

## Introduction

“Perhaps most nations learn to define what they are by defining what they are not”

Stephen Greenblatt

Stephen Greenblatt poses this throwaway suggestion during his observations on Otherness in the *General Introduction* to the 1997 edition of *The Norton Shakespeare*.<sup>1</sup> Linda Colley observes a similar characteristic in individuals: “men and women decide who they are by reference to who and what they are not.”<sup>2</sup>

The variety of ways in which nations and individuals exclude outsiders shows that the boundaries of such negatively defined identities are rarely clear or unequivocal. The curious binary model of “us and them” upon which this exclusion depends has been a lynchpin of national awareness since before Roman imperial times and late antiquity. A type of osmosis allowed ideas to move across the Mediterranean landscape and generate a surprising degree of cultural unity; the image of the barbarian was one such idea - it can be found in Greek and Latin authors, on display in the rhetoric at court and in the letters of private individuals. It was so widespread because it said as much about Romans as it did about barbarians.<sup>3</sup> The excluded Other<sup>4</sup> can be seen as the product of this binary model of “us and them”.

The formation and contestation of identity are fundamentally about the power to represent. In late antiquity barbarians were barbarised, the East was orientalised, and non-Christians were paganised because they could be subject to such categorisation without their voices being heard or their ideas being known.

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, Katherine Eisaman Maus (eds. and introd.), *The Norton Shakespeare*, W. W. Norton and Co., London 1997, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1992, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Miles (ed.), *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity*, Routledge, London 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Our use of descriptors such as the Other, the alien, the barbarian etc. is, where possible, text and time dependent. That is, when writing about Aeschylus or Euripides, we adopt their use of the term “barbarian” (“barbaros” in Greek) to mean something akin to the Other. Terms such as alien and Wild Man similarly reflect usage during the periods about which we are writing. To a large extent these terms come to represent a generic concept of someone or something *outside*. But in saying this we are fully aware of the specificity with which concepts like the Wild Man, the primitive and the barbarian have been and continue to be treated, by anthropologists.

Identities are being constructed and dissolved in all historical periods and across all cultural endeavours - art, drama, literature and architecture. They are in constant flux and development even today, significantly impacted by globalisation, labour and refugee immigration and national upheaval. Identity seems to become an issue only when something assumed to be fixed and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty from an external threat - no less true today than it was in late antiquity.

Performative productions of drama and tragedy are appropriate tools with which to think about ideas of culture and identity in any era, especially today. They are useful vectors for us as individuals to think not only about the past but the present and future as well, and to stake a claim to our own roles and opinions in contemporary culture and politics.

From late antiquity to the early modern era, the physical "space" where tragedy took place, the theatre, rapidly became a symbol of the battle for hegemony waged by the Church in urban centres; theatre was constructed as a direct rival to the Church both as a physical "space" and an alternative interpretation of the past, present and future. It thus became integral as a facet of civic identity; the sites of theatrical performance were one of the truly public spaces where all sections of the citizenry gathered together to watch and be watched - as in a church.

In the early modern era, one author/actor - Shakespeare - wrote drama to entertain and earn a wage. But can he also be said to have used tragedy and the theatre to critique the state, the powerful court of Elizabeth I and its successor under James I?

Is there a representative link between a nation defining itself through excluding Others, and the treatment of the Welsh, Irish and Scots in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, the Moor and Goths in *Titus Andronicus* and the Moor in *Othello*?<sup>5</sup> In particular, if nations do define themselves by defining what they are not, can it be said that Shakespeare's dramatic expressions of the excluded Other were foregrounding the emergence of a nascent

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<sup>5</sup> Quotations of Shakespeare's plays and sonnets are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare*. Quotations from other early modern non-dramatic texts, such as travel writing, are from facsimile reproductions of the first editions published. The spelling in these travel writings was modernised to facilitate reading and comprehension.

English nationalism in the sixteenth century? Is the surprising instability of the Renaissance imagination and his literary productions a possible interrogation by Shakespeare of a similarly unstable political and cultural condition, namely, national identity?

Authorial intention is a notoriously troublesome concept to define and to prove. Literature is not a clear and discrete discourse that can be employed to deal with themes in a particular way.<sup>6</sup> It must be read in relation to other kinds of discourse, and like the concept of a nation, it is neither stable nor constant. While sixteenth century writers could and did separate their literary utterances from the political constraints of the state (to avoid censorship or worse), it is not possible or even necessary to scrutinise Shakespeare's plays in the hope of uncovering his "politics".

Nevertheless, the authorial act of separating those literary utterances from political constraints was, *in itself*, political. It allowed authors to interrogate and explore contentious political issues, sometimes through the simple expedient of setting performances in ancient Rome or modern Venice so as to enable safe political comment on Elizabethan or Jacobean England. In this way authors like Shakespeare explored the relations of power and the outcomes of political interplay in a culture. "That more than exploration is involved is much harder to demonstrate convincingly."<sup>7</sup>

Self-defining by exclusion of the Other is not a Renaissance or Shakespearean innovation. Even a cursory examination of the concept throws up an intricate history of narrative and textual transmission from as early as Homer. This is not to say there is a smoothly progressive or even comprehensible chronology of ideas and influences from the ancients down to the Renaissance. The development of Western (or any) society has not been a linear growing maturity emerging from pre-antiquity.

Nevertheless there is a discernible, if fractured, transmission of the theme of exclusion for self-definition, from at least the time of Aeschylus, writing in 472 BCE. It is in Aeschylus' *Persae* that we see the introduction of the 'barbarian' as the chosen

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<sup>6</sup> See Andrew Hadfield, *Literature, Politics and National Identity: Reformation to Renaissance*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare*, University of Chicago Press, New York 1980, p. 254.

Other to be excluded. Aeschylus and Euripides participated in the discourse of excluding the Other through their representations of the Persians and the Trojans as barbarian, tyrannical, non-Greek. This discourse formed part of the development of fifth century Athenian democracy, or hegemony, depending on one's point of view. Exclusion of barbarians, even in drama, was a potent tool of nation-formation. And in the hands of dramatists, it sometimes undermined the very thing it meant to shore up.

But terminology is an issue in this transmission. "Barbarian" soon morphed into "the primitive" and became cross-influenced by the medieval Wild Man, the savage, the devil and the black. And finally, the Moor. These are not mere terminological debates: a potent anthropological and cultural discourse surrounds primitivism and the myth of the Wild Man.

How and why these concepts were used to fashion an exclusion of the Other is a question that is "very difficult to clear up."<sup>8</sup> This may explain why the concept of the Other, the barbarian and all its cognates, emerged with such instability when Shakespeare appropriated them. Whereas some sixteenth century playwrights treated the Other according to the stereotype (always evil, frequently black), Shakespeare (and before him, Marlowe) blurred the margins between the "us" and the "them", ambiguating the binary model and frequently swapping moral codes backwards and forwards between "civilised" and "barbarian".

While drawing on classical themes about barbarians, Shakespeare's performative expressions neither confirm nor reject classical prejudices. His appropriation of primitivism and its cognates from classical sources surfaces as ambiguous portrayals of characters who were traditionally thought of as inferior by the Renaissance imagination. If the traditional exclusion or stigmatisation of the barbarian Other was a constitutive method of national definition, in *not portraying* an unequivocally negative view of the barbarian Other, Shakespeare may have been commenting on a nascent national awareness emerging in early modern England.

There are various methods of constituting a national identity - the impact on national awareness of the explosion in cartography

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<sup>8</sup> R. Withington, *English Pageantry: An Historical Outline*, B. Blom, New York 1918, p. 74.

and mapping that took place from about 1570 in England is one. The peculiar ability of visual representations of the nation to capture imaginations lends cartography a specifically political dimension. Maps could include the individual rather than exclude the alien. Some of Christopher Saxton's early wall maps represented more than four thousand place and locality names,<sup>9</sup> allowing individual identities, dependent on locality and place, to become markers of internal cohesion and common heritage.

The Elizabethan period's rapid growth of geographic, cartographic and cultural information about newly discovered lands and peoples, together with the accompanying outward push for further discoveries, renewed an inclination originating in classical antiquity to differentiate between 'civilised' peoples and 'barbarians'. This generally emerged as a belittling of the latter so as to confirm the superiority of the former. The binary contrast of opposites was a Renaissance commonplace allowing "civilised" English society to see itself emerging as superior to the so-called primitive New World.

Such negative self-definition was manifest in travel books, pageants, cartography and similar representations of Renaissance responses to the challenges of the New World. A single example of travel writing lauded at the time of its English publication in 1600 as erudite and objective was Johannes Leo's *A Geographical Historie of Africa*<sup>10</sup> (see *Fig. 1*, p. 6), which claims to provide ocular proof of the real barbarian. This account of the author's extensive travels in Africa curiously amplifies and enforces "difference", as did other contemporary travel writing. But Shakespeare's appropriation and treatment of the primitive and barbarian did not unequivocally adopt any contrast of opposites approach. His barbarians and primitives sometimes appear as powerful models of virtue to be admired and emulated, before they revert to type and resume their role as the emblematic and despised Other.

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<sup>9</sup> See Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan writing of England*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1992, p. 131.

<sup>10</sup> Johannes Leo, *A Geographical Historie of Africa, Written in Arabicke and Italian by Iohn leo a More, borne in Granada, and brought up in Barbarie ... Translated and collected by Iohn Pory, lately of Goneuill and Caius College in Cambridge. Londini ... 1600*, Da Capo Press Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, Amsterdam 1969.

A GEOGRAPHICAL  
HISTORIE of AFRICA,

*Written in Arabicke and Italian*

by IOHN LEO a More, borne  
in Granada, and brought vp  
in Barbarie.

*Wherein he hath large described, not onely the qualities, situations, and true distances of the regions, cities, townes, mountains, rivers, and other places throughout all the north and principall partes of Africa; but also the descents and families of their kings, the causes and euent of their warres, with their manners, customes, religions, and ciuile gouernment; and many other memorable matters: gathered partly out of his owne diligent obseruations, and partly out of the ancient records and Chronicles of the Arabians and Moors.*

Before which, out of the best ancient and moderne writers, is prefixed a generall description of Africa, and also a particular treatise of all the maine lands and Isles vnderdescribed by Iohn Leo.

*And after the same is annexed a relation of the great Princes, and the manifold religions in that part of the world.*

Translated and collected by IOHN PORY, lately  
of Goueuill and Caius College  
in Cambridge.



LONDINI,

*Jmpensis Georg. Bishop.*

1600

Fig. 1

Frontispiece of the first edition of *A Geographical Historie of Africa, Written in Arabicke and Italian by Iohn leo a More, borne in Granada, and brought up in Barbarie*, published in 1600

## Chapter One

### **Nation-Creating: Traditions of Denial and Exclusion**

“Being English in the time of Shakespeare, Spenser and Marvell meant taking part in nation-creating traditions of exclusion and denial.”<sup>11</sup>

David J. Baker

#### **1.1. National Awareness**

In exploring whether Shakespeare interrogated an emerging national awareness or identity in his own society, terminology must be clear. The emergence, or not, of a communal state of mind that can fairly be called “national awareness” during the Tudor period is the subject of polarised academic debate. Some argue that nationalism, or an awareness of nationhood, did not develop in Europe until the eighteenth century.<sup>12</sup> Others maintain that a “bare bones” national identity was evident in England from the eighth century.<sup>13</sup> The former theory is, broadly, based on analyses and definitions of the type of nationalism witnessed during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries “read back” to earlier times and thus, found wanting. The latter theory uses references to *natio*, *nacion* and similar linguistic markers in textual and documentary sources as evidence that nationhood was a commonly understood state of mind in England from as early as the Venerable Bede. This theory recognises the importance of a vernacular language of nationhood and its expression in all manner of texts, from the Bible to ballads, maps and plays.

Medieval and early Renaissance terms and concepts should not be freighted with twenty-first century meanings. The existence of “nation” and its cognates in the language of medieval texts does not, of itself, denote a national awareness. But the early modern forging of communities under the rubric

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<sup>11</sup> D. J. Baker, *Between Nations: Shakespeare, Spenser, Marvell and the Question of Britain*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1997, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, Hutchinson, London 1962.

<sup>13</sup> Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997, p. 35.

of *natio* or *patria* was important. While it may not prove that the English were in fact a nation at that time, it is arguable that they thought of themselves as one. Where a community excludes the barbarian Other and by doing so, validates its own sense of cohesive belonging, can we say with certainty that a national identity is emerging?

Whether we can say that Shakespeare was interrogating any emerging national identity is not clear. In *Henry V*, representations of the Irish and the Welsh outsiders make it apparent that these two outlying nations represented differing challenges to the encompassing English polity. In part this may have been because the two had been integrated (to the extent that they were), according to a different pattern of encroachment. Although the original conquest of Wales took place under Edward III, Henry VIII assimilated Wales in 1536 to an English nexus of county jurisdictions, whereas Ireland remained a mix of overlapping jurisdictions and culturally autonomous zones, all of which seemed unusually threatening to the English. The two nations had a different valence in early modern England. This difference becomes evident in Shakespeare's treatment of the Irish MacMorris and the Welsh Fluellen in *Henry V*. MacMorris's fractured and comic demand, "What ish my nation?" (III.iii.61) is never answered. He is removed from the play. Fluellen is trusted with more of the text, and becomes the imitative Englishman, approximating the civility of the English themselves. Wales remains assimilated, Ireland remains excluded.<sup>14</sup>

A more subtle blurring of the differences that could validate exclusion of the Other is evident in one of Shakespeare's earliest plays, *Titus Andronicus*. Here the archetypal barbarians, black Moor and female Goth, are staged together as emblematic outsiders. But initially Roman civility is found wanting as Titus murders his own son while the barbarian Queen of the Goths pleads for mercy for her own. In the face of Roman irreligious piety, Tamora invokes language of nobility and valour. In similar fashion, Aaron the Moor, who could easily have conformed to the tradition of irredeemably evil, black and overtly sexual, is a role that is destabilised at the very end of the

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<sup>14</sup> A fuller analysis of *Henry V* would explore the treatment of the Scots in this scene as well. Because Scotland was already a separate state or nation, we have chosen to focus on the Irish and Welsh as more marginal outsiders.

play when he is invested with a fundamentally human response, namely the protection of, and love for, his own child.

A decade after this play, Shakespeare again explores the Other, again a black. But now we face an Other who possesses all the civilised and civilising qualities traditionally vested in those who would exclude aliens. In *Othello* these characteristics of nobility, courage and dignity are not sufficient to prevent the inevitable punishment of tragedy. *Othello* reverts to type as a barbarian but we are left wondering whether he fails because of his blackness, or because 'civilised' values were found wanting, or both.

## **1.2. Fashioning a Nation**

Any discussion about nationhood and its temporal origins is exacerbated when modern meanings are applied to medieval and Renaissance terms. Definitional analyses of doctrinaire movements characterising late nineteenth and early twentieth century nation-formation cannot be readily transported to the fluid and constantly re-negotiated fashioning of "nation" in pre-modern times. Fundamentally the debate seems to have "divided itself between those who saw the polity as an achieved nation ... and those who saw it as an uncertain construction, perhaps more medieval than modern."<sup>15</sup>

The modernist approach locates a doctrinaire nationalism in the vast social, economic and cultural upheavals of the eighteenth to twentieth centuries, noting that the term "nationalism" was not used until the 1790s. By this analysis, national awareness or identity is precluded from emerging in medieval or Elizabethan times. Elie Kedourie declared that nationalism was a doctrine "invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century."<sup>16</sup> Others maintain that a nation, in the sense in which the word is understood today did not emerge until a presumed "social homogeneity produced by industrialism"<sup>17</sup> caused it to flower.

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<sup>15</sup> D. J. Baker, *Op. cit.*, 1997, p. 3. Baker's *Introduction* provides a very clear analysis of the sometimes murky debate between theorists of nationalism, as well as a thought-provoking exegesis of J. G. A. Pocock's theory of Britain as a "realm inhabited by two, and more than two nations ..." (England and Scotland, while Ireland and Wales remained outlanders). See pp. 1-16.

<sup>16</sup> E. Kedourie, *Op. cit.*, p. 9

<sup>17</sup> D. J. Baker, *Op. cit.*, 1997, p. 2.

Gellner and Hobsbawm both place the nation exclusively in a particular and historically recent period, characterised by the nation-state. "It [the nation] is a social entity only insofar as it relates to a certain kind of modern territorial state, the nation-state, and it is pointless to discuss nation and nationality except insofar as both relate to it." <sup>18</sup> John Breuilly emphasises that "certain sorts of national consciousness in sixteenth-century Europe ... should not be confused with nationalism." <sup>19</sup>

This is a superficially attractive proposition. Yet there is evidence that the polemical and literary discourse of Tudor/Elizabethan England reflected the fact that English people *saw themselves* as a "nation", however defined. "What we have to look for in nation-spotting is a historico-cultural community with a territory it regards as its own and over which it claims some sort of sovereignty so that the cultural community *sees itself with a measure of self-awareness* as also a territorial and political community, held together horizontally by its shared character rather than vertically by reason of the authority of the state." <sup>20</sup>

The discrete and self-contained rules of definition for nationalism, readily applied to modern political movements, appear unsuitable to clarify the protean and "imagined" self-awareness that is more or less continuously evident in England from pre-medieval times. Certainly, a definition such as Hastings' in the previous paragraph "would concur with the evidence to be found in the writings of such diverse writers as Sir Thomas Smith, Richard Hakluyt, Raphael Holinshed and Edward Hall" <sup>21</sup> as well as Shakespeare, although all the definitional elements may not be present all the time.

Benedict Anderson's well-known linkage of the rise of the nation to the formation of print culture (novels and newspapers) as an economic commodity also seems to exclude pre-modern England from nationhood. He postpones national awareness until the end of the eighteenth century despite his own evidence of the numerical explosion of books during the sixteenth. <sup>22</sup> Others who have examined the development of a

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 178.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Adrian Hastings, *Op. cit.*, 1997, p. 25. Italics added.

<sup>21</sup> Andrew Hadfield, *Op. cit.*, 1994, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Benedict Richard O'Gorman Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London 1991, p. 40.

print culture link it directly to the rise of national self-awareness. “As more people spoke and wrote in the European vernacular languages - German, French, Italian, Spanish and English - the printing presses increasingly published these languages rather than Latin or Greek, which appealed to a smaller audience ... This encouraged the rise of national consciousness. The mass of printed books in everyday languages contributed to the image of a national community amongst those who shared a common vernacular. Over the centuries this would ultimately lead to individuals defining themselves in relation to a nation rather than a religion or ruler ... A culture based on communication through listening, looking and speaking gradually changed to a culture that interacted through reading and writing.”<sup>23</sup>

Yet if the nation is seen as “imagined” in Anderson’s terms, then it must have been constantly re-imagined and renegotiated in the mutable public sphere of pre-modern England. Indeed, this approach has been adopted by some historians to argue that England was not only a nation by Elizabethan times but that it was *the prototype* nation, “the one from which others would eventually derive.”<sup>24</sup> This line of argument is based on the twin pillars of linguistic history and the impact of the Reformation.

So far as linguistic theory is concerned, many analyses of the question “was England a nation by the sixteenth century?” reach the affirmative through close reading of the word “nation”, its cognates and Latin translations from the time of the Venerable Bede. Bede wrote his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*<sup>25</sup> (see Fig. 2, p. 15) in 730 CE, “in which the ‘Gens Anglorum’ were deemed to be a specific and identifiable race sprung out of Saxon and Old English roots. In Bede’s history, the English were God’s new chosen *nation* elected to

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<sup>23</sup> Jerry Brotton, *The Renaissance Bazaar: From the Silk Road to Michelangelo*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002, p. 79.

<sup>24</sup> D. J. Baker, *Op. cit.*, 1997, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Written by the Venerable Bede in the 8th century, the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (*Ecclesiastical History of the English People*) is a history of the Christian Churches in England, and of England generally. Its main focus is on the conflict between the pre-Schism Roman Rite and Celtic Christianity. It was originally composed in Latin, is considered to be one of the most important original references on Anglo-Saxon history and has played a key role in the development of an English national identity. It is believed to have been completed in 731 when Bede was approximately 59 years old.

replace the sin-stained Briton in the promised land of Britain.”<sup>26</sup> Bede has been described as playing a “decisive role in defining English national identity.”<sup>27</sup>

Liah Greenfeld has categorically fixed the 1530s as nationalism’s start date, based on a historical survey of the use of the word “nation”: “... at a certain point in history - to be precise, in early sixteenth century England - the word ‘nation’ in its conciliar meaning of an elite was applied to the population of the country and made synonymous with the word ‘people’. This semantic transformation signalled the emergence of the first nation in the world, *in the sense in which the word is understood today*, and launched the era of nationalism.”<sup>28</sup> The precision of Greenfeld’s arbitrary temporal conclusion is founded on a circular definitional analysis - “nation” as it appears in Parliamentary documents, polemical writings and literary discourse becomes indistinguishable from “nationalism” - “nationalism” becomes the only story that can be told of national identity.”<sup>29</sup>

The role of the Reformation in secularising the assertion of absolute sovereignty in England is sometimes seen by social scientists and historians as an almost accidental catalyst for nationalism: “the Reformation brought an undeniable change in intensity through a series of events beginning with ... the swing to state Protestantism. There was nothing inherently nationalist about Protestantism. The linkage was largely fortuitous.”<sup>30</sup> This commentator pushes the probable inception of a national feeling back to the Wyclifite translators of the *Vulgate Bible* text, who used *nacioun* for the Latin *natio* (*ethnos* in the Greek text). *Nacioun* may have been in full public consciousness from the fourteenth century, or earlier, through to the sixteenth because of its inclusion in the *Vulgate*. “This does not ... prove of itself that the English were themselves at that time a nation, as we understand the term,

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<sup>26</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *Albion: The Origins of the English Imagination*, Chatto & Windus, London 2002, p. XX. Italics added.

<sup>27</sup> Adrian Hastings, *Op. cit.*, 1997, p. 35.

<sup>28</sup> Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1992, p. 6. Italics added.

<sup>29</sup> D. J. Baker, *Op. cit.*, 1997, p. 178.

<sup>30</sup> Adrian Hastings, *Op. cit.*, 1997, p. 55.

though their frequent use of the term *shows clearly that they thought they were.*"<sup>31</sup>

Whatever the answer, there is no doubt that not only England, but Europe itself underwent a fundamental change in self-awareness in the few centuries leading up to Elizabeth's reign. "By 1600, Europe had changed beyond all recognition from the ill-defined collection of city-states and principalities that made little reference to the entity of 'Europa' in 1400. Nation states and emerging global empires set the political agenda, and the fluidity of religious encounters and exchanges between east and west had hardened into the programmatic belief systems of Catholicism, Protestantism and Islam. This signalled the birth of the modern institution of the state and the concomitant rise of nationalism."<sup>32</sup>

It is perhaps not possible or even necessary to prove whether England was or was not a nation, however defined, during the Elizabethan period or earlier. Nations are not objective factual entities - as with any socio-cultural construction in the public sphere, they are constantly being re-drawn like a work-in-progress. The way a society sees itself is never predictable or fixed. "One cannot develop a precise chronology of nationalism because *the nation is a shifty, insubstantial entity, a narrative or a structure of feeling rather than an institution.*"<sup>33</sup> Similarly, literary reflections or interrogations of that self-image are not fixed: aligning texts (or other kinds of discourse such as maps or travel writing) with one specific range of meanings is largely pointless. At most we can postulate that Elizabethan England *imagined itself into a community* with shared heritage, language and spatial interests. "The idea of a nation is predicated upon the existence of a public space - geographical and conceptual - which will always include competing voices desiring to speak for the 'nation' and fashioning it according to their particular designs. Some conceptions of national identity will clearly be more successful than others and become dominant; some will disappear ..." <sup>34</sup>

One of the most pervasive methods of "fashioning" the nation was rigorous exclusion of other peoples, polities and nations

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 19. Italics added.

<sup>32</sup> Jerry Brotton, *Op. cit.*, 2002, p. 122.

<sup>33</sup> Barry Cunliffe, *Greeks, Romans and Barbarians: Spheres of Interaction*, B. T. Batsford Ltd, London 1988, p. 80. Italics added.

<sup>34</sup> Andrew Hadfield, *Op. cit.*, 1994, p. 3.

from the privileged space of the English state. “Reduced to its bare bones, nationalism is no more than the assertion of a particular ‘we’ arrayed against the ‘they’ of the rest of mankind, by itself giving no clue as to how the ‘we’ may choose to manage its own affairs.”<sup>35</sup> The assertion of a “we” against a “they” can produce a distinguishing separateness from others, as well as an internal coherence in the community, group or people asserting their “they-ness”. Hanson has suggested that the thrust of a national consciousness is “chiefly self-assertive, outward-looking and ... negative. Historically, the focus of national consciousness has been international rather than domestic politics; it expresses a *self-assertive response to relatively sharp foreign rivalry and competition*.”<sup>36</sup> Theorists of nationhood maintain that for peoples experiencing a combination of distinctiveness and coherence through the exclusion of others, the “reinforcing gift” of national consciousness may develop with little difficulty.<sup>37</sup>

If the assertion of a civilised “we” against an alleged barbarian “they” was one of the constitutive methods of national identity, the Renaissance appropriation of it was unstable and ambiguous. This may suggest that the boundaries of Renaissance national identity were unstable and ambiguous. It has been said that most English writers of the Elizabethan period “tend to elide the distinction between British and English as geographical, political and literary communities”<sup>38</sup> but there is no clear reason to suppose that elision and exclusion were the sole province of writers. “Political and institutional structures supported a national history constituted by centuries of active exclusion and passive indifference.”<sup>39</sup> England became a nation because the “English *ruling structure* was able to organise a geographically defined culture into a

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<sup>35</sup> Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation: The Rise to Self-assertion of Asian and African Peoples*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1960, p. 213.

<sup>36</sup> Donald W. Hanson, *From Kingdom to Commonwealth: The Development of Civic Consciousness in English Political Thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1970, p. 2. Italics added.

<sup>37</sup> Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1966, p. 173.

<sup>38</sup> Andrew Hadfield, *Op. cit.*, 1994, p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> D. J. Baker, *Op. cit.*, 1997, p. 5.