In Search of Natural Identity: Alpine Landscape and the Reconstruction of the Swiss Nation

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Elias Canetti, in a brief passage of his *Crowds and Power* (first published in German in 1960), argued that neither language, nor territory or history are at the heart of what today we would call national identity. What nations can not do without, however, and what has contributed most to turning different individuals into conscious members of a particular nation, is a national "crowd symbol." Canetti then went on to show that most European nations possessed one such symbol around which a popular feeling of national belonging could be generated and sustained. In the case of England, he maintained, it was the sea that took this function; while for the Germans it was the forest. In France, on the other hand, it was the Revolution that came to play this very role. And in Switzerland—the case Canetti probably knew best from his own experience—it was the mountains (see Canetti 1960:191–203).

While it would be difficult for me to judge the accuracy of Canetti's comments on national mass symbolism in the English, German, and French cases, I broadly agree with his statement about the important role of Alpine symbolism in Swiss national identity. But why the mountains? Here his admittedly thumbnail explorations need some qualifying. First, there was nothing inevitable about the Alps becoming Switzerland's most salient national symbol—an impression that one could easily get from reading Canetti's text. On the contrary, it was under particular circumstances and as a result of context-bound ideological activities that the Alps evolved into a national mass symbol of the Swiss. Second, as a national mass symbol, the Alps did not replace but, rather,

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complemented history: The national past, or to be more precise—the popular memory of that past—was closely intertwined symbolically with the Alpine landscape.[1]

Starting from these premises, this essay explores the role of Alpine landscape in the formation and reconstruction of Swiss national identity from the late eighteenth century to the end of the Second World War. It proceeds, first, by tracing the history of thinking about geography and cultural characteristics and by developing a framework for the analysis of the relationship between landscape and national identity. It then distinguishes, in the substantive part of the analysis, between the two historical phases that each gave rise to a distinct conceptualization of the relationship between Alpine landscape and the Swiss nation. The first one (prevalent from the late eighteenth century to the 1870s)—what I will call the "nationalization of nature"—is metaphorical: The Alps reflect what is held to be authentically Swiss. The second conceptualization (prevalent from the 1870s until roughly the end of World War II)—what I will call the "naturalization of the nation"—is deterministic: Alpine landscape is portrayed as determining "national character." The last section looks in some detail at the popular bases of the Alpine myth, and discusses the reasons for its widespread appeal.[2]

LANDSCAPE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN HISTORY AND THEORY

Thinking About Geography and National Character in History

Attempts to establish meaningful links between nature and culture communities are not confined to the modern era. Since Antiquity, various groups, or peoples, have turned to their natural environment as a source of inspiration and collective identification. It was probably in the Hellenistic world that some of these themes were first developed in a more or less rigorous manner. These have remained at the heart of natural discourse ever since: The juxtaposition of rural and urban life, as well as the notion that certain physical environments might be more favourable to the emergence of high civilizations than others, provide examples of such themes. Some Greek dramatists in particular, such as Aeschylus and Aristophanes, or the historian Herodotus, referred in their writings to climatic factors to account for cultural difference. These Greek precedents, in their turn, exerted considerable influence on Roman writers. This became apparent, for example, when Tacitus, in the first century AD, described the Ger-

[1] Here I am following Pierre Nora's distinction between "history" (which, in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century, came to be dominated by the standards set by professional historiography) and "memory" (for which historical myths and popular narratives about historical events are constitutive). In Norra's words (1996:4):"Historiography begins when history sets itself the task of uncovering that in itself which is not history, of showing itself to be the victim of memory and seeking to free itself from memory's grip."

[2] Most quotations used in this article originally appeared in German or French and have been translated into English by the author.

manic tribes as rude and primitive and mentioned how closely tied they were to the Teutonic woods to support this claim.[3]

Yet it is only in the sixteenth century, that is, during a period marked not only by the discovery of non-European cultures but also by territorial consolidation and the rise of national consciousness in some European countries, that we witness a fairly widespread change in perception from nature as a more general idea to the more specific notion of a landscape.[4] A statement of Stefano Guazzo, dating from 1574, in which the author tries to explain alleged national differences by referring to a mixture of climatic and environmental factors marks this transitional stage: "There is no help for it, but you must . . . think that every nation, land and country, by the nature of the place, the climate of the heaven, and the influence of the stars has certain virtues and certain vices which are proper, natural, and perpetual."[5]

All things considered, however, neither geographical determinism nor cultural voluntarism prevailed in the works of early modern thinkers. Rather, the two conceptualizations of the relationship between nature and cultural activity made for a dualistic, and sometimes even conflicting, dialogue. That is to say, alongside the argument that nature in general, and geography in particular, delimited the scope open for voluntary human actions,[6] there existed at the same time the belief that human beings should interfere in nature for the sake of culture. In fact, this latter notion figured prominently in the theories of a great many outstanding thinkers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (that is, Machiavelli, Botero, Charron, or Milton). In its broad form, this belief asserted that a people's degree of civilization found its clearest expression in its ability to cultivate nature. Perhaps Giovanni Botero best encapsulated this classical ideal in his *Reason of State* (1589): "Nature gives a form to the raw materials and human industry imposes upon this natural composition an infinite variety of artificial forms; thus, nature is to the craftsman what raw material is to the natural agent."[7]

[3] Schama (1995:83–84 and 254–5). For an in-depth analysis of ideas about the natural environment in Antiquity, see Glacken's illuminating *Traces on the Rhodian Shore* (1967:pt. 1).

[4] Schama (1995:10). Hirsch (1995:2) maintains that the term landscape has its origin in the Dutch word *landschap.* It was introduced into the English language in the late sixteenth century "as a technical term used by painters." Lowenthal (1978:377) maintains that the notion of a landscape emerged where significant parts of the natural environment began to be perceived in scenic rather than strictly utilitarian terms.

[5] Quoted in Hale (1994:55). On the boost of climatic theories in the sixteenth century, see Glacken (1967:449–56).

[6] A way of reasoning so clearly expressed in what may rightly be regarded as the two greatest works on the influence of the environment on human beings appeared in the sixteenth century, Jean Bodin's *Methodus (* 1566) and *Republic (* 1576)

[7] Quoted in Glacken (1967:371). As Thomas (1983:257) argued in his recent analysis of attitudes towards nature in early modern England:"For the neo-classical theorists of the later seventeenth century, it was axiomatic that geometrical figures were intrinsically more beautiful than irregular ones."

More systematic efforts to illuminate the link between particular natural environments and alleged national characteristics were to follow in the eighteenth century, especially in the works of Montesquieu (1689–1755), Rousseau (1717–28), and Herder (1744–1803). As was the case with their precursors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the works of many of these authors reveal, although to varying degree, a tension between the notions of geographical determinism and human voluntarism, that is to say, between an emphasis on humankind being a product of geography on the one hand and on its role as a geographical agent capable of cultivating nature on the other. For Herder, for instance, as he cogently expressed in his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784–91), geography was merely one among several important factors affecting the course of cultural development and must take its place alongside "the circumstances and occasions of the times, and the native or generated character of the people." [8] And even in the work of Montesquieu, rightly held to be the most influential proponent of geographical determinism of the eighteenth century, things are less clear-cut upon closer inspection. At one point in his *L 'Esprit des Lois,* for instance, he clearly adheres to the argument of multiple causes without conceiving of climatic factors as determinative in the last instance: "Mankind are influenced by various causes: by the climate, by the religion, by the laws, by the maxims of government, by precedents, morals, and customs; whence is formed the general spirit of nations."[9]

As the foregoing may indicate, the philosophical and moral interest in the natural environment was not constant over time. It commonly gained in intensity at times of crisis, when profound changes in the broad cognitive and moral frameworks of orientation provided fertile ground for the emergence of new conceptualizations of the relationship between nature and culture. This is true of the Hellenistic era, whose authors created the notion of an idyllic place while they were exposed to the phenomenon of urbanisation in the metropoles they lived (Wozniakowski 1987:17). It also applies to the Renaissance period, when a more critical view of religious affairs and the emergence of new modes of scientific and moral thinking provoked a rethinking of humanity's position vis à vis its natural environment. And it surely holds true for the latter half of the eighteenth century. In a world in which traditional forms of religious attachment and social solidarity were declining at a disquieting speed, geography, and the natural environment at least seemed to offer some degree of stability, calm, and purity. It was in this context that landscape became critical as a source of social orientation. Commenting on the significant rise of landscape art at the end of the eighteenth century, the German painter, Philip Otto Runge, exhorted: "We stand at the brink of all the religions which sprang up out of the Catholic one, the abstractions perish, everything is lighter and more insubstan-

[8] Quoted in Glackcn (1967:542). [9] Quoted in Glacken (1967:578).

tial than before, everything presses toward landscape art, looks for something certain in this uncertainty and does not know how to begin."[10] Furthermore, as politicised nature, particular landscapes evolved into integral parts of historicism's search for national pedigrees, that other powerful movement which in the latter half of the eighteenth century came to form the centrepiece of most European nationalisms and national identities.[11]

Landscape Symbolism and the Study of National Identity

Given that the rise of nationalism in the late eighteenth century conspicuously reinforced the interest in geographical symbolism, it is somewhat surprising that, so far, little attention has been paid in the field of nations and nationalism to the conditions under which specific natural environments acquire significance in definitions of nationhood.[12] On the other hand, scholars working in fields such as human geography, art history, or environmental history have recently made use of existing theoretical approaches to nationalism and national identification.[13] Yet these theories have served these researchers as signposts to be passed rather than as springboards for the construction of new theories that deal with the question of how landscapes are valued in different historical and political contexts. Lowenthal (1995:283) expresses this marked and apparently widespread reluctance to draw even tentative theoretical conclusions, when he accuses "those predisposed toward particular explanations of landscape attachments" of misreading "ambiguous material."

Despite the absence of appropriate theoretical tools for landscape analysis, three broad positions are discernible. Adherents of a "primordialist" perspective view people's attachments to their natural surroundings as a manifestation of basic socio-psychological needs and as a phenomenon that is both universal and historically persistent.[14] Basing their analysis upon a psychological reductionism, however, those taking this position are at a loss to explain why people's interest in landscape can vary significantly over time. Applying an explicitly descriptive approach, a second group of researchers are concerned mainly with the way depictions of landscape are regarded as reflective of national virtues, such as freedom, liberty, or independence.[15] In contrast to the first two approaches, a third group of scholars emphasize the situational aspect

[10] Quoted in Rosen and Zerner (1984:52).

[11] On the part played by ethnic historicism in the emergence of nationalism and the fostering of national identities, see, for instance, Smith (1995:ch. 3). For an account of the Herderian conception of cultural community, see Berlin (1976).

[12] With the partial exception of Smith (1986:183–90).

[13] Good recent examples are the reader, *Geography and National Identity,* edited by David Hooson (1994), and Daniels (1993). And there is of course Simon Schama's (1995) pathbreaking historical account.

[14] See Hooson (1994:introduction). For a primordialist account of the connection between nature and group life that operates with the more general term, territoriality, see Grosby (1995).

[15] This approach is characteristic of most contributions in Hooson (1994).

by identifying the way in which the public role of landscape symbolism is contingent on particular cultural and political contexts.[16]

LANDSCAPE AND THE (RE) CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY: A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

Even though each of the three positions outlined above has something to recommend them, I believe that neither is satisfactory when it comes to analysing the possible causes of the changing currency enjoyed by geographical symbolism in definitions of nationhood. In what follows I shall put forward an analytical position that places equal weight upon historical traditions and cultural structures on the one hand and on factors of a more contingent, context-bound nature on the other.

To move from description to explanation, I shall begin by defining the nation as a cultural order (composed of certain idioms, values, symbols and myths).[17] Nations, thus understood, are not static entities, for, as Fernand Braudel reminded us: Any nation "can have its *being* only at the prices of being forever in search of itself" (1989:23). It is thus first and foremost to this recurrent project of national reconstruction—to the process whereby nations are being fostered and redefined in the course of history—that I am referring when I make use of the term national identity. The key concept with regard to national identity is *authenticity.* That is to say—to draw again on a more dynamic picture—reconstructing nations over time inevitably means reconstructing them as distinctive, original, and historically embedded orders. Once they cease to be perceived as authentic and original, nations lose much of their former legitimacy and meaning. Rousseau put forward this historicist point succinctly by declaring that "the first rule which we have to follow is that of national character every people has, or must have, a character; if it lacks one, we must start by endowing it with one."[18]

From a formal point of view, the authentication of a national culture entails two processes: the construction of continuity with a nation's alleged ethnohistorical past *(historicism)* on the one hand and the creation of a sense of naturalness *(naturalization)* on the other. The two processes, while analytically separate, are mutually intertwined and reinforce each other in the reality of nation formation: Whereas references to significant features of the natural environment serve to buttress a cultural community's claims of continuity, the historicist curiosity for the collective past inevitably directs attention to significant

[16] A point made by both Lowenthal (1978:401) and Schama (1995:15).

[17] This definition presupposes an analytical distinction between two conceptions of community and social organisation:nation and state. At its most basic, it holds that the nation, as an ethnocultural order, lends meaning and legitimacy to the state. The latter, in turn, is rooted in a set of civic (legal, political and economic) institutions. Modern nation-states can be regarded as a synthesis between these two conceptions. This distinction is spelled out in Smith (1995:ch. 4).

[18] Quoted in Smith (1991:75). The concept of national authenticity is discussed in Smith (1995:65–67).

features of the homeland. Broadly speaking, the fundamental role of both historicism and naturalization has to do, in large part, with their preventing the historical and cultural contingency of modern nations from entering into the picture.[19]

In addition, what is assumed here is that modern nations go through "settled" and "unsettled" periods. During settled periods the values, symbols, and myths that make up the nation as a cultural order are more or less taken for granted, so that they form, as it were, a cultural tradition or common sense. During unsettled historical phases, on the other hand, national authenticity is put into question, engendering endeavours at redefining national identity. Such efforts to reconstruct nationhood are both path dependent and contingent. They are contingent insofar as they present symbolic "responses" to specific conditions and events which can be both domestic and international in nature. Yet at the same time, such projects of national reconstruction are path dependent. That is to say, their mostly intellectual protagonists are bound to draw, to some degree at least, upon existing cultural resources (consisting of certain cultural idioms, symbols, values, and myths) that are salient in a given society. The impact of such cultural resources on the process of national reconstruction is conditioning rather than determining. By furnishing the cognitive and expressive frameworks for those involved in the project of national reconstruction, these resources reduce the likelihood of pure "invention". And yet, it needs stressing that the situational aspect is key for any explanation of the respective outcome of such national projects: While certain intellectuals and social movements may regard it as sufficient, at one point in time, to define a particular nation by emphasising its voluntaristic, civic character, this alone may be viewed as inappropriate under altered circumstances.[20] This leads me to the Swiss example.

From the "Nationalization of Nature" to the "Naturalization of the Nation": The Swiss Scenario in a Comparative Context

We can envisage various ways of establishing a symbolic link between a national community and a particular landscape. As we shall see, the conceptualization of the relationship between the Alps and the Swiss nation thereby could take either of two forms. The first form could be termed the *nationalization of nature.* What is characteristic here is that popular historical myths, memories, and supposed national virtues are projected into a significant landscape in an attempt to lend more continuity and distinctiveness to Swiss national identity. In this way, not only is the Alpine landscape put at use in such a way as to re-

[19] The "naturalization of social classifications" as a measure to reduce uncertainty is discussed most illuminatingly in Douglas (1987:48). Benedict Anderson, in his *Imagined Communities* (1991:12), has made a related point, arguing that "it is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny."

[20] The way I conceptualize the reproduction and change of national identity for the purpose of this analysis draws heavily on two most illuminating theoretical essays:see Swidler (1986) and Sewell (1996).

flect alleged national characteristics, but an image of national authenticity is developed in which the Alps appear, as it were, as the physical dimension of the national past. As a way of conjoining landscape and nation, this first form of discourse (the "nationalization of nature") came into use in the second half of the eighteenth century. It can be regarded as a delicate synthesis between the neo-classical approach to nature (which is anthropocentric in orientation and sees culture as prevailing over nature) and its early Romantic counterpart (which depicts human beings as organically linked to the natural environment). I shall argue that, as a way of incorporating landscape imagery into the fabric of national identity, the nationalization of nature was to remain predominant in Switzerland until roughly the 1870s.[21]

The nationalization of nature, though crucial as a mechanism for rendering Swiss national identity authentic, was not confined to the Swiss case. We encounter it in the English discourse on landscape which, ever since the late nineteenth century—at least in its prevailing current of rural paternalism—showed a preference for tamed over savage lands, equating the former with stability, permanence, and harmony, while associating the latter with what was seen as the anarchism epitomized in American and French republicanism.[22] In France, too, where Vidal de la Blache invented "human geography" as a scientific discipline at the end of the nineteenth century, landscape, for a time at least, was crucial as a means of defining national identity. As in England, French geographers and historians depicted humans as having the upper hand over nature rather than being determined by it, a theme most cogently expressed by Michelet: "Society, freedom have mastered nature, history has rubbed out geography. In this marvellous transformation, spirit has won over matter, the general over the particular, and idea over contingencies."[23] Germany, to cite another instructive example, presents us with a different picture. Here, where since the late eighteenth century the belief in ethnic homogeneity had not been seriously questioned, the concern, at least among geographers of the late nineteenth century, was primarily with the determination of boundaries rather than with specific landscapes. After 1890, geography as a discipline became the vehicle of an attempt to elevate the "relatively low awareness of the "colonial question" by the public," with *Kolonialkund*e and *Meereskunde* becoming elements of the curriculum of national education (Sandner 1994: 77). At the same

[21] For differences and similarities between early Romantic and neoclassical conceptions of cultural community, see Smith (1976). On romantic nationalism's search for poetic spaces and golden ages, see Smith (1986:179–200). A decisive shift that goes hand in hand with the ascendancy of the Romantic approach to nature consists of an enthusiasm for wild, as opposed to crafted, nature. Needless to say, the Alps fullfilled the Romantic ideal of natural purity and wilderness quite splendidly. For an instructive account of the Swedish case, see Frykman and Lofgren (1987).

[22] To quote Lowenthal (1994:22):"The English landscape is not natural but crafted. . . .Englishmen tame and adorn nature." On attitudes towards nature in England between 1500 and 1800, see Thomas (1983). For the symbolic significance of English landscape during the interwar period, see Potts (1989).

[23] Quoted in Claval (1994:44).

time, however, there had been a long-standing preoccupation in the German case with the influence of the natural environment and of the "soil", especially the Teutonic woods, on what contemporaries commonly called the Germanic character; and this notion became a centrepiece of the organicism of the Romantics, and later of volkisch nationalism (Schama 1995:ch. 2).

This leads me to the second formal possibility of establishing a symbolic connection between nations and their natural environment, which I designate the *naturalization of the nation.* This point of view, resting as it does upon a notion of geographical determinism, regards the natural environment as doing more than expressing certain presumed national virtues and characteristics. Here, nature—or in the Swiss case, the Alps—is depicted as a force capable of determining national identity and giving it a compact, homogeneous, unified form. Measured against the continuum ranging from the classical to the romantic approach to nature, the naturalization of the nation, with its stress on organic growth and natural determination in opposition to deliberate human interference with nature, doubtless is located closer to the Romantic pole.[24]

To be sure, ideas of how certain geographical features might be connected symbolically with the Swiss nationhood existed well before 1870, constituting as they did a vocabulary and a symbolism familiar to a substantial proportion of the public (Marchal 1992b; Walter 1990). However, two elements give the Swiss discourse on landscape between 1870 and 1945 its specificity: First, in response to certain sociopolitical conditions, this mechanism of establishing a symbolic fusion of landscape and nation came to prevail. [25] Second, the Alpine myth spread from its ideological producers and most vocal proponents to ever-wider sections of the population, culminating in the 1930s in an almost obsessive preoccupation with the alleged national significance of the Alps which crossed both linguistic and political boundaries.

On the substantive level, three different portrayals of the Alps—as an unifying force, a defensive castle, and a purifying force—obtained particular prominence. This is not to say that the analogy between Alpine landscape and national community was the only element which entered into the fabric of Swiss national identity during this time. It can plausibly be argued that the most basic process at work was a historicist interpretation of the national present. But landscape

[24] Canada and the United States present two further cases in which the "naturalization of the nation" played an important role as well. The argument that a particular natural environment had fundamentally determined American culture gained currency in the latter half of the nineteenth century, in the works of the historians George Bancroft and, most prominently, in Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis, first put forward at a conference of the American Historical Association in Chicago in 1893, about the character-shaping impact of the American frontier. For a systematic account of the role of geographical symbolism in the Canadian and American cases, see Kaufmann (1998).

[25] To maintain that this new conceptualization of linking the Alps symbolically with the Swiss nation (the naturalization of the nation) came to prevail after around 1870 is of course not to deny that the preceding one (the nationalization of nature) had favoured its emergence and spread. Nor is it meant to imply that the break was an absolute one. Nevertheless, as the available evidence clearly suggests, the change of emphasis is marked enough to speak of a transformation.

was crucial as an intervening variable that contributed to the re-focusing of public attention to, and the rendering natural of, a rich and complex heritage of existing national myths, symbols, and values—and therefore acted as a vehicle of ideological ethnogenesis.[26]

IN SEARCH OF NATIONAL AUTHENTICITY: NATIONALIZING NATURE (UNTIL THE 1870S)

The Swiss Alps had been of interest long before they became a symbol of the sublime and of virtue in the eighteenth century. As early as the sixteenth century, painters like Albrecht Durer drew on their imagination, rather than actual topographical experience, to use mountains both as an expression of frightening power and of the dualism between the divine and the profane (Schama 1995: 427–8). Furthermore, the interest in Alpine nature was intensified by a humanist concern for natural history. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that many Swiss humanists were among the first to create a more positive picture of the Alps which hitherto had been seen "as horrid, misshapen locales to be shunned" (Lowenthal 1978:382). In 1555, naturalist Conrad Gessner climbed Mount Pilatus and summed up his experience in emotive tones, singling out, among other things, "the clarity of the mountain water, the fragrance of the wild flowers . . . the purity of the air, the richness of the milk." Some twenty years later, in 1578, the Bernese physician and geographer, Johannes Stumpf, produced the first detailed map of the High Alps (Schama 1995:430). Learned men like Gessner and Stumpf, along with a tiny number of mountain enthusiasts from all over Europe, no doubt set the tone for future Alpine discourse.

Notwithstanding these precedents, the breakthrough towards the nationalization of Alpine nature came only in the course of the eighteenth century, when the mountains "had ceased to be monstrosities and had become an integral part of varied and diversified Nature" (Hope Nicolson 1959:345) and when, towards the end of the century, a cult-like enthusiasm was focused on the Swiss Alps in particular. Various Enlightenment scientists and poets, foreign and Swiss alike, contributed to this development. The English scientist, Thomas Robinson, in his *Natural History,* described the Alps as an "integral and necessary part of nature's harmony." [27] The Swiss Johann Jakob Scheuchzer (1672–1733), after two decades of travelling the Alps, published in the 1720s a topographical de-

[26] An anonymous reviewer reminded me that naturalization can go so far as to virtually remove the nation from time altogether through the equation of it with a timeless natural environment like the Alps and that this removal from time apparently formed one of the temporalities of the Swiss nation. While recognizing that, at its most extreme, the naturalization of the nation does define the nation by dislodging it from the parameters of chronological time, in the Swiss case, as remains to be shown, naturalization commonly meant a fusion of some sort of nature and historical memory.

[27] According to Thomas (1983:261), it was the English who "created the greatest mystique about mountain-climbing." In Switzerland, it was, in the words of the official chronicle of the Alpine Club (founded in 1857), the *Alpine Journal,* notorious that "if you met a man in the Alps, it was ten to one that he was a University man, eight to one (say) that he was a Cambridge man, and about even betting that he was a fellow of his college." Quoted in Thomas (1983:261).

scription of the Alpine landscape entitled, *Itinera Alpina.* Of considerable influence was the poem, *Die Alpen,* by the Bernese mathematician and medical scientist, Albrecht von Haller (1708–77). His poem, first published in 1732 and subsequently translated into most European languages, became an eighteenth-century best-seller and an inspiration for successive generations of Alpine travellers (Bernard 1978:9–13).[28] From the middle of the eighteenth century onwards, moreover, the classical view, which had conceived of nature primarily in utilitarian and anthropocentric terms, gave way, slowly but surely, to a more romanticized conception in which nature was conceived as an organic force, even as a source of almost religious importance.[29] In an age of enlightened criticism of aristocratic politics and opulence, a large section of the educated public, many of them influenced by Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (first published in 1761), began to see in the Swiss Alps and their inhabitants an expression of simplicity, purity, honesty, and liberty, the republican virtues par excellence.

Thanks in no small part to the works ol Johann Jakob Scheuchzer, Albrecht von Haller, and an ever-increasing body of foreign travel literature, the Alps increasingly became an important aspect of Swiss patriotism in the last third of the eighteenth century (Walter 1990:57). The intellectual focal point of this rapidly progressing movement, the Helvetic Society (founded in 1761), presented the Alps as the seat of the country's national virtues. One of its founding fathers, Franz Urs Balthasar, expressed the significance of this connection in 1763 by saying that the character of the Swiss nation found its complete expression in its untamed Alpine landscape. Besides, the Alps were conceived of as the genuine scene where the Swiss Confederation had been founded and had experienced its golden age of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The mountains of central Switzerland, especially the Gotthard, where the then-territorial authority, the Habsburgs, had been defeated in 1315 and 1386 respectively, were portrayed as the ultimate birthplace of liberty and independence. Or as Phillipe-Sirice Bridel expressed this after the fall of the *ancien régime* in Switzerland: "Ex alpibus salus patriae" (From the Alps comes our country's salvation) (Marchal 1992b:45).

A decisive step as to the popularization of the symbolic link between landscape and the core myths in Switzerland's history was taken with the publication of Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* in 1804 (Weishaupt 1992:23). Not only was Schiller's play to form the picture most German-speaking Europeans had of

[28] Bernard (1978:9–13). A second edition of Haller's *Alpen* was published as early as 1734. According to Wozniakowski (1987:245), the poem went through twelve editions during the second part of the eighteenth century and was translated into five different languages. What is more, Goethe, in his *Wilhelm Meisters WanderJahre (* 1821), claimed that, along with Kleist's *Fruhling* and Gessner's *Idyllen,* Haller's *Alpen* had taught the cult of nature to a whole generation of Europeans.

[29] This crucial distinction between the classical and romantic conception of nature is set out in more detail in Wozniakowski (1987) and Short (1991).

Switzerland; but it also was read and performed throughout the nineteenth century and became part of the literary canon of Swiss primary schools (Bernard 1978:24). Although it by no means accomplished this single-handedly, Schiller's drama contributed much to the spread of the late medieval myths of Swiss foundation and liberation (particularly the Oath on the Rutli and the deeds of Wilhelm Tell against Gessler), hitherto largely confined to the educated elite, to ever-wider sections of the public. [30] As Haller and Rousseau before him, Schiller presented the Alps as a natural habitat that was conducive to the emergence of a notion of a pure, simple, honest, and liberty-loving character.

It was after the founding of the modern Swiss nation-state in 1848 that its national identity developed conspicuously strong links to the landscape (Walter 1989: 287). In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Alps became the most common icon on tourist souvenirs. Furthermore, in 1863, the Swiss Alpine Club was founded. Its declared aim was "to gain a better knowledge of our Alpine landscape, especially with regard to its topography, natural history social implications."[31] Finally, Alpine scenery became a prominent feature in the work of some of the most renowned Swiss artists in the second part of the nineteenth century. The Swiss novelist Gottfried Keller, for example, in his *Der Grüne Heinrich* (first published in 1854), declared that "with the thoughtlessness of youth and childish age, I believed that the natural beauty of Switzerland was a reflection of historical and political merit and of the patriotism of the Swiss people: an equivalent of freedom itself."[32]

IN SEARCH OF THE DETERMINING PRINCIPLE: NATURALIZING THE NATION (1870–1945)

The Alps as a Homogenizing Force

It has long been acknowledged by scholars of nationalism that the progression of national identities is causally related to international factors, such as geopolitics, ideological competition, warfare and subsequent invasions.[33] Nationalism established itself as the dominant political force in nineteenth-century Eu-

[30] According to the legend, the Oath of the Ruetli (said to be taken in 1307 by the three valley communities Uri, Schwyz, and Unterwalden) stands for the beginning of the Old Confederates' struggle for independence against the Habsburg dynasty. Wilhelm Tell is the personification of this struggle for liberation. As the myth has it, Tell assassinated Gessler, the Habsburg bailiff. The Swiss foundation myths are explored in Im Hof (1991:ch. 1).

[31] Quoted in Dubi (1900:440). In 1900, the Swiss Alpine Club counted 5,976 active members who were spread over 44 different national sections in all linguistic parts of the country. The activities of the Club consisted in a considerable number of excursions and publications. By the turn of the century, 34 maps on a scale of 1:50,000 of different parts of the Alps chain had been edited. This is discussed in Dubi (1900:440–3).

[32] Quoted in Jost (1988:18–19).

[33] For two outstanding recent contributions to the study of national identity that make systematic use of this assumption, see Greenfeld (1992), and Colley (1992).

rope, stirring competition among different conceptions of nationality and serving as a major catalyst of national self-assertion. In the Swiss case, what posed a serious challenge to their conception of nationality was the fact that "ethnolinguistic" nationalism came to dominate from the last third of the nineteenth century until the end of World War II. Particularly in Italy and Germany, this form of nationalism rapidly gained force around 1870, when it came to be seen as somewhat of a normative prerequisite of national legitimacy and served as a fertile ground for the emergence of irredentist movements in both countries.[34] When Nazism rose to power in 1933, its völkisch nationalism, with its markedly racial overtones, was tantamount to a denial of the legitimacy of Switzerland's conception of nationality.

It was against this historical background that the second pattern of linking nature and nation—the naturalization of the nation—came to prevail. The realization of the discrepancy between the Swiss conception of nationality and that of its neighbours set in early. Already in 1884, the eminent Swiss historian, Karl Dändliker, warned of the challenge posed by ethnic nationalism when he declared that "the Swiss people did not enjoy the advantage of their neighbours: Being a nation in the true and literal sense of the word, that is to say, being an entity uniform in terms of linguistic and ethnic composition."[35] Dändliker's statement does not represent a marginal view but forms part of a concern, apparently widespread at the time, at least among liberal intellectuals and the political establishment, that the two groups had been traditionally in charge of the definition and legimation of Swiss nationhood. When, in December 1914, German- and French-speaking Swiss had clashed over conflicting sympathies towards the parties involved in World War I, writer Carl Spitteler, in an emphatic call for national unity, argued that in the current European political climate, Switzerland's lack of both ethno-cultural homogeneity and a strong centralist state presented a "political weakness."[36]

Statements like the latter bear testimony to the normative force of ethnolinguistic nationalism at the time. But ethnic homogeneity was simply not an option open to those willing to preserve the country's polyethnic character. Faced

[34] While Bismarckian Germany rested on a statist rather than ethnic conception of nationhood, it has to be borne in mind that many Germans regarded the *kleindeutsche Lösung* of 1871 as an incomplete nation-state. The Pan-German League certainly presented the most radical—but by no means the only—current within German ethnic nationalism prior to 1900 to express this dissatisfaction with the Bismarckian solution. The völkisch movement that rapidly gained ground in Wilhelmine Germany and reached its peak under the Nazis could thereby capitalize on earlier ideological precedents. On Germany's "homeland nationalism" and its institutional manifestations, see Brubaker (1992:especially chs. 3 and 6) and (1996:especially 114–7). On the emergence and spread of völkisch nationalism in Germany, see Mosse (1964), and Greenfeld (1992:ch. 4). On European ethno-linguistic nationalism more broadly, see also Alter (1985:112), Hobsbawm (1990:ch. 4), Winkler (1984:introduction), Woolf (1995:16–25). On Italy, see Alter (1985), and Schieder (1991:329–46).

[35] Quoted in Im Hof (1991:172).

[36] Spitteler (1914:5). Other prominent personalities of public life argued along similar lines. See also Huber (1916) and (1934).

with the challenge of ethnic nationalism, liberal intellectuals and portions of the political elite endeavoured to create a distinct national identity for Switzerland; and it was in this context that Alpine landscape once more came to play a crucial part. Given that ethnic and völkisch conceptions of nationhood emphasized a nation's alleged homogeneity in terms of its ethnic or racial composition, the nationalization of nature (the pattern which portrays the natural environment as an expression of an alleged national character) would have been , however, somewhat deficient as an ideological antidote against ethnic nationalism. In view of the challenge at hand, the naturalization of the nation, which can best be understood as a form of ideological ethnogenesis, seemed to be the more appropriate response. But to arrive at a better understanding of why that particular Alpine response came to predominate, let me reconstruct the overall ideological reaction in Switzerland to ethnic nationalism in its successive stages and different facets.

At first glance, the forging of a civic nationalism (the brand of nationalism that, by and large, had been dominant in Switzerland ever since the late eighteenth century) seemed to provide an appropriate antidote against the threat of ethnic nationalism. The most outspoken supporter of this ideological response in the 1870s was the Bernese professor of law, Carl Hilty. In 1875, he maintained that Switzerland was the perfect nation and that its destiny and its secular mission were to uphold a truly republican, voluntarist conception of nationality in a Europe in which the ethnic ideal was on the ascendant (Hilty 1875:29):

> Not race or ethnic community, nor common language and customs, nor nature and history have founded the state of the Swiss Confederation. . . .What holds Switzerland together vis à vis [its] [linguistically more homogeneous] neighbours is an ideal, namely the consciousness of being part of a state that in many ways represents a more civilised community; to constitute a nationality which stands head and shoulder above mere affiliations of blood or language.

But Hilty's presentist conception of nationality (which was undoubtedly influenced by the critical school of Swiss historiography gaining ground at the time),[37] though widespread among liberal-minded intellectuals, did not reflect the dominant current of thought.[38] Instead, a more popular version of civic nationalism traced Switzerland's civic present back to its pre-modern past. This was based both on the myths of liberation and foundation (in particular the legends of Wilhelm Tell and the Oath of the Rütli), as well as on the memories of allegedly glorious events (especially the victorious battles against the Habsburgs in 1315 and 1386). On the other hand, it had as its pillars the values and institutions of the modern Swiss nation-state founded in 1848. These two ideological dimensions, one inspired by legalist rationality and liberal-democrat-

[37] On the influence of this critical school of historians on the definition of Swiss national identity, see Kreis (1991:ch. 4) and Im Hol (1991:233–5).

[38] Frei (1964:213). This civic conception of national identity did come to dominate the liberal and left-of-centre discourse again during the 1930s. See Zimmer (1996).

ic ethics, the other by the emotive power of an ideological myth of descent, were at the heart of Swiss national identity in its most widespread form.[39] And on the whole, this synthesis proved to be highly effective. From the era of the Helvetic Republic (1798–1803) to at least the end of the Second World War, this was the officially propagated version of national identity and one that was popular in all parts of the country.[40]

Nevertheless, to some contemporaries, both the purely civic conception of national identity and its more popular historicist counterpart seemed insufficient as the sole basis of nationality. Johann-Kaspar Bluntschli (1808–81), for instance, a moderately conservative intellectual and professional colleague of Hilty's, maintained around 1870 that, in view of current debates on nationality in Europe and the recent severe contestation of "the belief in the existence of a particular [Swiss] nation vis à vis the German, French and Italian nationalities," it had become necessary to draw the boundaries of Switzerland's national identity more firmly. To achieve this, Bluntschli argued, a notion of nationality grounded on voluntarism and the institutions of the modern state, as Hilty had proposed, would not suffice (Bluntschli 1875:14). But neither, he maintained, would the reference back to the mythical past per se, even if it fostered the reproduction of historical memories of wars fought for independence and liberty in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Instead, to buttress the claim for a distinct national identity that could stand up to the force of ethnic nationalism, a further element was needed. It is here that Bluntschli brings the Alpine landscape into play (1875:11):

> I am surprised that Hilly did not, besides referring to the influence of the political idea, seek assistance from the country's nature to make the notion of Swiss nationality acceptable For Switzerland's landscape is indeed of peculiar character. If the Swiss possess a particular nationality, then this feeling derives above all from the existence of their beautiful homeland. . . . There may well be Alps, mountains, seas and rivers outside Switzerland; and yet, the Swiss homeland constitutes such a coherent and richly structured natural whole, one that enables to evolve on its soil a peculiar feeling of a common homeland which unites its inhabitants as sons of the same fatherland, even though they live in different valleys and speak different languages.

It needs underscoring that this attitude cut across Switzerland's linguistic boundaries. The French-speaking intellectual, Ernest Bovet, for example, professor of French literature at the University of Zurich, wrote an article in which he rejected the intellectual and moral validity of racial theories and ethnic conceptions of nationhood. Not ethnic homogeneity, he maintained, but the Alps were responsible for the creation of a Swiss character. In an article with the noteworthy title, *Refléxions d'un Homo Alpinus,* he maintained that "our independence was born in the mountains, and the mountains still determine our

[39] The important distinction between ideological and genealogical myths of descent is examined in Smith (1984).

[40] A view taken by both Im Hof (1991) and Marchal (1990). For national identity in the French-speaking part of Switzerland between 1848 and 1914, see Kreis (1987).

whole life, give it its particularity and unity" (1909a:289). And only a few months later, in an essay entitled, *Nationalité,* Bovet resumed the same theme, linking the Alpine narrative with the two other cornerstones of Swiss national identity—its marked historicism and its emphasis on liberty and independence (1909b:441):

> A mysterious force has kept us together for 600 years and has given to us our democratic institutions. A good spirit watches our liberty. A spirit fills our souls, directs our actions and creates a hymn on the one ideal out of our different languages. It is the spirit that blows from the summits, the genius of the Alps and glaciers.

Some thirty years later, geographer Charles Burky, in a brochure that was on display at the National Exhibition of 1939, an immense popular success, put forward the notion of geographical determinism in its purest mode: "The physical milieu, the natural environment determines a people. This is an axiom, and apparently Switzerland cannot escape from it. . . .This savage and haughty nature remained untamed. Only the mountain dweller can cope with it."[41] Perhaps unsurprisingly, we find the most extreme forms of this geographical determinism in the 1930s. Its champions were authors who, while explicitly dealing with social-Darwinist and racial ideas, stopped short of accepting their premises in the face of Swiss polyethnic reality. In his essay entitled, "The ethnic structure of Switzerland," Zurich geographer Emil Egli put forward a Swiss version of ideological ethnogenesis: "For the racial scholar, Switzerland is a difficult field of study because, for logical reasons, the racially pure must step aside in favour of the mixture." In another paragraph of the same text, he describes how immigrants can be naturalised and thus become a part of what he conceives of as the organic fabric of the Swiss nation: Becoming a Swiss national, Egli tells us, is something that the natural environment (he uses the term "Alpinisation" to describe the process at work) ultimately determines and is thus beyond human will to merely assimilate to certain civic values and cultural codes (Kreis 1992:176).

The Alps as a Defensive Castle

But the threat posed by German and Italian nationalism was not confined to the sphere of ideology embodied in different conceptions of nationality. It was real and posed a problem of national security. Memories of Italian irredentism were still fresh in the 1880s and 1890s. When in July 1862 members of the Italian parliament, publicly considered the possibility of incorporating into Italy Switzerland's Italian-speaking southern part, a wave of protests arose throughout the country.[42] The external threat of course, became much more imminent in 1933. Hitler's *Heim ins Reich* not only referred to Austria,

[41] Quoted in Lasserre (1992:198). [42] Ramseyer (1987).

the German population of Bohemia, as well as to Alsace and Lorraine, but was actually meant to include Switzerland as well (Im Hof 1991:245). The predicament deriving from this external threat was further heightened by the fact that, at least until 1935, Italian and German authoritarianism found adherents in Switzerland, even if only a small minority were sympathetic to the völkisch conception of nationality (Beck 1978:284; Mattioli 1995; Zimmer 1996).

It was against this background that the *Alps,* as a symbol of protection against external threats, steadily gained in currency towards the end of the nineteenth century; for it was during this time that public interest in the national past (and particularly in the late medieval myths) was increasingly reduced to a military dimension.[43] As with the symbolic pattern which depicted the Alps as a homogenizing force, the stress placed on their protective function was by those who were above all liberal intellectuals but also members of the governing elite. Even though the opening of the Gotthard Pass in 1883 also favoured interpretations which depicted the Alps as a source of cultural mediation, the picture that prevailed until 1945 stressed the protective character of the Alps as a defensive castle. In 1909, Ernest Bovet, in a noteworthy passage, singled out the protective function and characterbuilding impact of the Swiss mountains (1909b:441): "Not accidentally was the mountain herdsman's protective wall to keep out the knights. It was itself their place of birth; the mountain's blank soil, its rough sky have shaped their character, and ever since has the mountain determined our inner life."

When the threat became more imminent in the latter half of the 1930s, Swiss Councillor Philipp Etter, in a similar fashion, alluded to the Alpine myth in an address to a crowd gathered in 1939. He reiterated an important theme of the overall ideology of *Geistige Landesverteidigung,* the "spiritual defence of the country," when he maintained that the providential character of the Alps was most clearly epitomised in their historical role as protector of the Swiss people: "The divine Creator himself has produced the unity of this country, and he has provided her with a robust rampart made of granite and hard chalk. But while He made his country a fortress as huge and strong as only he could build it, he has at the same time not made her bigger than necessary for her to defend from her rampart a great spiritual mission.[44]

Perhaps the symbolic value of the Alps found its clearest expression in the attitude of the Swiss population towards its army's defence strategy. When General Guisan, on July 25, 1940, gathered the highest Swiss military officers and declared that the army's strategy consisted of building a defensive ring around the Gotthard, the reactions among the Swiss public (with few exceptions) were enthusiastic, and the Alpine myth reached its peak (Im Hof 1991:247). This is

[43] See Marchal (1990:372). [44] Quoted in Lasserre 1992:194).

striking, given the rather bleak situation in which the country found itself at the time and the actual implications of the general's statement. Guisan had not only made his statement shortly after France had been defeated, so Switzerland was therefore encircled by the powers of the Axis; but his defensive strategy, in the event of a foreign invasion, would have left defenseless the great majority of the Swiss population who lived in the industrial and economic centres. Well aware of the symbolic value of the Alps, Guisan had made very deliberate use of them at a time of great public concern, even gathering his officers on the Rütli Meadow, where according to historical legend the Swiss Confederation had been founded and where the struggle for liberty and independence had its roots (Marchal 1990:396–97).

The Alps as a Purifying Force

The idea that mountains have a purifying effect on human beings, expressed so vividly by some thinkers of the eighteenth century, was to be adopted actively and widely in the process of national self-assertion between 1870 and the outbreak of the Second World War. Those who depicted the Alps in terms of their homogenizing and protective capacities were either established intellectuals or belonged to the political establishment. Their social status, by and large, was relatively secure. By contrast, the champions of the myth of purity commonly represented those social strata who felt most threatened by the effects of rapid industrialization and increasing state authority. Conservative ideologues, mostly from rural Catholic regions, constituted the driving force behind this movement for purity. One of its protagonists, Fribourg intellectual Gonzague de Reynold, regarded the liberal state and its adherents as the major cause of the "materialist degeneration" of the *fin de siècle* and openly demanded a return to the value system of the ancien régime. Others, like the peasant leader, Ernst Laur, represented the interests of those groups who felt most threatened by the transformations which unfolded before their eyes. What both these ideologues and their clientele shared was a configuration of status which fulfills the basic criteria of what is commonly described as the "anomie" manifested in "the inadequacy of the traditional definition . . . of the involved groups" when faced by structural change.[45] The fact that industrialization spread as unevenly in Switzerland as in much of the rest of Europe was the main cause undermining social cohesion, first in the 1880s and 1890s, and then again in the 1930s.[46] This was accompanied by widespread criticism of everything associated with the evils of modernity and modern life: the secular state, the materialist ethics of

[45] Greenfeld (1992:16). The crucial role of *anomie* in terms of both the intellectual production and popular reception of nationalist doctrines is also stressed in Berlin (1981:351–52). On these status-inconsistent groups and its leaders with regard to the Swiss case, see Clavien (1993), Jost (1992), and in particular the introduction and case studies in Mattioli (1996).

[46] In 1798, 62.5 percent of the total population were occupied in the rural sector, 25 percent in the industrial sector, and 12.5 percent in the service sector. In 1900, the respective figures were 31 percent, 44.9 percent, and 24.1 percent Bergier (1983:176 and 206–7).

both liberalism and socialism, the vanishing of traditional social hierarchies in the wake of the extension of democratic rights, and—perhaps most telling—to cosmopolitanism and foreign immigration.[47] Fears of foreign infiltration induced the Federal Assembly to raise the waiting time for the naturalization of foreign residents from two to six years after World War I. A similar public mood can be observed again during the 1930s, but this time anti-Semitism was a frequent ingredient in the cultural criticism of an emerging right-wing nationalism (Picard 1994).

Within such a climate of accelerated sociocultural change, the eyes of those who were tired of civilization turned to the Alps and their inhabitants who seemed to belong to a bener, happier world. Were not these mountains the habitat of the glorious forebears, who had excelled in simplicity, durability, and love of liberty? It did not matter that this was an idealised version of the past or that between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries the harsh conditions of living had forced a great many of the younger inhabitants of Alpine regions to spend their lives as mercenary soldiers in French, Spanish, Dutch, and Italian armies. Unlike contemporary modern society, the mountain regions had remained untouched by the forces of civilisation, or so at least it seemed to those who worshipped them. Gcorges do Montenach, for instance, together with Gonzague de Reynold, one of the foremost Swiss critics of modernity at the time, argued in 1908 that the Swiss were once again looking to the Alps to purify themselves from the "cosmopolitan virus" of the present (Jost 1992:101). As the religious socialist, Leonhard Ragaz wrote in his influential 1917 pamphlet entitled, "The New Switzerland": "It is above all the mountains that belong to us in their power and majesty, their tranquillity and purity. And a certain simplicity of way of life, a certain perfume of nature and primitive force, an air of rustic life belongs to us".[48] The interest of those searching for purer surroundings was not confined to the high Alps but included the foothills and their inhabitants, so patriotic enthusiasm for mountains was linked with an idealised picture of an unspoilt peasant world. Both mountains and peasants stood for purity. In 1901, peasant leader Ernst Laur described in confident tone the regenerating influence of the peasantry on the Swiss "national character":

> It is not an empty phrase to say that a country's defensive capability rests in the peasantry. . . .Yet it is not merely health and force that the peasant lends to a people. He is also the best bearer of Swiss characteristics. . . .Untiring in his diligence, strict in his economising, simple and sober in his way of life.[49]

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[47] In 1910, foreign nationals made up 14.7 percent of the total population, but it was considerably higher in towns, where it reached 37 percent in Basle, 40 percent in Geneva, 20 percent in Zurich, and 23 percent in Schaffhausen. After World War I it decreased to about 10.4 percent at the national level. See Stettler (1969).

[48] Quoted in Marchal (1992a:45).

[49] Quoted in Weishaupt (1992:75–76). For the ideal of purity in sum-of-the-century Swedish nationalism, see Frykman and Lofgren (1987:ch. 2).

Depending on circumstances, the peasant ideal, traditionally also linked with liberty and democracy, was associated with organic continuity. In the 1930s and 1940s, the organic dimension tended to be stronger in most depictions of peasants than the republican one. As the academic, Karl Schmid, expressed it in a 1939 address organised by the Swiss liberal party: "It is more important to us that [Wilhelm Tell] climbs down from the mountains to us in hobnailed boots than that he speaks the language of human rights." [50] But even though the ideal type of the Swiss peasant at times adopted a markedly anti-modernist and anti-liberal direction of meaning, it was too firmly rooted in republican traditions to become anti-democratic. Besides, unlike in Germany, for example, where the idealisation of a "healthy" peasantry took on strong volkïsch overtones, on the whole the Swiss counterpart, though also depicted in naturalist and purifying terms too, lacked such racial connotations.[51]

THE ALPINE MYTH: ITS POPULARIZATION AND PLAUSIBLE STRUCTURE

The Spread of the Alpine Myth

The previous analysis has mainly focused on intellectuals, naturally the most vocal segments within any nation's public sphere. However, the idea that the Alps formed the ultimate source of national authenticity and that they were capable of fusing different linguistic groups into a single, homogeneous nation was not confined, in fact, solely to the realm of scholarly and intellectual discourse. To be sure, until the middle of the nineteenth century, the Alpine ideal had been the special preserve of a relatively small but articulate group of intellectuals and members of the political intelligentsia By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, however, this doctrine had spread to ever-wider sections of the population. Indeed, between 1870 and the end of World War II, the Alps were turned into the popular national symbol of the Swiss.[52]

Nevertheless, I need to underscore an important difference between the in-

[50] Quoted in Mattioli (1995:9).

[51] Ernst (1994:308). However, it is chiefly in terms of definitions of the Other that the ethnogenesis-function of the Alpine myth reveals itself. For as is well-known, this kind of naturalized ("alpinisized") Swiss nationalism could result in a national self-definition of considerable exclusiveness. On the discourse of *Ueberfremdung* (foreign infiltration) and on anti-Semitism during the interwar period, see Piccard (1994) and Zimmer (1993). On the discourse of national identity in Switzerland during the 1930s, see also Siegenthaler (1990).

[52] There remains, of course, the question of the place of Alpine symbolism in postwar Swiss identity. While a further study would be needed to satisfactorily tackle this question, a tentative answer may nonetheless be given. First, on the level of everyday life, there is every reason to suggest that the Alps retained much of their traditional importance as a self-evident symbol of Swiss nationhood up to the present day. Nevertheless, where the Alps may have lost considerably of their former symbolic significance is on the level of explicit ideological definitions of national identity. Particularly the naturalization of the nation—the belief that landscape in general, and the Alps in particular, are capable of determining national character—may be less sustainable under conditions

tellectual Alpine narrative and its popular counterpart: Although the former showed a marked concern for logical consistency, this was less so in the case of the latter. To put it more precisely, the Alpine reflections of the intellectuals rested upon a sharp distinction between the two patterns of linking nature and nation—first with the nationalization of nature until roughly the 1870s, then with the naturalization of the nation until the end of the Second World War. Within the broader public discourse on the national significance of the Alps, on the other hand, the two patterns often became part of the same narrative.

Even though it is notoriously difficult to grasp precisely how the Alpine myth spread from its intellectual producers to everwider sections of the public, there are numerous examples that suggest that it had indeed become part of the national consciousness by the turn of the twentieth century at the latest. This was favoured, first and foremost, by national festivals and rituals of various sorts. A great many Swiss men and women directly participated in such public national events, many of which were deliberately staged in an Alpine environment. Crucial among these were historical plays, which experienced a remarkable boom after 1885.[53] Furthermore, Alpine and pre-Alpine areas provided the traditional geographical setting for military training courses, which provided a fertile ground for the forging of popular patriotism; and ever since the early nineteenth century, the great majority of Switzerland's male population has had to contribute to these most prominent rituals of the modern nation-state, whether they liked it or not. Of no less importance was a folk-song movement that had witnessed a rapid expansion since the latter half of the nineteenth century, thus helping to embed the Alpine myth in the hearts and minds of many Swiss.[54] Likewise, Alpine symbolism played a crucial role in the ideology of *Geistige Larzdesverteidigung* (spiritual defence of the country), manifested in the National Exhibition Of 1939.[55] In official pamphlets on display at the exhibition, the Gotthard was depicted as the mountain which—by fusing four different linguistic groups into a culturally and spiritually united nation—had enabled Switzerland to exist.

The ideologies of the major political movements of the time were also replete with images of the Alps. During the two World Wars, the Liberal and Conservative parties in particular made frequent use of Alpine symbolism in their definitions of the Swiss nation.[56] So did people with direct influence on the

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of "reflexive modernization," with an attitude of "systematic doubt" starting to colonize the sphere of everyday life. On the implications of reflexive modernization, see Giddens (1991).

[53] A very recent study of newspaper articles from August 1st (that date being Switzerland's national holiday since 1891) in the period from 1891 to 1935 reveals that the Alpine myth occupied a crucial place in liberal and conservative papers all over the country, although the socialist press was more critical. See Merki (1995:67–71). On national festivals, see Santschi (1991). For a discussion of historical plays, see Kreis (1988).

[54] Braun (1965:326–9). [55] Lasserre (1992:192); Marchal (1992b:49–50).

[56] This is set out in Widmer (1992:619–38) and Wigger (1997:86–89).

course of national education. The school inspector, Jacob Christinger, to name but one example, in a much-noticed final speech at the National Conference of Teachers in Basle in 1884, presented the argument with unmistakable clarity:

> It seems that linguistic and religious differences in particular form a barrier to the national education of the Swiss people, and some go even so far as to deny that our people possess a unified national characters We do not want to accept this delusion. We all gaze upon the same mountains, look back to the same heroic figures in our history, enjoy the same folk songs and are proud of the same rights and liberties.[57]

Moreover, recent analyses of history and textbooks used in secondary education in all parts of the country have revealed that the Alps served as one of the major motifs in fostering national identity within the education system.[58] Hence, in 1905, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Schiller's death, the *Verein für die Verbreitung guter Schriften* (Association for the Promotion of Good Books) launched a special edition of *Wilhelm Tell,* the drama in which the Alpine landscape around the lake of Lucerne figures so prominently and which had become part of the Swiss literary canon soon after its first publication in 1804.[59]

In the field of artistic production, painting stood out in terms of the attention it devoted to the Alpine theme. Already during the nineteenth century, with Alexandre Calame and François Diday, mountain painting "had come to represent the very embodiment of national art" in Switzerland, very similar in style to the Romantic Norwegian artists, J. C. Dahl and Thomas Fearnley (Nasgaard 1984:134). But the peak of Swiss landscape painting was not reached until the turn of the century, in the form of the work of Ferdinand Hodler. In paintings such as *Dialogue with Nature* and *Communion with the Infinite,* or *Eiger, Monch and Jungirau above a Sea of Mist*, Hodler revived "the Romantic belief in the spiritual replenishment and uplifting experience to be derived from oneness with the grandeur of nature" (Nasgaard 1984:125). Hodler's naturalistic paintings, wrote the art critic Hermann Ganz, added "an overpowering force and magnitude to the Swiss landscape, enabling Switzerland to stand out as an independent entity against the countries which surround it."[60]

Finally, in an age of quickly expanding popular travel (railways) and mass communications, tourist propaganda and newspapers were important vehicles for the dissemination of the Alpine myth. In an advertisement launched by the Federal Swiss Railway Company during the inter-war period, the beauty of the country's rivers, its countryside and forests were described at length, principally to underline the predominance of Alpine symbolism. As the text pointed

[57] Quoted in Helbling (1994:160).

[58] See, for instance, Helbling (1994); Rutschmann (1994). On the significance of folk songs, see Im Hof (1991:158–9).

[59] Helbling (1994:173). [60] Quoted in Jost (1988:18).

out, the Alps "encircle the country and thus delimit its space, . . . defend and erect it, and . . . elevate it".[61] In newspapers and pamphlets, too, the Alps figured prominently as one of the most frequently evoked symbols of national identity and unity. As described in October 1935 by a Zurich-based newspaper aimed at a lower middle-class readership:

> We understand by Swissness a certain inheritance of spiritual and physical features which we find among the people as a whole between the Alps and the Jura throughout the centuries of our history to the present day. . . .We are the only typically Alpine state in Europe. . . .The Alps are our actual strength, for it is in the Alpine human being that we find our common ground. [62]

The Plausibility-Structure of the Alpine Myth

As the Swiss example shows, using geographical symbolism can be a highly effective way of reconstructing the nation as an authentic community. This process of naturalizing the nation, in the course of which group history and nature are fused into one single discourse of national identity, is vital to the task of linking nations firmly in time and space. Nature in general, and specific landscapes in particular, thus contribute greatly to buttressing the belief in the historical continuity of nations and in their being determined by external and physical rather than social factors. However, as the foregoing analysis equally demonstrates, the role of landscape in the reconstruction of nations varies according to time and circumstance. In the case of Switzerland, the Alpine myth gained considerably in currency between 1870 and 1945, when the country's polyethnic conception of nationality was severely contested by the rise of ethno-linguistic nationalism in Europe. This provoked a crisis of national identity in Switzerland which, in turn, engendered a project of national reconstruction. Unlike in France and England, where human beings were supposed to have the upper hand over their natural environment, in Switzerland, at a time of considerable social uncertainty, people sought guidance from a rugged example of nature, which they found in their Alpine landscape. Intellectuals and portions of the intelligentsia portrayed this landscape as a relentless force capable of determining the character of their nation and of its inhabitants—an ideological pattern that I have termed the naturalization of the nation.

Does this mean, however, that the Alpine myth became an important part of Swiss national identity during this period simply because of external challenges which, in turn, provoked a fierce nationalistic response based upon public rituals and ceremonies, the education system, new and more effective means of transport, and influence of the media? Much does indeed support this view. To begin with, it is surely true that, as an eminent student of geographical symbolism has put it, "What men see in Nature is a result of what they have been

[61] Quoted in Walter (1992:14). The advertisement was launched in 1911 and 1937 respectively.
[62] Quoted in Zimmer (1996:100).

taught to see."[63] Like all sustaining national myths, the Alpine myth did not depend for its effectiveness upon its being true. What is more, by the latter half of the nineteenth century, a potent Alpine narrative did emerge that was able to set the tone for the heightened public debate on national identity that set in after 1870, and then again during the 1930s.

This phenomenon becomes obvious if we look at some of the themes that constitute the Alpine myth. It can hardly be argued that the Alps, as the myth would have us believe, actually acted as a defensive castle that protected the Swiss against external military threats throughout the centuries. These mountains did not, at any rate, pose an insurmountable obstacle for the French troops when they invaded Switzerland in 1798 to replace the ancien régime with the Helvetic Republic. Nor was the military defense ring built around the Gotthardmassif in the late summer of 1940 the major reason why Hitler's Wehrmacht did not invade Switzerland—a belief to which a great many Swiss who grew up during the 1940s and 1950s chose to subscribe against a considerable amount of contradicting evidence.

Were the mountains responsible for what contemporaries called the Swiss "national character"? Had the Alps created a people of pure and simple herdsmen, a bit rude perhaps, but otherwise proud and certainly not to be ridiculed when their independence and liberty was at stake? Even if one endorsed this (highly questionable) notion and the geographical determinism it implied, this way of reasoning would be hardly plausible; especially during the period under consideration, Switzerland, a country extremely poor in natural resources, was transformed from a rural to an industrial nation. By 1910, it was the most industrialized European country next to England; and the bulk of its population resided in towns rather than small villages, with only an insignificant number actually dwelling in Alpine regions (Von Greyerz 1980:1094–5).

But why did the Alpine myth seem plausible all the same? Why, then, did so many Swiss apparently subscribe to the belief that the mountains were a vital source of Swiss national identity, that they had shaped their character and, hence, "their" nation? I believe that an additional argument is necessary to arrive at a fuller explanation for the important role played by the Alps in defining the Swiss national identity. The argument asserts that the Alpine myth, resting upon half-truths rather than pure fiction, possessed a "plausibility structure" (Berger and Luckmann 1966) and that this favoured its widespread appeal. To be more specific, what I am arguing is that the Alpine myth seemed plausible to a great many Swiss for two reasons: first, because it was grounded on certain material conditions; and, second, because it could be related to certain historical events, myths, and symbols that had formed part of the narrative of Swiss national identity after the latter part of the eighteenth century.

[63] Hope Nicolson (1959:3).

One such condition is plain physical topography. Topography mattered in that it formed a potentiality, even human actors selected particular landscapes and endowed them with national significance.[64] The size of the proportion of land covered by mountains—more than 60 percent, with many of the peaks rising above 4,000 metres—to Switzerland's overall territory (which is indeed small by European standards) can scarcely be ignored.[65] Furthermore, towards the end of the nineteenth century travel and tourism started to affect the masses (Bernard 1978: chs. 5 and 6). As a corollary, many Swiss men and women became well acquainted with the Alpine landscape through actual experience. For some this was because they took the opportunity to travel through them, while for most this was because they could see them on a clear day, whether they lived in Zurich, Bern, Geneva, Lucerne, or Lugano.

The second condition of importance concerns the economic and political significance of the Alps in the evolution of the Swiss Confederation from the fourteenth century onwards. Gaining control over the mountain passes as a means to secure the exchange of goods and capital with the prosperous Italian city-states proved vital to the economic and cultural development of the Confederate valley communities and city-states (Marchal 1986:152–3). What is more, the mountains of central Switzerland, along with the military success of the Confederate peasant army in the battles against the Habsburgs at Morgarten (1315) and Sempach (1386), helped prevent feudalism from taking root and let the Swiss Confederation emerge, in the words of Perry Anderson, as "a unique independent republic in Europe" (Anderson 1979:301). This actual exceptionalism was subsequently exaggerated by the chroniclers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The powerful mythical repertoire that emanated from their elaborations came to form the kernel of an emerging early modern Swiss identity. In the second half of the eighteenth and during the nineteenth centuries, the increasing prominence of a romanticized conception of nature (fostered by Rousseau and Schiller in particular) put the crucial finishing touch to the symbolic fusion of the Alps with the national past. To sum it up, a specific socio-political context, articulate ideologues, effective means of communication, as well as the country's geographical structure and historical development were together the factors responsible for the fundamental role of Alpine imagery in the reconstruction of Swiss national identity between 1870 and the end of World War II.

[64] The notion that geography shapes cultural evolution in the sense of a "possibilism"—a concept first developed by Vidal de la Blache and subsequently became influential in the *Annales* school of French historiography—is discussed in Braudel (1989:263–4).

[65] This is a considerably higher proportion than that of France, Italy, or Austria, the other three countries possessing major parts of the overall European Alps chain. Nevertheless, with a 12-percent share of the Alps of Europe, the percentage covered by Switzerland is lower than that in Austria (28 percent), Italy (27 percent), and France (22 percent). The figures are taken from Wachter (1995:39).

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