

Nationalism and Myth

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Old Mythology, New Mythology

Over the last three centuries many new nations have come into being. A nation is a community that is basically governed by the will of the people, at least so the citizens of a nation believe. This is opposed to the governments that are really "ruled" by a single ruler or by a small aristocracy in which the citizens have little or no influence. In modern times the saying that "the governed deserve their government!" can only be applied to popular governments, or those states that conceive themselves as such. There is hardly an end to the number of new nations that support a nationalist movement. As early as the 18th century there came the United States of America, followed closely by the Republic of France, Italy, and then many of the colonized nations of South, Central and North America, then Africa and Southeast Asia. All of these new states had a need for some kind of basis differentiating it from any other state. That is to say that the people who identify themselves as "belonging" to any particular nation must have elements demonstrating their superiority. This is the motive for the appropriation and the creation of mythology. It is, in fact, the definition of nationalistic mythology.

It happens then that many new "nations" lay claim to a primordial history and an accompanying mythology, or create a mythology claiming for it a primordial source.¹ Some nations such as Israel, which have only appeared in the last century, lay claim to a long history and mythology to go with the continuity it claims to extend back to ancient Judea. The citizens of Israel see them-

selves as inheriting the 3,000-year-old traditions from their god, Yahweh.

Israel, of course, is a rare case of a modern nation claiming a heritage from cultural roots that date from the distant past. Few other modern nations can claim such a long cultural continuity. In the conflict in Palestine, the Jews lay a much older claim to the area than the Arabs do, albeit, the Arab claim is also based on a mythology peculiar to it. It may be said that the Palestine conflict is one of opposing mythologies. The Canaanite (Phoenician) culture that inhabited Palestine before the Jews has, perhaps fortunately for the present confusion, not left any descendents to counter the claims of either the Palestinians or the Jews.

Japan's national mythology, chiefly an adjunct of Shinto, probably dates from early in the Current Era, and was written down in the early eighth century in the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters), and the *Nihongi* (Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697). It played a large role in what is called the Meiji Restoration, which resulted from the overthrow of the Shogunate by clans supporting the Emperor. Japan became very nationalistic in the Meiji Period and remains so today after several conflicts in Asia and worldwide, though there was a period after World War II when it had lost a great amount of confidence in its cultural ideals formulated by its mythology up until the crushing military loss to the U.S. Since that time, however, though the majority of the Japanese have rejected the mythology itself, it exists in unexpressed ways within the culture, especially within the rituals common in everyday life in Japan.

The Republic of France, which we can date from its revolution in the late 1780s, is only some two hundred years old but is seen by the French people as having a much longer history from the time when it was hardly a single country, and even earlier when an entirely different race inhabited the area that is now France. The modern citizens of France consider all of this "French" history. Not only the mythology concerning the actual founding of the Republic, but much earlier traditions and legends such as the story of Joan of Arc, Charle-

magne, *La Chanson de Roland* became the mythology of the Republic of France, even though the Republic purportedly had rejected religious symbolism.

Colonizers, people having no roots in the land that became their nation and could hardly claim to be the product of a local history or mythology, have formed other recently established nations. The United States is a good example of this type. It was settled by people from other countries and had no ties to the aboriginal population, nor even wanted to have such ties. The Native Americans, of course have a rich mythology, which has been studied and analyzed, but never considered a part of the "nation" of America until very recently. Instead, America created a new mythology to fit its own needs and ideals, a mythology, which for a long time included neither that of the Native Americans nor the blacks who were already a large minority at the time of the foundation of the country. Native Americans were not considered citizens at all, and the blacks were, with a kind of *noblesse oblige* attitude were granted "partial" citizenship by the founding legislators.

Australia and New Zealand are similar to the United States in being nations formed by outsiders and definitely regarding the history and mythology of the previous inhabitants as "other."

In recent years, Australia, New Zealand, America and Canada have recognized a larger role for the original inhabitants of those lands in their history and mythology, and have begun to see their mythology as being a significant factor in the formation of the national culture. In America, the history of the black population has come to be recognized beyond the subservient role it played in mythological antebellum culture of the South and the North. There was, however, a condescending literature in the Northern States, which created the myth that the North was the protector of the Negro. In the future, the histories and mythology of these minorities will undoubtedly be fully incorporated into that of the "nation" and no notice will be taken of the prejudices existing at the time of the founding of the nation.

In Latin America there was a combination of assimilating a previous my-

thology and that of importing a mythology from the colonizing country. Nations such as Peru and Brazil, which were founded by Spanish and Portuguese Creoles revolting against the colonizing power of Spain and Portugal and claim the mythology of the historical inhabitants, mixed with a European Spanish-Catholic heritage.

Mythology Unifies

The basic reason that myth develops and endures is its unifying function for the community or culture, the people, the central theme of nationalism. Nationalism itself is a myth, which seeks to unify all the citizens with a single community of will. In *Nation as Meme*² I cited Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*³ to show the lack of actual substance to what is called a Nation. One of the best examples of this is the one selected by Benedict Anderson, Indonesia.

Indonesian nationalism developed while the Dutch governed what was to become the Nation of Indonesia. In a sense, the Dutch created the nation of Indonesia, first by colonizing a contiguous group of islands and parts of islands under one government and awarding the people of those islands second-class citizenship in a single European nation under whose rule the people discovered a previously non-existing singularity of purpose of throwing off the yoke of that colonizing power. During the time this national sentiment was developing, a national language⁴ developed which had not previously been co-extensive territorially with the area of the colony, a single history and tradition, as well as a full-blown mythology. Admittedly, there has been a great amount of accommodation within the new nationalism of Indonesia to afford a singular national awareness including such diverse cultures as Bali with its Hindu traditions, the Islamic culture of Sumatra and Java with the capital, Jakarta, the Buddhist history of Borobudur, and the Christianity of Batak. and the Roman Catholicism legacy of Portugal in East Timor. Indeed, since the Netherlands

ceded control of its former colony to the new nation of Indonesia, a great amount of turmoil has resulted from the diversity of cultures and traditions within its territory. The dominance of Islam, the religion of 90% of the Indonesians, greatly affected the original incorporation of East Timor into the nation, the following crisis and eventual independence of that "half island." There is little evidence, however, of latent rebellion among the people of Bali, who maintain lively, if somewhat idiosyncratic Hindu traditions, nor the Batak people of northeastern Sumatra, which have their own mainly Christian orientation. The ingress into the area of the colonial powers in the 16th century, and the settlement of spheres of influence between Britain and Holland in the early 17th century gave the Dutch control of the islands now called Indonesia.

Since the beginning of the Dutch control a resistance to the colonizing power grew among the various cultures brought together under that rule. The varied cultures all maintained their own traditions, whether Islamic, Hindu or Christian, and the accompanying mythology, but the additional unifying purpose of independence led to a particularly varied mythology coalescing into one of unification. Still, although the first president, Sukarno, always spoke of 350 years of "colonialism" that his "Indonesia" had endured, Indonesia is a 20th century concept and most of Indonesia was only conquered by the Dutch between 1850 and 1910.⁵ The myth that Indonesia had a kind of unity before the arrival of the Dutch became common thinking after independence.

In spite of its diversity, a common awareness of belonging to a single nation has been fostered through the myth of common cause against the colonizing power. Some peoples of Sumatra just across the narrow Straits of Malacca are related to the populations of the Malay Peninsula ethnically, understand each others' speech and have a common religion. These same Sumatrans share neither mother tongue, ethnicity, nor religion with the Ambonese on islands thousands of miles to the east. Yet they have come to understand the Ambonese as fellow-Indonesians and the Malays as foreigners.⁶

Religion is the basis for the national consciousness in some modern na-

tions, especially Islamic nations such as Iran. Religion might even be thought of as the driving force in the creation of the State of Iran, but this is a rare example. It is more usual for the religion to be a unifying background. The formation of ancient Israel was apparently prompted by religion, as was that of modern Israel which enlisted the ancient mythology in its cause for nationhood. But in other nation-creating episodes such as that of modern Japan, the religion or mythology was more of an excuse to enlist the will of the people in overthrowing the former rulers than an actual motive in the overthrow.

In most states of the ancient world religions were synonymous with any national identity and the ruler was usually religious, especially in places like Egypt where the King or Pharaoh was not merely a priest, but a god.

Rome's emperors from the time of Augustus were proclaimed gods while still alive and intended to be worshipped as such, believing, wanting to believe, themselves to be the unifying factor of the Empire. An Empire with such an eclectic selection of gods as Rome had a difficult time unifying its entire population under one religion until the time that Constantine declared Christianity the state religion. While the Empire deteriorated after this, the Catholic Church promoted a sort of super-nationality with the institution of the Holy Roman Empire, albeit this was in reality a myth that there was a binding religious force holding the states of Europe together. In the case of the Holy Roman Empire, it, as well as the Papal States in Italy, was supposedly supported by the Donation of Constantine, which purported to give the Bishop of Rome claim to all the lands of the Empire. The Church, for a long period, insisted upon the authenticity of this document, later proved to have been a myth itself.

These later attempts to use religion as a political tool of unification were only occasionally successful, in Iran and Japan, for example. Using religion to unify the people, however, is almost a conditioned reflex, harkening back to the days when, for example, the Japanese Emperor could order the *Kojiki* and the *Nihongi* written to reinforce his own authority and unify his realm.

Karl Marx considered religion to be the opium of the working class be-

cause he saw it as being kept in line by the ruling class through religion. He was, however slightly misreading the role of religion. It is not simply a tool cynically used by one class, or even one demagogue, but a part of the national identity in cases where the religion and the nation are co-extensive. The people see themselves as, for example, "Islamic" Irani or "Roman Catholic" Croats. They see religion as part of their rightful heritage, and religion is often the basis upon which popular uprisings develop. The turmoil in the Balkans had a three-cornered religious basis; Orthodox Serbs, Catholic Croats, and the Islamic population left from the days of Turkish rule. Religion was not the tool of the powerful to keep the populace under control, but the unifying factor for the three opposing factions.

In any state, new or old, the need of internal unity among the citizens is constant and the means to this unity may not necessarily be religious, but are usually, perhaps always, mythological, "religious" only being different in the formality. The religions of old are the mythologies of today. And just as new religions are constantly being created today, mythology is likewise constantly created. The foundations of either are approximately of the same character, they serve to create or enhance an ideal, often a "national" ideal.

Even in the British colonies in North America, mythology, including the stories of such heroes as George Washington, Paul Revere and the minutemen and many others, were vital in unifying the heretofore-disparate colonies into the *United States*. The myths surrounding the War of Independence include such stories as "The Boston Tea Party," which assumed a patriotism far beyond the protest against the Tea Tax, the actual motive. The story of the Revolutionary War hero, Ethan Allen, leader of "The Green Mountain boys," has helped foster patriotism in generations of school children, although, his exploits for his "country" were for the "country" of Vermont, which he later even attempted to have annexed to Canada. There is much trivial myth also created for the same unifying purpose, such as the story of George Washington and the cherry tree.

In many nations, seeking a unifying factor, a formal religion would not work. In Indonesia divergent religions, and in the United States as well, religion could not be the main unifying factor. In the U.S. it is not because there were many different religions but because, at the time it was founded, there was a diversity of sects of the same religion. While the original colonies were Christian in orientation, Christianity did not serve as a unifying factor since, on one hand, it was also the religion of the perceived oppressor and, on the other, the diversified sects of Christianity on account of which some had fled Britain in the first place, were mutually incompatible. It was perhaps this background that made it necessary to maintain the integrity of the states rather than forming a new single state, the particular sect of Christianity helping, perhaps, to unify the individual state. The unifying factor of having a common oppressor was offset by the divisive factor of differences in customs and religion. This was responsible for the articles in the constitution separating politics and religion. That the central government "shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise of,"⁷ did not prevent it from proclaiming that men "are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable Rights..." in the Declaration of Independence, and later for Abraham Lincoln in his Gettysburg Address to describe the United States as "*one nation under God*." "God" here, of course, is the Christian God.

The background nationalism in the U.S., however, has had a very religious as well as ethnic undertone as typified in the acronym WASP (White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant) a label which was often worn with pride by Americans identifying themselves with the "roots of America."

Mythology and Patriotism

As I have noted in earlier papers, (National Identity as Meme, Nation as Meme)⁸ the citizen of any nation "belongs" to any nation only in so far as he or she perceives him- or herself to be such, and the will to feel oneself a part of

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a nation or of any other large group must be induced and maintained through communication within the group, including education and mass media. Within this communication, a large portion of that which is aimed specifically at fostering an adherence to the nation is myth, not in the sense that it is false, but in the sense that it presents incidents or action of individuals as epitomizing an ideal or a set of values considered those of the community. Those ideals and values are never questioned as to validity or objectivity but are formal to the particular community/nation. Concretely, the myth of George Washington cutting down the cherry tree and then announcing that he has done so to his father, demonstrates the ideal of honesty (and seemingly condones rather irresponsible actions by children) and attaches it to the "Father of the Country" and, through association, to the country as a whole as a national ideal. Whether the incident actually happened or not, (it did not) is inconsequential since the story is aimed at expressing an aspect of the ideal citizen, not at communicating historical fact. Here I use the word "mythology" to mean the narration of incidents and/or personal actions, which are aimed at fostering a national ideal rather than simple fact and history.

As a child of eight through twelve during the Second World War I experienced a great amount of brainwashing concerning the righteousness of America and its allies, and the fiendishness and perniciousness of the Japanese and Germans. The enemy never had any successes that were not due to some kind of treachery or inhumanity. Actually, very little was noted of the enemies' successes, except for those which could hardly be avoided such as the attack on Pearl Harbor, the loss of the Bataan Peninsula in the Philippines, and the Battle of the Bulge. Pearl Harbor, of course, was labeled "treacherous" from the first and still leads the list of infamous enemy actions. The loss of Bataan to the Japanese was blamed on the overwhelming Japanese forces opposing the "few beleaguered" defenders, and then was translated into Japanese inhumanity in what was labeled the "Bataan Death March."

In the Battle of the Bulge in the European theater of the war, the Germans

were accused of deceitfully pretending to be Americans and misdirecting the American forces, and then of murdering prisoners. The murder of the prisoners may have actually taken place, but wartime national mythology presents these and other such events as proving the inhumanity of the enemy, and the basic humanity of one's own countrymen.

In a particularly strange apposition, the Kamikaze attacks of the Japanese on the American navy in the Pacific were considered demonstrations of the inhuman fanaticism of the Japan soldiers, and of the evil influence of the Japanese Emperor, Hirohito, who pretended to be God. Some months before the Kamikaze attacks became prevalent a certain U.S. Navy pilot name Colin Kelly is supposed to have crashed his plane into a Japanese warship. This event was broadcast as the epitome of heroism, to the extent that his name appeared in a popular patriotic song of the time. There was, of course, never any comparison made between Colin Kelly's action and those of the Kamikaze pilots.

Wartime mythology in Japan was similar in not communicating reverses such as the battle of Midway, and enlarging the successes such as invasion of Attu Island in the Aleutian Island chain.

The mythology of the invincibility of one's own country is a prevalent inconsistency. Both the U.S. and Japan claimed never to have lost a war, but, of course, there had been reverses that are not counted as losses. The U.S. did not consider what is called the War of 1812 against Britain a loss, even though their capitol was burnt and there were several reverses with Canadian based British troops in Louisiana and elsewhere. The war was settled in Europe with America hardly an afterthought. Much later, the Viet Nam War was not labeled a war simply because the U.S. lost. It was, as the Korean War, called an "incident." There is, of course, no one in America who thinks of the war between the states as a war lost, simply because the winning side is the government of the whole country because it has won, a demonstration of the Japanese saying, "when it wins it is the Emperor's army," (勝てば官軍) meaning that, in the sys-

tem of government of the time, the warlord in power was the protector, and therefore had a hold on the imperial authority.

In Japan, the many wars among lords during the "Warring Nation" period were hardly considered losses or wins, nor were the several unsuccessful invasions of the Korean Peninsula considered military defeats. In any case, military loss is considered by most states to be an unforgivable weakness, and in any country historical losses, which must be admitted, must also be the subject of revenge. It was thus that in the Balkans in the 1990's, the pride of the Serbs demanded retribution for the perceived atrocities of the Turks from more than three hundred years earlier.

Ramses II, Pharaoh of Egypt, had many temple walls inscribed with his great victory at Kadesh, against the Hittites. The interesting part of this episode is that it is reported from both the Egyptian and the Hittite side. The extraordinary victory of Ramses is reported as a victory by the Hittites as well. Wading through the propaganda one comes to the conclusion that it was, at best, a draw. Although Ramses did manage to extricate himself from a very precarious situation, he did not achieve his aim, which was to capture Kadesh and subdue that particular part of the Mediterranean coast of the Mid-East.

Mythology and Oppression

Nationalism develops in many ways, all of which involve some kind of opposition to perceived oppression, internal or external. In the case of colonies such as those in Indonesia or those of North or South America or India, the oppressor was the colonizing nation. In France the King was seen as the oppressor, in Iran it was the Shah. Soviet Russia is a special case since in its original revolt against the Tsar it denied the validity of a nationalist awareness, maintaining the myth of world revolution, individual states being irrelevant. Its "National" Anthem was the "International" sung as a hymn to international Communism rather than to the country of Russia. Meanwhile the second-class

subservient states in the USSR were developing nationalist tendencies which only became apparent after the Soviet Union broke up, giving rise to many Nations which had never had existence as an independent "nation" before, such as Gruzija (Georgia), Kazakhstan, and even the Ukraine. These new nations had found their identity while subject to the Soviet Union, and became "nations" at the collapse of the Union. This would also include Russia itself, which could not have been called a "nation" in the sense in which the people saw themselves as the governing elements of the government before the October Revolution, and gained that particular awareness afterwards, without having been able to fully realize it until the dissolution of the USSR. So it could be said that the Tsar served as the oppressor for the formation of the modern Russian state while the USSR served as the oppressor for the succeeding states after its collapse.

The same phenomenon occurred in miniature in Yugoslavia, which was an attempt to unify the Balkan states but ended in tragedy after the death of its founder, Marshall Tito. The case of Yugoslavia is complicated, however, by the fact that the resulting states had pre-existed the formation of the Yugoslavian state, and had pre-existing prejudices resulting from historical circumstances.

Myth has always been a basic tool in resisting the perceived oppression to unify those who feel themselves to be part of an oppressed group, whether it be ethnic, religious, or geographically contiguous. In the case of India, a nation of disparate religions and languages, the unifying factor was the British colonization, and though the language of the educated became English, the resistance to the British finally became insurmountable and India became two "nations" where, in reality, many had existed before. And then, the two became three, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, Pakistan and Bangladesh oppressed by a now overwhelming Indian majority. And these three nations all now have their own particular history and mythology.

In the case of the Persian Gulf War, the outset was the claim by Iraq on

the territory of Kuwait as the "traditional" territory of Iraq. This claim had been made earlier when an independent Kuwait was established by a United Nations decree in 1961. The British had determined the border between Iraq and Kuwait in 1923 when they were protectorates of Britain. There was little basis for using the word "traditional," since the country itself had only existed as a monarchy since 1921. Upon its creation, however, it had acquired a mythology, which gave it claim to an area that includes vestiges of some of the oldest civilizations known, the ancient city-states of Sumer, such as Ur, Uruk and Lagash. The whole history of the world's first civilization was promptly assimilated into the history of the nation of Iraq, even though continuity from ancient Sumer to modern Iraq is hardly sustainable.

Other modern states which lay claim to ancient traditions and mythologies include the modern state of Israel, which pretends to be the direct descendent of the Jewish state that was driven from the area by the Romans more than 1,900 years ago. The state of Israel has a full-blown mythology to support it in the bible and other Jewish traditions and it therefore has one of the strongest mythological bases for unity among nations that have arisen in the modern era.

Heroic Mythology

In ancient mythologies the hero was a major player. By definition, the hero is one who is admired usually for courage and strength and often for heroic activity on behalf of the community, city, etc. The earliest example of heroic mythology is Gilgamesh, thought to be the king of Uruk around 2,800 B.C. The story of Gilgamesh and his friend Enkidu, who had been made by the gods as a companion to help restrain Gilgamesh's baser inclinations, was found written on twelve tablets in the library of Ashurbanipal in Nineveh in 1851 by A. H. Layard. Written in cuneiform it was apparently well known throughout the Middle East, much in the way the Iliad and Odyssey were known throughout the Greek world a thousand years later. This heroic literature certainly had

the purpose of entertainment, but its entertainment value was in presenting extraordinary exploits of a national hero, one struggling with superhuman strength against a foe. Gilgamesh struggled against death, to which he finally had to concede defeat. It was his struggle, however, that made him a hero and admired. It must be presumed that the popularity of the Gilgamesh myth was due to the relationship that people could make with him and his struggle. A struggle against man's plight of mortality is probably the most common and one of the earliest subjects of myth and legend.

The reason that anything or anyone becomes myth or legend is because an ideal is presented by the story. If a perceived relationship can be found in the subject of the myth or legend, it becomes a matter of pride. This is true even for sports heroes whose fans perceive themselves as having some kind of relationship to the hero, even though it may only be that of simply being a fan. In one sense, being the "fan" of a sports hero or team is quite similar to being the citizen of a nation. As I have shown elsewhere, the basic element of citizenship is the perception of oneself as "belonging" to a particular nation, identifying oneself as a citizen of this or that nation.⁹ It follows simply that national heroes are an effective means of creating patriotic emotions among the citizens. From time immemorial national heroes have been grist for the mill grinding out patriotism. Bible stories, David, Samson, Daniel are only a very few of the hero stories that stimulate Jewish nationalism even today. In recent history, Parsifal, an opera by Richard Wagner celebrating the Germanic superiority of the Germanic roots, inspired Hitler and the Nazi party to proclaim a "Third Reich" to last a thousand years, answering the Roman Empire that had also lasted a thousand years. In the case of Hitler, the "Aryan" race was thought to be the most superior race, presuming a connection between the Germans and the Aryans who were certainly a conquering people but hardly limited their expansion to the areas where Germany was located in later ages. Aryans moved out of the Caucasus into Persia, the Mid-East and India sometime around 4,000 ~ 3,500 B.C. and, while they may have also moved west, they probably contributed lit-

tle to the Germanic inheritance, while they probably did contribute a large measure of genes to peoples who were considered inferior to the Germans of Hitler's day. Still, the myth of Aryan superiority was a highly motivating force for the people of Germany during the Second World War. It was with the ideal of Parsifal searching for the Holy Grail and other Germanic heroes such as Henry I who was the ruler of the First Reich, which led the German people to withstand the trials of World War II.

In 1999 I was traveling in Iran and was amazed at the number of huge advertisements on the walls of buildings that commemorated Irani soldiers who had died in the war with Iraq that had concluded several years earlier. They were being celebrated as martyrs and heroes, and certainly intended as symbols of patriotism. The extent to which the war with Iraq had affected Iran was evident in the extent to which the "martyrs" of that conflict were shown in advertisements and their relics shown in displays in airport terminals, etc.

For Germany, the Nazi hero, Parsifal, was, from the beginning, a mythological figure, but in Iran the soldiers being commemorated in the huge advertisements almost certainly lived (and died) in the war with Iraq. The reality, however, is not really the problem. Real or not, they are symbols intended to represent the ideals of the nation. There is little difference between these examples and the deification of George Washington as the "Father of the Country" in the United States of America, who is supposed to have cut down the cherry tree as a boy. George Washington as a boy was not depicted as a military hero or someone searching dramatically for a holy grail, but he was presented as a model for emulation, and this is the common element in all national heroes. The standard for heroism is not objective and heroes of one nation are often despised by another, standpoint determining the evaluation. Benedict Arnold was considered a traitor by the American colonies fighting for independence, but was considered a loyal citizen and hero by Britain.¹⁰ The hero role is one that expresses a national ideal that appeals to the citizens and becomes a source of pride. To the Mongols the ultimate hero is Genghis Khan¹¹ whose history of

conquest expresses the latent power of the Mongols. Today's Mongols do not reflect upon the fact that the peoples of the vast area conquered by Genghis Khan consider him and his army criminal in intent and deed. To them he is still an unmitigated hero. In France one of the most revered heroes (heroines) is Joan of Arc, claimed as a hero by France for her efforts to install Charles VII as King, apparently in accordance with the wishes of God. The background of her actions are considerably in question as to political and religious orientation, but, in the same way as the Japanese "if they win it is the emperor's army," Joan of Arc is revered in today's France as a martyr to the cause of French nationalism, even though the nation of France did not yet exist and her role was expressed as carrying out the will of God in enthroning a rather mediocre king. Only later did royalty become a despised thing in France, but even after that institution was overthrown in favor of the republic, the myth of the Maid of Orleans survives and flourishes, not only in France but in Western Europe and America and within the Roman Catholic world as an example of bravery and fidelity to mission.

King Arthur and the knights of his round table supply extensive mythology for Britain, the return of Arthur promised at the end of Mallory's *Morte d'Arthur* reminds one of the expected arrival of a Messiah awaited by the Jews and the second coming of Christ for Christianity. The stories of Lancelot, Galahad and the other knights have supplied inspiration to the youth of Britain and other countries within the English sphere for centuries. Classic chivalry found in the tales of the Round Table has supplied ideals for many aspiring English gentlemen.

It is not necessary that a hero be perfect. As with the Lancelot affair with Guenevere, the wife of his Lord, in many cases of heroism, the hero is flawed in some way and yet remains a hero. All the heroes of mythology are, in one characteristic or another, defective. Gilgamesh was overbearing towards his people and insulting to the goddess Ishtar: Achilles was unforgiving and vindictive when he felt his honor impugned and is thought by many scholars to have

also been gay: Heracles delighted in murder and mayhem: and Zeus himself was, to say the least, a superhuman philanderer. Yet these flaws are not fatal to the concept of heroism, nor are heroes necessarily presented in order to be emulated in all aspects of their life, but only in those aspects relating to the ideal for which the hero is a representative example.

Historical national heroes are also mythological. That is not to say they did not exist, nor that the deeds they perform did not happen, but that the accolade of heroism is bestowed when the actions are representative of a national ideal such as patriotism, whether such a motive was present or not. The Boston Tea Party was given patriotic status even though patriotism toward a not-yet-existing nation is patently impossible. Thus, in many cases, the event may have actually occurred but not for the motive attributed. In other cases the deed is a case of wishful thinking, such as that of George Washington and the cherry tree. Another of the famous patriots of the War of Independence was Paul Revere who never actually made the ride made famous by Longfellow's poem that millions of school children have had to memorize and recite.

It is not only heroes that become national mythology. Historical and unhistorical events also become rallying points for nationalist sentiments. Such events are almost always involved with conflict and either relate the story of a great victory or some humiliating defeat or atrocity perpetrated against the nation. Storied events for Japan would include the two invasions of Chinese forces under Kublai Khan in the 13th century repulsed by the Divine Wind, and the battle of the Tsushima Straits when the Japanese under Admiral Togo defeated the Russian navy. The atom bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are real history but their meaning and affect on Japanese society is quite mythological. There is almost pride in the Japanese claim to being the only country to ever have been atom bombed, and the further claim to be more aware than any other country of the horror of nuclear war.

For America the confrontations of the American minutemen at Lexington and Concord, the battle of Gettysburg, Pearl Harbor, and many others have

taken on the aura of mythology sometimes far overreaching the affects on the course of the war. For the British there was the Charge of the Light Brigade in Crimea immortalized by Tennyson though known to be the result of a breakdown in communications, and the Battle of Britain in which the RAF was credited with almost single-handedly beating back the German Luftwaffe and the invasion of Britain. This is somewhat open to debate but was so labeled by Churchill at the time and so has achieved the status of an unassailable myth. Throughout history battles have been a huge reservoir of national mythology. The Greeks supply some famous examples. The battle of Marathon perhaps is more known for the fictitious race to report the victory, which has lived down to this day in spite of its doubtful basis. The battle of Thermopylae seems to have been historical, but its worth as inspiration for the Spartan spirit went far beyond its effectiveness in stopping the Persians.

Mythology and Meme of Citizenship

The person who considers him or herself the citizen of any particular "nation," has an image of what that citizenship means in terms of attitude and belief. There is an image of the virtues of that citizens of that particular "nation" should have. They have been taught this basic awareness at home and at school, and through the media and a group of memes, a "memplex" has established itself in the consciousness of the citizen. Very early most citizens of any nation have attached themselves to the community, identify themselves as belonging to it, and most are prepared not only to devote themselves to the perceived goals of the nation as a whole, but will defend the righteousness of the nation in any circumstance. This devotion, the will to belong to and cooperate in national endeavor, "patriotism," must be sustained by the nation in order for it to exist. And the nation, once constituted, has thus become a memplex¹² that has only the goal of maintaining and replicating itself, therefore, one of its first priorities is to foster and sustain this will in the citizens. Among the means

to having the people sustain this will are: concentration on an awareness of being oppressed; of not having receive justice from others; of having participated in a glorious event such as a victory over enemies; having a special mission or a special relationship to God, etc. Thus it is that any event, true or only imagined, will be interpreted and broadcast to fit the patriotic mold. This is, perhaps, one definition of "propaganda," and it may also be one definition of mythology.

Previously I have noted elsewhere that a "Nation" is a non-adaptive phenomenon.¹³ That is to say that it cannot evolve genetically since it requires cooperation with strangers who do not share one's genes. It follows that all such phenomena must be constructed culturally rather than genetically and therefore depend on symbolism for their existence. This symbolic web "includes the rules, definitions and the like that explain *what* one is expected to do. However, it usually also involves a set of symbolic concepts, usually embedded in mythology, that explain *why* one must do as expected. That is to say, cultural imperatives, especially the most important ones, are not seen by members as arbitrary rules. Rather they are embedded in a world-view (or nationalistic view) that justifies their existence and add weight to concepts of good or evil, required and forbidden...."¹⁴ or patriotic and traitorous.

Thus Nationalism demands a mythological mold or form into which the citizens fit and which differentiates the nation and its citizens from other nations. The mold may include ethnicity, religion, specific ideals, interests, occupations or any other value in combination. The typical Irani is, for example, thought to speak Parsi, be Islamic, and usually a lover of Persian poetry and yogurt, among many other characteristics. This particular mold is promoted and reinforced by the nation as a whole. This is not to say the government, but in as much as the government derives its power from the people, the government and society at large support this mythological ideal form/memplex of the Irani citizen. It is not necessary that each and every citizen embody each and every element of this nationality memplex, it is more like the Platonic ideal form of

which the reality may be an imperfect copy. It is usually this mold or memeplex that is being referred to when one says things like, "The Japanese do this," or "Americans like...." Or "The French always...." Of course non-citizens sometimes include negative aspects in such perceptions that are not necessarily promoted by that particular nation. Still, the nationality memeplex always contains elements that differentiate it from any other national form/memeplex. It is the national mythology that supports this memeplex and holds it to be the ideal form of the citizen. As national events occur and new concepts are added to the nationality memeplex pool, new mythology is continually being created to renew and reinforce the patriotism of the citizens.

Summary

Nationalism is a phenomenon in which members of large communities cooperate for the purpose of unifying and strengthening the will of the whole community for the purpose of protection from other communities, for resistance to oppressors, for defense against aggressors, for retribution to harm-intending enemies, and simply for racial, religious or ethnic pride. The unity, being one of mind, must be induced through internal communication that needs a mythology to give it purpose. The truth or falsity of the mythology is not the problem, it is the end for which it is created or related, and the way that it is related that makes it mythological. Even real events are given a mythological twist when their original purposes are re-edited to make them patriotic or nationalistic.

Heroic stories or mythology have as their purpose to inspire citizens to, if not emulation, at least admiration and agreement in the apparent ideals displayed by the hero. The hero becomes an "ideal" citizen displaying virtues that the national memeplex has, through development, come to define the model citizen.

I would venture to say that, in the final analysis, nationalism is a very vig-

orous construct, based on myth, using myth to sustain itself, and partaking of the quality of myth itself.

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Notes:

1. Anderson, Benedict: *Imagined Communities*; Verso, London, 1983.
2. Guerin, Thomas: *Nation as Meme*; Sapporo University Faculty of Cultures; *Journal of Comparative Cultures* 3, March 1999.
3. Anderson
4. Anderson
5. Anderson, p.11.
6. Anderson, p.120-1.
7. Amendment I of the Constitution of the United States of America.
8. Guerin: *The Meme of National Identity*; Sapporo University Faculty of Cultures; *Journal of Comparative Cultures* 6, Sept. 2000.
9. *Meme of National Identity*
10. *Nation as Meme*
11. The heroism of Genghis Khan is cultural rather than nationalistic. The Mongols of Inner Mongolia, a part of China, are as proud of Genghis Khan as those of independent (Outer) Mongolia. But the heroism of Genghis Khan would certainly be an energizing factor if there is ever a movement by Inner Mongolia to achieve independence or unity with Outer Mongolia.
12. *Meme of National Identity*, p.12.
13. *Nation as Meme*, p.75.
14. Chase, Philip G.; *Symbolism as Reference and Symbolism as Culture*; p.40

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