Introduction

One of the most controversial topics in the contemporary social and human sciences, discussions on nationalism began in the 19th century with the emergence of new nation-states. It became widespread, in terms of its various aspects, as the number of nation-states increased during the first half of 20th century up to the 1970s (Özkırımlı, 2009, 28-30). As important scholars began publishing analytical works on this phenomenon during the 1980s, academic discussions on it and its related aspects began to flourish. A new set of topics, such as feminism, gender, religion, fascism and multiculturalism, were gradually included. Although a quantitative expansion is now underway, the most vital questions concerning the theories of nation and nationalism, both now and in the past, may be the problematic of locating nationalism in human history.

What Is History to the Past?

Either “history” or “the past” is the common denominator in the frequently used ancient-modern contrasts when debating or trying to justify nationalism. Carvalho and Gemenne (2009) note the importance of history as the backbone of nationalism in terms of justifying the present (p. 1). Topics such as feminism, gender, religion, fascism and multiculturalism have not been part of these in terms of history and the past. This article seeks to analyze the relation among “history,” “the past” and nationalism.

In order to define the subject’s limits and prevent any shift away from the main focus, I confined myself to Eric J. Hobsbawm and Anthony D. Smith, their works, their interpretations of “history” and “the past” and the roles they attribute to them. As a means of explanation, these roles are analyzed in these discussions are examined. I therefore compare modernists and ethno-symbolists and attempt to define how they project the future. The well-known historian Carr has defined history's role as the analysis of the importance of the perception of history and the past in shaping the vision of the future. Contemporary Western civilizations acquired their supremacy over non-Western civilizations by means of their estab-
lished relation with their history and their past, which they to erect a self-perception of historical superiority. Therefore, this article aims to rethink the presuppositions and beliefs regarding this established culture and history.

E. J. Hobsbawm: Useful Material for Invention

The most important point that separates Hobsbawm from other scholars is how he defines history. For him, just like many other modernist authors, “history” is used to refer to “modern history” or a period that is not too far distant. The beginning point is designated as sometime around the end of the 18th century, when modern states or territorial states started to (Özkırımlı, 2009, p. 149). According to Carvalho and Gemenne (2009), history had an important effect on the creation of modern states in both the Old and the New World (p. 1).

Hobsbawm’s (1997) discussions of nationalism, topics of history and the past can be seen as an effort to answer to questions, such as the importance or function of history and the past, that have occupied a considerable space in the author’s intellectual agenda (pp. 23-25). In essence, both of these are important because of the roles that have been attributed to them. According to Hobsbawm, they are important because not only does the power of the past rely on witnessing past events and the phenomenon and foundation of the knowledge of traditions, but it also has the power to determine the present. The past can rest significantly traditional in social change; however, the same past could also significantly direct the present or at least be considered in that way (E. J. Hobsbawm, 1997, 13-25).

This complementary relationship between the past and the present should be mentioned in terms of its relation to the present and the future. The past, which includes everything that has happened until the present day, is not bound by time and place, for Hobsbawm (1977) held that “The past was the model of the present and the future. The past signified the genetic key to allow generations to reproduce and reorganize their relations” (p. 25). Even though it is used as a tool for some “goals”, the fact that its influence cannot be reduced by change means that it remains the most useful analytic tool around (E. J. Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2006, 16; E. J. Hobsbawm, 1997, 18-20). In this context, one of the most important arguments around which Hobsbawm forms his opinions is the “invention of traditions”. He asserts that if there is not enough information and perspective about “the invention of traditions”, nationalism cannot be fully understood (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2006, 17-18). To justify the status quo, which benefits the society’s elites and both controls and integrates the citizens into the system, nation-states invent a past (tradition). Every society has a stock of such elements that includes the required materials, such as symbolic practices and a language (E. J. Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2006; Özkırımlı, 2009, 7).

Finally, after designating all of this in his capacity as a historian, Hobsbawm frequently provides suggestions to other historians in order to reveal the true history. As an inspiration and an ideology, history tends to justify itself. Until now, there has been nothing more dangerous than the attempts of modern nations and nationalist ideologies to justify themselves. The historian, as a memory bank, has a mission to uplift these connections every once in a while and pull them apart, for this is the only way to learn something about
modern societies. Generally, historians have to be critical about ideological and political approaches to history, for such attempts are usually misguided. Therefore, history can only become history when it is clear what it “really is” and “really is not” (E. J Hobsbawm, 1997, s. vii, viii, 6, 36).

**Anthony D. Smith: Limited to the Present, so It Cannot Be Twisted to Someone’s Liking!**

Anthony Smith has clearly embraced the perspective of ethno-symbolism. With a Weberian approach clearly evident in his works, this was not enough to stop him from self-identifying as an ethno-symbolist. Unlike many authors, he emphasizes the strong bond between nationalism and pre-modern ethnicity and focuses his works accordingly. He contends that nationalism has a relatively deep history and an uninterrupted ethnic consciousness. However, he does not agree with the primordialists’ opinion that nationalism was the first and natural (Calhoun, 2009, 76). Ethno-symbolists criticize those modernists with a primordialist bent who hold that nations have existed since the beginning and have always been a primal component of humanity, as compared to having appeared with modernity based upon a political ideology. Arising as a reaction to the hegemony of modernism, ethno-symbolists assume that nations and nationalism are cultural phenomena and assert that they should be analyzed in the field of historical sociology (Smith, 1994, 7-8). One of the different points of Smith’s modernist approach is what he means by the past, the intervals, and the duration of time. The sense of continuity, “la longue durée” as Fernand Braudel calls it, between the past and the present requires a period of time.

The method used in the École des Annales inspired the author and helped him form his opinion (Lee, 2012, 1-7). One of the controversial topics that Smith addresses related to the past is ethnic past(s). He opines that either with embracing, either with continuity or repetition, there is a vital relation between ethnic past(s) and national existence, a reality that occupies a central position in the problems with which ethno-symbolism deals (Smith, 2009, 39). One important aspect of this argument is that, according to Smith, although the past has been exposed by a political viewpoint, the partial approach of nationalist theories does not mean that the present can completely influence or manipulate the past. Likewise, he emphasizes that reading the past from the present viewpoint is partial (biased). To prevent this, just as looking to the present from the past, one must analyze from the present to the past (Smith 1998, 170-180).

As mentioned before, one of the key words in his explanations of “ethnic” is presented as ethno-history in the context of history. For him, “ethnic history that is passed on to generations continues to shape our identity and determines the communal goals” (Özkırımlı, 2009, 156). Like Hobsbawm, Smith (2000) discusses the past’s extension into the present. He writes that the past, especially the ethnic past, is of vital importance to the national entity, since it influences a nation’s existence in three ways. First is the recurrence of the past, for even though change has unique forms, its recurrence is an important fact in the ideal nation type. Second is continuity, for an established continuity is important to the existence of nations. In this context, Western Europe could be traced back many centuries in terms of the continuity of its nations. And third is appropriation (pp. 63-64).
Thus one could say that Smith has a semi-determinist perception of history and the past. Just like modernists, ethno-symbolists agree that the past, if interpreted from either of these two perspectives, could lead to it being used for “political goals”. However, he criticizes Hobsbawm’s “invented tradition” theory and emphasizes that this could be, at best, a “reinterpretation of the past”.

**Conclusion**

History and the past are neither faits accomplis in terms of their influence on the present, nor are they bound by time and space. Therefore, how they are perceived and how they influence people have occupied a place in many disciplines, not to mention an important place in nationalistic literature. The differences in interpretation between Hobsbawm and Smith are due mainly to the meanings they attribute to the concepts of history and the past. Even though the magnitude and dimensions of their effects are described differently, both scholars have not evaluated them as fait accompli. Besides the differences in their approaches, a meaningful conclusion of history and the past is beneficial to non-Western societies. At the present time, the weakest part of those ideologies dominated by Western thinking is the fact that they accept the Western definitions of history and the past. Therefore, one could say that there is a complementary relationship that provides continuity between the past/history and the present/future.

**Kaynakça / References**


