İSTANBUL UNIVERSITY PRESS

İstanbul Üniversitesi Sosyoloji Dergisi

İstanbul Üniversitesi Sosyoloji Dergisi 39(1): 41–64

DOI: https://doi.org/10.26650/SJ.2019.39.1.0013
http://iusd.istanbul.edu.tr

Submitted: May 14, 2018
Revision Requested: August 04, 2018
Last Revision Received: October 28, 2018
Accepted: November 4, 2018

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Durkheim and the Nation

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Abstract

This article elucidates key elements of the Durkheimian framework that bear specifically on studies of nations and nationalism. Durkheim's theory of collective representations and his general theoretical view of the nature of human experience and the constitutive forces of social life are shown to offer leverage on problems of contemporary general interest to sociology. A Durkheimian approach to the study of nations and nationalism centers on three key elements: i) the definition of the form of collective consciousness characterizing the putative national unit; ii) a focus on the historical or genealogical development of the national unit; and, iii) the analysis of this unit in its theoretical aspect as a set of collective representations. Seeing nations and nationalism from a Durkheimian standpoint affords an understanding of these phenomena in terms of what they suggest about the nature of human social order as such. The contributions of Anthony Smith and Liah Greenfeld are discussed in light of this framework so as to make manifest the enduring significance of Durkheim's thought.

Keywords

Durkheim • Nations • Nationalism • Political Sociology • Anthony Smith • Liah Greenfeld

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To cite this article: Malczewski, E. (2019). Durkheim and the nation. *İstanbul Üniversitesi Sosyoloji Dergisi, 39,* 41–64.
https://doi.org/10.26650/SJ.2019.39.1.0013

Scholars of nations and nationalism have recognized the relevance of Émile Durkheim's thought in their endeavors, yet they have not approached their subject matter with a specific interest in Durkheim's general theoretical claims regarding the nature of collective representations (Guibernau, 1996, pp. 21–30, 1997; Hayes, 1926; Llobera, 1994; Mitchell, 1931; Phillips, 1996; Smith, 1983).[2] The result is that scholarship on nations and nationalism misses an opportunity to illuminate in a general theoretical manner the primary *explicanda* of the social sciences – i.e. the causes and functions of states of consciousness motivating action and giving rise to social transformation. To wit, on the question of economic nationalism Takeshi Nakano (2004) makes a compelling case for synthesizing political and economic theory (specifically, as it concerns the relationship between the nation, the state, and political and economic outcomes), although he does not engage with the broader theoretical implications of Durkheim's thought. Such engagement would clarify the nature of the relationship between the state and the individual (see Durkheim, 2003 [1937], 1958) as well as the significance of Nakano's claim that the state is autonomous *vis-à-vis* the nation (2004, pp. 211–216), thereby drawing attention to the difficulty of shaping or mobilizing nations for given ends.[3] Indeed, as Oliver Benoit's work demonstrates, the strength of national identity plays a key role in creating and sustaining regular patterns of action. Benoit's work also illustrates the manner in which other forms of collective representations (such as class identity, where it exists) may impede the formation of strong national identity (2011; 2007). Rogers Brubaker's work examining approaches to how the relation between religion and nationalism may be analyzed invokes Durkheim briefly, but sustained engagement with Durkheim's general theoretical claims is not in evidence (2012). Such an engagement would clarify the extent to which Durkheim anticipates Brubaker's claim that it may be productive to link religion and nationalism to general social structures and processes and to consider them as modes of identification, social organization, and ways of framing political claims (see Durkheim, 1893, 1912, 1915, 2003 [1957], 1938; and also Durkheim, 1958, 2003, p. 50; Cf. Giddens, 1971; Greenfeld, 1996). M. Marion Mitchell's classic paper on Durkheim and nationalism offers a sketch of the theoretical elements of Durkheim's thought as it relates to certain aspects of

2 Although James Dingley's discussion offers an exception; in particular, the cases of Germany and Ireland that he develops do provide a suggestive view of the genealogical development of the collective consciousness (2008, pp. 133–161, 162–214). See also Türkay Salim Nefes' discussion of the influence of Durkheim's concept of collective consciousness on the political and sociological thought of Ziya Gökalp (2013).

3 Nakano claims, for instance, that the state creates individuals and that it also relieves them of communal constraints. These two claims overlook Durkheim's important argument that a more basic form of collective consciousness creates individuals as such and underlies the state. The release from communal constraints is effected by this basic form of collective consciousness and gives rise to regular patterns of action such as the state that facilitate its spread and reproduction (see Durkheim, 2003 [1957], pp. 1–109). Nakano's claim that the more developed the state is the stronger individualism is errs in seeing the state as primary – for instance, the German state of Durkheim's time was highly developed, yet Durkheim himself noted the essential collectivism characteristic of Germans (1915). It may be the case that some states function to secure the rights of individuals, but the state's undergirding principles are structured by the form of collective consciousness.

nationalism, but Mitchell does not develop what Durkheim's claims serve to draw out of scientific studies of nations and nationalism –that is to say that it does not offer a perspective on what studies of nations and nationalism can teach one about human social order in its generality (1931).[4]

The lack of emphasis on general theoretical claims in scholarship on nations and nationalism developed with Durkheim in mind may be attributable partially to the interpretation as to the nature and utility of Durkheim's thought being a controversial matter (Collins, 2005; Lukes, 1973; Malczewski, 2013; Mellor, 2002; Parsons, 1937; Pope, 1973, 1975; Ramp, 2008; Smith & Alexander, 2005; Cf. Alpert, 1939; Gehlke, 1915; Merton, 1934, 1938; Parsons, 1937) and to a constitutive general theory remaining the major lacuna in sociology (Alexander, 1982, 1990; Friedman, 2004; Greenfeld, 2004, 2005; Malczewski, 2014; Sewell, 2005; Tilly, 2005). Alexander Riley notes – quite soundly – that the interpretation of Durkheim (at least in English-speaking sociology) rests "largely on significant misreading" (2015, p. 2; see also pp. 1–6). As Warren Schmaus demonstrates, moreover, commentary on Durkheim generally bypasses questions concerning Durkheim's fundamental epistemological position and how he conceived of the nature of scientific knowledge[5] (including the status of theories and methods) – questions without the answer to which the attribution of any general theoretical view to Durkheim is wanting (Schmaus, 2004, pp. 1–26; Cf. Alexander, 1982, p. 214, 471 fn. 83; Schmaus, 1994, pp. 12–20; see also Vogt, 1976, pp. 38–41). In Smith and Alexander's review of scholarly debates over the interpretation of Durkheim's thought, they identify five typical standpoints of interpretation, three of which emphasize aspects of Durkheim's thought having a general-theoretical bearing (i.e. the structural, semiotic, and interactional/pragmatic aspects). Cultural sociology and, in particular, what Mustafa Emirbayer (2004) has called the Alexander School (centering on Jeffrey Alexander's contributions and his emphasis on the analytical autonomy of symbolic systems, the development of the Durkheimian insight concerning the role of binary oppositions in symbolic systems, and the centrality of ritual in fusing these systems to the embodied experience of actors) is perhaps the most ambitious contemporary program of Durkheimian research in its development of the standpoint concerned with the semiotic strand in Durkheim's work and the explicit aim of linking work on symbolic systems with structural and interactional/pragmatic theoretical entities and processes. In this way, contemporary sociology is offered an approach to the several widely-recognized facets of Durkheim's thought that aims for general theoretical coherence. Cultural sociologists building on a Durkheimian foundation have sought to reinvigorate

4 Apart from his brief commentary (1931, p. 96), Mitchell does not offer a discussion of the defining characteristics of the nation. The nation is taken as given, and Mitchell does not advance an argument as to how Durkheim's theory helps make tractable or explain the *sui generis* qualities of the nation.

5 Schmaus regards Turner 1986 as a notable exception.

nations and nationalism scholarship by providing theoretical insight and raising empirical questions that focus attention on the collective symbolic constitution of identity in its several aspects (Debs, 2013; Greenfeld, 2013; Rose-Greenland, 2013; Türkmen-Dervişoğlu, 2013; West, 2008, 2015; Woods & Debs, 2013; Wyrtzen, 2013; see also Alexander, 2013).

What ought not to be lost in theoretically-driven debates over Durkheim is what I take to be the key substantive implication of Durkheim's thought – the idea that each human society is specific and unique (e.g. 1938b, pp. 197–200). Put differently, the emphasis on Durkheimian explanation and its methods should not overshadow the key opportunity provided for by his thought – the opportunity to situate the description and explanation of any given society (whether or not it is a nation) in a general theoretical framework that makes more clearly intelligible the definite original qualities pertaining to the society in question (namely, those qualities constitutive of the set of that society's defining collective representations). In this way, the work of general theory is to illuminate the distinct nature of the relatively more basic phenomena out of which general theory itself is partially constructed.[6] Durkheim's claim that "In a sense, all that is historical is sociological" not only emphasizes the intimate relation between these two approaches to knowledge (at least when what is meant by history is history practiced as a science) but also calls attention to the historical variability of the phenomena that underlie any general sociological claim (1898c, p. v; also see Bellah, 1959, pp. 448–453).[7] On the question of nations and nationalism, Brad West argues that Durkheimian scholars "neglect an appreciation of historical variance in regards to the nation" (2015, p. 2). Indeed, variance between nations is one vital issue, as is variance within nations across time (West, 2008; see Kim & Schwartz, 2010). Durkheim emphasizes the importance of comparison so profoundly for the reason that it brings what is shared as well as what is distinct clearly into view. Studies of nations and nationalism that engage pointedly with general theory whilst focusing on the individuality and distinctness of particular nations are best at remaining sensitive to this implication.

6 On this point, Durkheim argues the following in the *L'Année sociologique* (year six): national history… can only gain by being penetrated by the general principles at which sociology has arrived. For in order to make one people know its past well, it is still necessary to make a selection among the multitude of facts in order to retain those that are particularly vital; and for that some criteria which presuppose comparisons are necessary. Similarly, to be able with greater sureness to discover the way in which concrete events of a particular history are linked together, it is good to know the general relations of which these most particular relations are examples and applications. (Translation in Bellah, 1959, p. 448)

The original text reads as follows:

l'histoire nationale…ne peut que gagner à se pénétrer des principes généraux auxquels arrive le sociologue. Car pour bien faire connaître un peuple son passé, encore faut-il faire une sélection entre la multitude des faits pour ne retenir que ceux qui sont particulièrement vitaux et pour cela il faut des critères qui supposent des comparaisons. De même, pour pouvoir, avec plus de sùreté, découvrir la manière dont s'enchainent les événements concrets d'une histoire déterminée, il est bon de connaître les rapports généraux dont ces rapports plus particuliers sont des exemples et comme des applications. (1901-1902, p. 125)

7 "En un sens, tout ce qui est historique est sociologique" (Durkheim, 1898c, p. v).

In what follows, I render explicit how key components of Durkheim's conceptual apparatus hang together so as to clarify what a Durkheimian approach to the study of nations and nationalism entails minimally. I illustrate my claims with an analysis of the implications of the work of Anthony Smith and Liah Greenfeld, two classic scholars of nations and nationalism whose Durkheimian approaches to nations and nationalism emphasize the importance of attention to general theoretical standpoints and substantive specificity. I contend that by leveraging Durkheim's general theoretical thought for the study of nations and nationalism the nature of human collectivities, consciousness, and social order in both their generality and specificity may be better known. Engagement with Durkheim also will help to counter tendencies in the scholarship on nations and nationalism to provide localized studies lacking a general theoretical perspective (or, minimally, empirical contextualization with processes of *long durée*) or to neglect to introduce macro-level analytical guideposts (see Eastwood, 2006, pp. 1–22). It will also serve to preclude, as it were, reinvention of the wheel or walking around in theoretical circles.[8]

Collective Representations, Collective Consciousness, History, and the Nation

As Durkheim understood well (1893; 1895), every research program must be distinguished by a central subject matter around which constellations of problems, approaches, concepts, and explanatory theories revolve (see Malczewski, 2013, 2014, 2015b). Given the significance of empirical justification in scientific scholarship, the definition of the relevant set of phenomena and specification of its qualities (to include relevant explanatory relationships within this set) must be the primary task (1895; 1898a). With this in mind, Durkheim built on a foundation of realized instances of action seen from the perspective of their putative social influences, and he linked his definitions to their empirical objects by indexing their distinctive characteristics. At the theoretical level, Durkheim established a link between the main phenomena to be explained (i.e. the theoretical entities he termed collective representations) and the relatively more basic objects (i.e. social facts) in whose principles and patterns the legitimacy of the more general theoretical entities is established (1893, p. xxxvii).

8 Edward Shils' (1995, Cf. 1957) view of nationality as a state of "collective self-consciousness" has two significant theoretical shortcomings that lead him back to his starting point. The first is that Shils' foundational object –the individual– rests on an unexplained foundation: Shils seeks to understand how society is possible whilst leaving the question concerning how the individual is possible unaddressed. To wit, he regards nationality as a conscious state of mind in the sense that it is something added to the individual. The individual, in this way, is taken for granted, hence society rests on an unexplained foundation. The second shortcoming is that the theoretical distinction between regular patterns of action such as the state and a phenomenon such as the nation is blurred in that both forms of society reduce to intentionally-formed collectivities (despite Shils' position that there is something more basic or primordial about the nation). Beginning with the individual, as Shils does, does not permit him to adjudicate theoretically between more or less significant forms of society unless significance is determined quantitatively; given that some states contain a larger quantity of individuals than the several nations they compose, this poses a logical problem for Shils' claim regarding the more essential –putatively primordial– status of the nation.

Durkheim's explanatory claims thus are undergirded by reference to relevant sets of concrete empirical phenomena.[9]

Durkheim defined his most relatively basic set of facts as consisting of manners of acting, thinking, and feeling that are external to the individual and that manifest a power of coercion on him; he termed this basic set of facts *social facts* (1895, p. 5). These basic units of analysis are comprised of symbolically oriented action manifest not only in its performative facets but also in its concretized material ones (1911, 1912 –particularly Book II, Chapter 7).[10] The core categories of the sacred and the profane which Durkheim discusses in his most theoretically comprehensive work, *Les forms élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1912), are categories that are essentially symbolic – i.e. they are categories of phenomena essentially characterized by an arbitrary law-, rule-, or convention-based organizing principle. To recognize the symbolic aspect of an entity is to see (from the standpoint of an actor or a collectivity) its conditioning elements as having undergone a transformation of kind.[11] The symbolic

9 From the standpoint of the philosophy of science, Durkheim's approach has certain advantages. One, it acknowledges that the central subject matter (i.e. the relevant set of phenomena) of scientific inquiry is delineated along lines laid down by the guiding question (see Durkheim, 1901-1902, p. 125). Two, although the central subject matter contains the analytical element of art just mentioned, the empirical phenomena are seen as bearing inherent qualities that resist arbitrary interpretation (Durkheim, 1893, p. xiii; Durkheim, 1895). Three, theories are recognized as works of reason that function as tools for gaining leverage on understanding reality; theories are not true in some as if absolute sense. Durkheim's self-awareness of the nature of the activity he is undertaking remains persuasive (see Alexander, 1982, pp. 1–35; Schmaus, 1994).

10 The centrality of the symbolic in Durkheim's work is most widely recognized by those commentating on *Les forms élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1912), where Durkheim seeks to discover the processes by which categorical principles are created (see Smith & Alexander, 2005). The symbolic aspect, however, is central to all of his work, from his analyses of principle-based action indexed in legal codes (1893), to his underappreciated analyses of the systems of meaning (e.g. military honor codes, Indian funerary rituals, etc.) that exemplify and underlie the four types of suicide he identified (1897), to the value of the individual manifest in the "cult of the individual" typical of certain societies (1898a), to the meaningful bases of social solidarity as found in the collective consciousnesses of contemporary societies (1915; 1938a; 1938b), and in his emphasis on "*règles d'action*" in *Les Règles de la méthode sociologique* (1895). Even his early discussions in *De la division du travail social* (1893) and *Le suicide* (1897) concerning what he calls integration (functional solidarity) and regulation (action effectively guided by symbolic principles) show that the former is largely an effect of the latter – thereby locating the explanatory factors in symbolic principles – in the same way that social volume is a product of moral (also called social or dynamic) density, which refers to the social relations that exist between individuals and that implies a basis of shared meaning (see Johnson, Dandeker, & Ashworth, 1984, p. 159; Schmaus, 2004, pp. 137–145).This evidence demonstrates Durkheim's continuous engagement with symbolic phenomena throughout his career. Durkheim's views on social relationships and their transactional, systemic, and functional characteristics are well-known (e.g. Alpert, 1939; Emirbayer, 1996a, 1996b). For this reason, I emphasize the place of the symbolic element in Durkheim's studies which through most of the 20th century tended to be minimized or even overlooked in sociology outside of France (Morrison, 2001), although cultural sociology has offered a powerful corrective to this historical oversight (Alexander & Smith, 2001; see also Hunt, 1988; Kane, 2000).

11 Although ordering principles are arbitrary in the sense that they do not inhere in the motions, behaviors, or material objects that significantly constitute their phenomenal form (and which are essential conditions of their realization), they are not arbitrary in the sense that individuals may take them or leave them as they wish. One, the ordering principles are external both to individuals as well as to the group of individuals that comprise a given collectivity (Malczewski, 2013, 2014, 2015b). Durkheim's emphasis on the coercive nature of social facts is well known, but equally important is the implicit idea of an elementary reciprocity in recognizing and acting in accordance with an ordering principle – it is the principle itself that constitutes and

aspect is seen as concomitantly *in* the object (i.e. analytically, in the description of its relevant qualities) and *in* the actor or collectivity (i.e. theoretically, as a putative constitutive entity). Social facts refer to types or manners of principle-based or rule-based behaviors that both describe the symbolic aspect of behaviors and locate their scientifically relevant characteristics in patterned social relationships (1893, p. xxxvii).

The analysis of social facts prepares the ground for the creation of basic descriptive concepts, theoretical entities that contextualize and situate those concepts, and explanatory theories that order them.[12] Basic descriptive concepts and theoretical entities are the key elements harnessed in theoretical explanation. In his definition of sociology Durkheim identified its central subject matter (which he regarded as the definition of the central subject matter of social science itself) as *institutions*, or all of the beliefs and modes of behavior instituted by the collectivity (1895, p. xxii). The concept of institutions composes both social facts and theoretical entities that are based on such facts. Institutions are collective representations that endure, and they are seen as both putatively constitutive elements or points of orientation of consciousness and the organizing principles of forms of behavior. The term *collective representations* denotes a category of theoretical entities that serve to define and explain the cognitive states and cognitive functions (forms of consciousness, for short) of the individual actors responsible for creating social facts (1898b, 1901, 1912; see Schmaus, 1994).

As it regards the study of nations and nationalism (indeed, as it regards the study of any form of society whatsoever) the most important form of collective representation is what Durkheim terms collective consciousness (see Malczewski, 2015a). The concept of *collective consciousness* denotes the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average man in a given collectivity, and it is seen to form the basis of the process by which social units cohere, or social solidarity (1893, pp. 35–52). The concept of collective consciousness hence concerns the process of the production of social order in general. As a theoretical entity, this concept concomitantly does two jobs. One, it indexes the defining characteristics of a phenomenon. Two, it references the particular epistemic framework in which it is embedded (in this case, a scientific framework that regards the defining nature of human social order and experience as symbolically constituted and essentially social in the specific sense that individuals

explains social order. Two, the principles themselves are essential to and inseparable from the phenomenal form they take. A mathematical algorithm, for instance, is essentially constituted by its ordering principles – take away the ordering principles and the remaining phenomenon is nonsense. Likewise, observe the *intichiuma* ceremony or the representative, commemorative, or piacular rites discussed by Durkheim, which are only recognizable as coherent events by reference to the ordering principles (1912, pp. 330–354, 374–391, 392–417).

12 The term "theoretical entities" refers to processes or relationships as much as it does to more basic relatively substantial entities. Gravitational force, the American public, and anomie are common examples of relatively non-substantial theoretical entities. H_2O may be considered a relatively substantial theoretical entity (although it presupposes, for instance, the relatively non-substantial effect of gravitational force).

are seen as creatures of a collective process).[13] Beliefs and sentiments, which are two forms social facts take (n.b. there are also others, such as evaluations/value judgments), are phenomena shaped by and realized as symbolic ordering principles (see Durkheim 1911, 1912, 1897-1898). When Durkheim refers to elements of a given form of collective consciousness he is illuminating the symbolic ordering principles that characterize (and by which sense is made of) a body of phenomena, and these elements are always understood from the standpoint of his general theoretical framework. States of the collective consciousness are essentially states structured by symbolic ordering principles. As Durkheim argues, even the putatively most generalized basic categories of thought are seen to come under their control (1912).

Given his interest in explaining key features of modernity and his interest in testing his hypothesis regarding the primacy and causal efficacy of society in defining human experience, Durkheim tended to focus on forms of collective consciousness of the most general or salient nature. The concept of collective consciousness, however, applies by definition to every society of every size and shape. Collective consciousness takes many forms, such as religion, occupation, family, ethnicity, nationality, etc. Such general forms may encompass innumerable subtypes, such as Catholic, scholar, nuclear family, Arab, Russian, etc. There are as many forms of collective consciousness as there are societies. Indeed, the characteristics of a form of collective consciousness constitute the definition of the social entity itself: it is how the entity is recognized as being of a certain kind and is analytically delineated from all other social entities. On this view, even those societies that are seen to be formed by so-called transactional or otherwise structural causes would be seen as products of the process of collective representations insofar as they are societies and not mere heaps (in Aristotle's sense) of individuals sharing the characteristic of having been affected by one process or another. Economic behavior, social stratification, or states of enduring conflict are basically realized by actors guided by arbitrary symbolic ordering principles.[14] It is the orientation to those principles that reveals the existence of a collective consciousness. It is a mistake to conflate orientation to

13 In these ways, Durkheim's view anticipates a solution to two key problems raised by Eric Hobsbawm (1990, pp. 1–13). Firstly, it provides criteria for a scientific concept of the nation. Secondly, it demonstrates that symbolically constituted phenomena – such as members' consciousness of belonging to a nation – is valid as explanatory evidence bearing on the definition of the collective consciousness of a putative nation. Hobsbawm's claim that "defining a nation by its members' consciousness of belonging to it" leads to a tautological definition of the nation does not consider the theoretical view that such members may be creatures of a collective process and, therefore, on this view ought not to be assumed to select or choose their forms of consciousness qua individuals (7-8). Like Shils (see footnote vii above), Hobsbawn interprets such consciousness as a matter of individual choice, and he is rightly suspicious of this. As Durkheim shows, however, this is not the only way to view the matter.

14 Value, status, or justice, for example, are established arbitrarily and are not given as such in a particular ordering of human organisms or collective contexts. The labor theory of value, biological (i.e. race-based) explanation, or even as if universal principles of justice have received heavy criticism for their inability to explain empirically human action (A. Sandel, 2014; M. Sandel, 1982; Walzer, 1983).

a set of principles or its functional or performative aspect with consensus, a concept alien to Durkheim's framework, as has been done (Alexander, 1988, pp. 195–198; Bernard, 1983; Dayan & Katz, pp. 161–166; Hunt, 1988, p. 30; Parsons, 1937). It is the voluntarism implied by consensus in which Durkheim is arguably least interested (see Schmaus, 1994, pp. 13–15). It is a strictly empirical matter whether a given individual participates in a form of collective consciousness. The ordering principles need not endure (as seen in social currents and fashions, the tendency of which is to pass quickly), although it is the enduring ones that often matter most for sociological explanation.

In studies of nations and nationalism, the collective consciousness of the putative national unit or group is the lodestar. The characteristics of such a form of collective consciousness constitute the definition of the nation itself and, once they are discovered, elucidation of the process of the formation of those characteristics serves to make sense of them in addition to contributing to what we know about the creation of social solidarity and social order in general. Forms of collective consciousness are seen by Durkheim to develop in history. Emphatically, although Durkheim sought to create a science that permitted sociological explanation, history plays a key role in his framework. In order to understand the place a given form of the collective consciousness has in social life as a whole, analysis of historical context is of paramount importance. Every characteristic element of a given form of collective consciousness is recognized as having a process of formation of its own, and the context of its creation reveals its role or function as well as its nature and significance. This holds for the form of collective consciousness as well as its elements.

Durkheim's emphasis on history makes clear that even when sociological analysis turns its attention to the individual or the historical event the significant phenomena are seen as socio-historically constituted. Durkheim's approach allows one both to identify the principles and significance of a given action or set of actions as well as to discover whether a particular form of the collective consciousness is a variety of another species or if it is to be regarded as a manifestation *sui generis* (1938a; 1938b). History thus entails accounting for contingent actions in addition to accounting for a series of such actions understood as cohering one way or another and illuminating the nature of that coherence (see Bellah, 1959). The choice regarding the taxonomic rank to be assigned to a particular form of collective consciousness is adjudicated best according to the degree of fit with the empirical data with reference to the guiding question.[15] By revealing the conditions and causes of the development of the elements of a given form of collective consciousness, the study of the past permits the sociological understanding of the present. Durkheim sees all human institutions

15 For example, it is conceivable that some forms of ethnicity –say, African-American– may be varieties emergent from nations, which suggests an empirical reversal of the general pattern identified by Smith (see Du Bois, 1903; Smith, 1986).

as being rooted in history; hence history offers the key to understanding the genesis of such institutions and the role these institutions serve in a given historical context (1898c; 1901-1902). Methodologically speaking, the historical approach involves isolating the defining characteristics of the collective consciousness and examining how they developed in time. The elements of the collective consciousness must be isolated and explained, which is to say that their conditions and causes must be discovered (see 1938a; 1938b).

Durkheim never conducted a study of nations and nationalism, but he did develop certain arguments that illuminate phenomena of specific interest to scholars of nations and nationalism. His view of French and German collective consciousness and his conception of the state are two salient ones. First, his discussions of key features of French and German collective consciousness, although they are schematic, function as guiding lights that may lead scholars to the kind of phenomena he thought worthy of attention and systematic investigation (Malczewski, 2015a; see also Durkheim, 1961 [1925], p. 234; Fournier, 2013, pp. 75–78, 298–302, 451–453). He notes that the French are characterized by a basic Cartesianism and that the contemporary French of his day could be said to recognize the individual as a sacred being and to accord him supreme value (1898a, 1938a, b). The German collective consciousness, in contrast, is said to regard the state as the highest form of community, and, in this way, the state itself is sovereign and above or superior to the individual (1915). Durkheim claims that the state is power in the German collective consciousness, and through this we understand phenomena such as German conquest, annexation, and disregard of the rights of nationalities. Durkheim claims that these qualities are visible in the motto "*Deutschland über alles*" (or "Germany above all") as well as in the writings of Heinrich von Treitschke, the late-nineteenth century writer and political figure whom he takes to be a paradigmatic representative.[16] What is perhaps most clearly of enduring value in this short work is the manner in which Durkheim analyzes social facts such as mottos, texts, and historical events in order first to define the putative characteristics of the collective consciousness and then to posit how this form of collective consciousness developed and how it bears on action. Durkheim thus provides a strong complement to *Les forms élémentaires de la vie religieuse* in the demonstration of his methodological approach and theoretical ambition.

Second, Durkheim defines the state as "the people awakened to a consciousness of itself, of its needs and its aspirations" (1915, p. 27).[17] The conception of the people

16 His commentary on Germany must be treated cautiously, however. The defining characteristics of the German collective consciousness are found in his essay *L'Allemagne au-dessus de tout: la mentalité allemande et la guerre*, which was written during the first part of World War I and may be said to lack scholarly detachment.

17 His definition of a *people* and his discussion of *civil society* provide context (1915, p. 27–34).

Durkheim has in mind is a collective he terms *political society*, which is "the coming together of a rather large number of secondary social groups, subject to the same one authority which is not itself subject to any other superior authority duly constituted" (1992 [1957], pp. 42–45). A people is thus a politically sovereign entity comprised of a number of various groups each having a form of collective consciousness of its own by which it may be recognized analytically.[18] In referring to the people being awakened to a consciousness of itself Durkheim means that the nature of the collective representations produced by the officials or agents of the state have an explicit nature –that is to say that the collective representations are relatively clear, vivid, and have a specific self-consciously recognized intent (1992 [1957], p. 50; see also 42–54). These representations differ markedly from those of the general collective consciousness in that the latter are several, diffuse, and often obscure (as in the case of myths or legends). The intensity with which the collective representations of the state are experienced Durkheim sees as being akin to the intensity of feeling corresponding to restitutive law that he discusses in chapter three of *De la division du travail social*, which is to say that not only are they not intense but also that they might not be felt at all (1893).

A Durkheimian approach to studies of nations and nationalism hence begins with the definition of the form of collective consciousness of the putative national unit and an understanding of how its characteristic elements developed in history. It then entails an analysis of the causes and functions of key qualities of that form of collective consciousness in its aspect as a putative set of collective representations conditioning and effecting action and social transformation. Put differently, a Durkheimian approach commences with a relatively basic descriptive and historical level of analysis to establish a key conceptual object and then proceeds to a higher-level inquiry into more complex relationships of causality, function, and theoretical significance. Durkheim's general theoretical view of collective representations – namely, the view that analysis of action can provide insight into the causes and functions of aspects of consciousness that are etiologically social and that structure action and social transformation – in this way situates the empirical phenomena at the center of studies of nations and nationalism in a framework befitting their supposed general significance. It also serves to make of each case a discrete contribution to the understanding of an actual, particular, historical collectivity.[19] This approach places an emphasis on the realm of symbolically constituted phenomena, which is

18 This conception is nearly indistinguishable from his view of a *nationality*, which he defines as "a group of human beings, who for ethnical or perhaps merely for historical reasons desire to live under the same laws, and to form a single State, large or small, as it may be: and it is now a recognized principle among civilized peoples that, when this common desire has been persistently affirmed, it commands respect, and is indeed the only solid basis of a State" (1915, p. 40).

19 In this way, Durkheim's approach counters the tendency to treat nations as mere type cases or epiphenomena (e.g. Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1990).

taken to be of key importance both to understanding the *sui generis* characteristics of nationalities and to shedding light on the general bases of human social order.

What is perhaps most useful for studies of nations and nationalism is that Durkheim's approach offers a theory with an explicit epistemological position (including a number of metatheoretical markers, such as his view – one that is rooted in empirical evidence – that the symbolic aspects of sacred entities are not fixed and tend to transform[20]), enabling the achievement of clarity regarding the general implications of scholarship on nations and nationalism carried out along these lines. Studying nations and nationalism from a Durkheimian standpoint affords an understanding of phenomena in terms of what they suggest about the constitutive principles of human collectivities and, in particular, provides insight into the relationship between the symbolic dimension of human experience and social transformation.

In order to illustrate the Durkheimian approach to the study of nations and nationalism, I discuss Anthony Smith's influential *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (1986) and then turn attention to Liah Greenfeld's key contribution to the understanding of nationalism (1992) and her more recent work examining the functional implications of nationalism for contemporary society. The work of these two scholars has been singled out in order to draw attention to the general theoretical value of work on nations and nationalism and its basis in history as seen from the Durkheimian standpoint elaborated here.

Ethnies, Nations, and Nationalism

Although Anthony Smith and Liah Greenfeld pose questions concerning different facets of nations and nationalism, there is a striking convergence at the level of analysis and its significance for general social theory in the accounts they provide in explaining the nature, conditions, and causes of the form of society – i.e. the general type of collective consciousness – known as the nation (Smith, 1983, 1986, 1991, 1996, 1998, 2002, 2014; Greenfeld, 1992, 2001). The Durkheimian intuitions driving their work are, in this way, perhaps clearest. At the center of their major studies is an engagement with social facts with an emphasis on the defining characteristics of collective consciousness and how they developed historically. Smith's and Greenfeld's views regarding the genealogical development and historical status of the nation have parallels, although Greenfeld makes a strong claim regarding the recent emergence of the nation that nuances Smith's classic refutation of "modernist" views and highlights the emergent and *sui generis* nature of the nation form and its import for modernity (Greenfeld, 1992; Smith, 1986, 6–18). Perhaps most importantly, Smith's and Greenfeld's work opens a vista on the nature of human society as such. A brief overview of their contributions in this regard follows.

20 See for instance Durkheim's discussion of the impure sacred. Cf. Kurakin (2015).

Anthony Smith

In *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Smith traces the roots and ethnic foundations of nations (1986). The central object of inquiry is a particular pattern or tendency between one form of society (i.e. ethnic community, or "ethnie") and another (i.e. the nation). Smith's guiding question, in this way, has the aim of grasping the process of differentiation genealogically whilst delineating the characteristics of putative ethnies and nations. The study's theoretical power lies in the conjecture that the nation is significantly conditioned by a form of large-scale collective identity that has existed in various epochs and amongst different groups that suggests a general pattern of human social order. The focus on a specific form of collective identity –i.e. ethnie– brings one closer to understanding the *sui generis* qualities of that form (this meets the basic threshold for conceptual development) and the study of the relationship between that form and another –i.e. the nation– sheds theoretical light both on the general question of social transformation and on the nature of human social order as such.

Smith's concept of *ethnie* –defined as "named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity"– denotes a putatively general form of collective consciousness (1986, p. 32). This general form is proposed to be commensurable to other general forms such as religion, occupation, or family. Particular ethnies (e.g. Normans, Greeks, etc.) refer to specific types of collective consciousness within the general form, and, therefore, they denote specific empirical societies within the common type. To refer to a given collectivity as "Greek" from this perspective, for instance, is to say that the beliefs and sentiments common to the average man in that collectivity exhibit certain typical characteristics.

Smith places an emphasis on understanding a number of theoretical entities seen to drive action: sentiments, attitudes, and perceptions. These entities are regarded as key explanatory elements. They are the putatively effective forces of society that analysis of the collective consciousness allows one to see. Smith's adoption of Durkheim's theoretical view is here most in evidence insofar as Smith indicates it is where he expects explanatory power to be found. Smith acknowledges that mechanisms of diffusion and transmission help complete the account, but these mechanisms are analytically secondary. The significant empirical facts or more basic objects underlying Smith's concept of ethnie are myths, memories, values, and symbols. These more basic objects are seen to index the sentiments, attitudes, and perceptions that are regarded not only as the defining qualities of a particular form of social solidarity but also as the most telling indicators of the states of consciousness that drive action – i.e. the *explicanda* of sociology (1986, p. 15).

What Smith's work brings into view is the central importance of symbolic phenomena taking the form of myths, memories, and values in the construction of a general theoretical view. Ethnies are theoretical entities constructed out of essentially symbolic phenomena, and their process of development is explained historically. The epistemological relationship between the relatively more basic symbolic phenomena engaged at the descriptive level, the mid-level theoretical entities that he constructs out of them (i.e. sentiments, attitudes, and perceptions), and the more general and encompassing theoretical entities he postulates (e.g. the Greek ethnie) is in plain view. Such general theoretical entities comprehend the characteristic principles defining a putatively extant or once-extant form of consciousness that help illuminate the actions and ways of life of a particular population. Myths, memories, and values are symbolically constituted phenomena whose organizing principles may provide insight on the nature of human experience. With the adoption of a Durkheimian *attitude mentale*, the study of them in this way illuminates the extent to which some phenomena (e.g. collectivities, events, geographic locations, etc.) are relevant by ascribing analytical significance to them and conveys meaning to actions, events, and other phenomena.

Liah Greenfeld

A signal contribution of Liah Greenfeld's work is her focus on the processes of social transformation that give rise to nations. Her work offers a genealogical account of the emergence of nations and nationalism and examines the transformation of societies that became nations whilst accounting for both the roles of other forms of collective consciousness – such as, in the case of France, Catholicism and *noblesse* – as conditions providing the symbolic material out of which particular nations took shape and the roles that social carriers of these forms of consciousness came to play in spreading national consciousness (1992; 2001). Greenfeld argues that the nation form emerged in early sixteenth-century England. The *sui generis* qualities of the nation –the qualities that make this form of society distinct and that legitimate Greenfeld's claim about the nation's modernity– are the conceptual linkage of the "people" with an "elite" and the essentially secular view of reality whose essential status component entails the principles of fundamental equality of membership in a community and popular sovereignty (1992, pp. 3–26, 31–87, 2013, p. 2). Empirical instances of nations manifest characteristics that set them apart from one another in striking ways. To wit, the conception of a people as sovereign (originally, in England) was transformed as it spread to mean, in certain cases (e.g. Germany and Russia), a *unique* sovereign people. This crucial difference characterizes what Greenfeld terms "civic" versus "ethnic" nations and reflects a major difference in criteria for the inclusion or exclusion of members of specific nations.

Although Max Weber's influence stands out most clearly in Greenfeld's early work, her theoretical perspective is, at its base, essentially Durkheimian.[21] One of the core theoretical insights structuring her work is that the function of a form of collective consciousness provides insights reaching beyond the case of historical interest and illuminates essential social processes. The most salient manner in which Greenfeld's focus on function offers analytical purchase is her extensive treatment of moments of social transformation putatively brought on by the inadequacy of a form of consciousness in emergent social contexts (1992, pp. 44–51, 133–154, 293–314; 2001, pp. 242–267). One of her key explanatory concepts, anomie, develops Durkheim's concept and is embedded in an epistemic framework that sees nationalism as a first-order *explanans* for social order in modern societies. Her development of the concept of anomie into a theoretical entity denoting not only a structural insufficiency of symbolic order but also a psychological state of being with observable effects on the functionality of mind is more revealing (2005a, 2013, p. 5, 8, 27–31, 178–210, 620–626). Greenfeld argues that the structural inconsistency or experiential lack of fit between certain forms of consciousness and lived experience precipitated the national form of consciousness that better accounted for the experience of actors. She details the significant ways in which national consciousness came to reshape the key structures of the societies in question, and the historical evidence she marshals makes apparent the process of change –e.g. showing both how forms of collective consciousness precede the creation of regular patterns of activity such as modern economy and develop along the lines laid out by this form of consciousness (Greenfeld, 2001). This discussion suggests that the study of collective consciousness reveals the way that collective representations function at the level of the individual and, more specifically, that the core principles of nationalism create functional demands on individuals which are linked to creativity as well as mental disease (Greenfeld, 2013; see Cerulo, 2014). In this way, Greenfeld's first-order analysis of the genealogical development of the nation form and its specific characteristics in historical cases (e.g. English individualism, French civic collectivism, etc.) leads to the development of second-order analysis engaging the level of collective representations –in this case, their function.

Durkheimian theory is advanced by Greenfeld, moreover, by a theoretical conceptualization of the anatomy of the mind. Greenfeld places emphasis on collective representations and posits a model of how they manifest in a putative functional structure of the mind (2013), and she proposes a general model of the relationship between features of collective consciousness and the structures of mind and culture. Such explicit theoretical development of the several epistemological levels of analysis into a theory of mind and of culture not only owes a debt to Durkheim in

21 Elsewhere Greenfeld has emphasized her relationship to Durkheim more strongly (Greenfeld, 2004, pp. 288–322, 2005a, 2005b, 2007, pp. 125–142, 2013).

the theoretical ambition he enabled, but it also thus ties together the implications of Durkheim's three major works in their emphasis on how collective representations transform human bodies (1893, 1897, 1912).

The endurance of certain social forms is an object that Durkheim's thought helps analyze and explain. Both Smith and Greenfeld wish to understand why it is that some forms of collective consciousness go so deep as to endure over long periods –especially in contexts of apparently widespread social change. The centrality of one's ethnic community is experienced, in Smith's words, as "natural" and "proper" (1986, pp. 48–49). Greenfeld argues that in societies defined as nations, national consciousness not only offers a view of one's general identity in a collective but also that the fundamental secularism and view of popular sovereignty provide the image of reality as such for members of the nation that extends well beyond the question of collective identity (1992, pp. 3–26, 2013, pp. 1–31).

Discussion

The implications of Durkheim's thought for studies of nations and nationalism for general sociology are patent. The empirical research noted above demonstrates that the constituent parts of forms of collective consciousness are adaptable, which is to say that the elements that comprise a form of society are seen as dynamic and malleable (Cf. Alexander, 2013, p. 694). This key point is in evidence on every page of Durkheim's two-volume *L'Évolution pédagogique en France* (1938a; 1938b) and directly challenges the misguided view of Durkheimian theory as being fundamentally conservative (Bernard, 1983) and unable to address social variability and transformation – indeed, the essence of Durkheimian theory may be said to be the problem of social variability and transformation. As Brad West's recent work demonstrates, Durkheimian theory offers an approach that helps make sense of the revitalization of forms of collective consciousness – including the nation (2008; 2015). The genealogical intuition guiding the Durkheimian approach to historical transformation stands out here, particularly in the linkage of micro- and macro-sociological analysis it affords; hence comparatively more subtle transformations of social order can be accounted for alongside more salient ones.

The Durkheimian approach entails an epistemic framework that interprets human social order as unfolding from symbolically constituted conditions. As seen in Smith's and Greenfeld's work, their basic first-order subject matter –i.e. myths, memories, values, etc.– is comprised of a set of reality that is symbolically constituted. Second-order analysis suggests that sentiments, attitudes, and perceptions are the theoretical entities that are the key to explanation given that they are posited to be the states of consciousness motivating action and bringing about social transformation. A

complete theoretical treatment of these entities demands a discovery of their causes and functions. Theoretical development on this front remains a major opportunity – as Durkheim notes, it is a mistake to leave these questions to psychology, given that the phenomena in question have peculiar qualities demanding methods and theories suited to them (1898b). As Greenfeld's work suggests, inquiry into the relative sufficiency or adequacy of the symbolic orders offered by various nationalisms can illuminate not only the functional processes of the societies in question but also may lead to the better understanding as to how variations in the levels of symbolic order (see Durkheim, 1897) may be productive of social transformation.

On this note, two of the biggest opportunities for contemporary studies of nations and nationalism pursued along Durkheimian lines is found in the focus on the symbolic element in, respectively, the study of ritual and the study of materiality. Smith's development of Durkheim's insights on the significance of ritual helps clarify the ways in which the symbolic aspect is tied to the repetitive element of performance (Smith, 2014). This insight is developed elsewhere to great effect by Robert Bellah and also in Rachel Tsang and Eric Taylor Woods' recent volume (Bellah, 2005; Tsang & Woods, 2014; Cf. Deacon, 1997). The constitutive and reproductive importance of the symbolic element in material reality is at the center of recent studies in materiality or what Jeffrey Alexander calls (in a most Durkheimian manner) "iconic consciousness" (2008; 2010; 2012; see also Bartmanski, 2012, 2014; Bartmanski & Alexander, 2012; Malczewski, 2016). The implications for studies of nations and nationalism appear clear (Rose-Greenland, 2013; Verdery, 1999; Zubrzycki, 2011).

Finally, taking forms of collective consciousness as the key explanatory variables, core features of political society –e.g. the state– are better understood. To be clear, on this view state processes and policies are in a key respect dependent on the society that enables and legitimates them. Although the state's organizing principles are products of the collective consciousness, the state is not a mere reflection of the collective consciousness.[22] The organizing principles reflect the collective consciousness partially and are conditioned by the historical milieu in which they were realized. More importantly, the localization of these principles in a specific pattern of action indicates a relatively autonomous form of society within the society of origin. In this way, the state and the society at large (of which the state is a part) reciprocally condition and shape one another.[23] Nevertheless, the difference between these two societies is marked. In the one case the society with the more encompassing form

22 Smith appears to conflate nation and state (1991, p. 14; 1998), although he seeks to render the distinction clearer in his later work (2002, p. 15; see Guibernau, 2004).

23 Durkheim's under-read work on socialism and the role of professional guilds illustrates this point most clearly. See 1958 and 1938a, b. Also see the comprehensive discussion of professional guilds in the original introduction to the first edition of *De la division du travail social.* This discussion was truncated significantly for the second edition upon which translations in English are based and which is also the standard version reprinted in French.

of collective consciousness lacks a structure of which it is self-aware. In the case of the state there are organizing principles to be found that are concretely established and through which action is consciously and deliberately guided; there is as it were a self-consciousness in the collective consciousness of the state. Once instituted, however, the state is expected to develop according to a relatively autonomous logic (n.b. this is an empirical generalization). The aims and functions of the state develop along lines provided by the constitutive principles – i.e. the most sacred elements of its collective consciousness (see Durkheim, 1915, pp. 27–40, 1958, pp. 53–54, 2003 [1957], pp. 49–50; also see my footnote ix in the present article). Emphatically, Durkheim's view is not deterministic: the generative principles which guide the state remain open to change. The point is that this form of social organization develops in a deliberate manner, guided by principles that are objects of contemplation.[24]

The aim of the state in general is to enact the will of the sovereign authority, and the characteristic organizing principle is the form of collective order –i.e. the form of the political society– according to which the agents of sovereign authority pursue this aim. Durkheim's insight is that the generative principle that defines the form of collective order expresses the nature of the society in which it was born as well as the contexts of its historical origin.[25] The form of collective order of a given state is then seen to have organizing principles reflecting the nature of the society in which it emerged and the historical conditions that afforded its emergence. It follows that to grasp the nature of a state is to approach the question in a general theoretical manner seeking first and foremost to determine the qualities of the collective consciousness of the political society that gave rise to it and then to use the understanding of this collective consciousness to identify the nature of the symbolic ordering principles that constitute the state's domain and aims. To grasp the nature of a given state is thus to understand the collective consciousness of the political society it serves and to use this, for instance, as a measure to comprehend the degree to which the state in question is autonomous or the extent to which it shapes reciprocally the qualities of the political society in question.

These are just some of the ways that Émile Durkheim's theory of collective representations offers a framework that continues to bear fruit just over 100 years since the publication of his last major work. In its emphasis on questions tied to a general theoretical framework and an approach to historical subject matter that is scientific in its aims, it offers the study of nations and nationalism a clear route to progressive research. Rethinking the study of nations and nationalism and recognizing Durkheim's continued relevance on questions of general theory can help

24 The state offers an exemplary instance of a "patterned activity" (Malczewski, 2014).

25 On this view, Durkheim owes a debt to Montesquieu, who sought to attain purchase on the underlying causes of political regimes (Durkheim, 1960, pp. 1–64; Montesquieu, 1989, pp. 308–336).

to reinvigorate sociology in the 21st century as well as programs of research that use sociology's guiding lights.

Grant Support: The author received no financial support for this work.

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