something about their appeal and success in providing a unifying focus. The respect they demand, as regulated by law, helps illuminate the ways in which national symbols help sanctify the purpose of nations and constitute components of national worship. Protests involving the burning of the Tricolour on Bastille Day or shouting during the two minutes silence on Remembrance Sunday are defined as acts of desecration. Symbols are thus able to ignite conflicts of various kinds and we find them contested and divisive.

In consulting the World Value Survey (WVS, 2005) and International Social Survey Project (ISSP, 2003) we find that people continue to be considerably proud of their nationalities despite their suggested decrease (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). The high numbers indicate percentage of being very proud or quite proud of nationality as follows: Poland

96 per cent, Finland 94 per cent, Norway 90 per cent, Italy 90 per cent, Slovenia 90 per cent, Sweden 88 per cent, Switzerland 87 per cent, Serbia 86 per cent, Romania 84 per cent, Bulgaria 81 per cent, Ukraine 73 per cent (European Values Study Group and World Values Survey Association, 2006). Similar figures (of being very proud or somewhat proud) account to the following numbers in: Ireland 98 per cent, Portugal 95 per cent, Hungary 94 per cent, Austria 92 per cent, Denmark 90 per cent, France 89 per cent, Slovak Republic 86 per cent, Russia 85 per cent, Czech Republic 81 per cent, Netherlands 78 per cent and Latvia 76 per cent (ISSP, 2003). These figures appear to confirm that nationality matters with increased fragmentation and heterogeneity. Interestingly, high figures are also noted in multi-national states such as Spain 95 per cent (WVS, 2005) and Britain 87 per cent (ISSP, 2003), which suggest that survey material of this nature is more complex than first meets the eye. It is unlikely that a representative sample of nationals within these states would have been collected. However, if we instead consider the relative importance of nationality in comparative terms (see e.g. Heath et al., 2007) the ranking of identities (ISSP, 2003; Spreckelsen, 2010) continue to demonstrate that nationality matters. The significance of social identities across Europe has been ranked in the following order: family, occupation, gender, nationality, age, region, class, ethnicity, religion and political party. The figures above point towards the continued appeal of nations and nationhood and also contribute to an explanation as to why symbols associated with nationality continue to matter.

Exploring patterns with regard to the history of flags and national days will help assess their significance in expressing, representing, recognizing and building nations. Moreover, these patterns help demonstrate the ways in which nations are uniquely honoured, glorified, celebrated and commemorated. Thus a representative of the British conservative press described Herman van Rompuy after his election to the EU Presidency in 2009 as a 'fanatical federalist' who was even backing the replacing of national symbols such as national flags and anthems with their EU equivalents (*Daily Mail*, 20 November 2009).

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