Shakespeare, Renan and Weber: an interdisciplinary study of the violence paradigm and what it means to law and the nation-state

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2 Renan and his concept of nation

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will analyze the concept of nation as presented by Ernest Renan (1823-1892). In his authoritative paper "What is a nation" (1882) he describes some key concepts that have, in his opinion, but secondary significance in the forming of a nation: they may make their appearance in the process of (or as a characteristic in) nation-forming, yet are not of quintessential importance as he duly sums up. This preeminent role is allocated by Renan to a spiritually imbued type of will. A concept he elaborately but equivocally circumnavigates. And of course, my interest in this thesis lies in the careful and attentive peeling off of this concept until its core is revealed. Only then we might understand the full meaning of Renan's will, but more importantly, we might evince its affinity with what thinkers like Shakespeare and Nietzsche have written on nation and the forming of nations. But for now, we will, in this chapter, address Renan's concept of nation; yet not before I have given a short overview of Europe's tumultuous history of his time.

2.2 The turbulent birth pangs of 19th-century national consciousness in Europe

The 19th century in Europe sees political and social upheaval throughout the continent. Parallel to revolutionary developments in the fields of technology and science, the major nations of Europe, as we know them today, through a series of revolutions (either bloody or not), are emerging in the wake of the disruptions caused by Napoleon's military conquests (unsettling and shaking up the entire continent). And although the sovereign nation as a political entity has figured ever since 1648, it comes as no surprise that the concept of "nation" was not reflected upon theoretically and in depth until the nineteenth century. This, in the opinion of many commentators, did not happen in a convincing way until the classic study by Renan. To get a picture of this turbulent century in which he lived and thereby gain a clear impression of his immediate frame

of mind, I will start with a brief overview of the European revolts of his century.[1]

In the 18th century, the Revolution (1789) had swept through France with the subsequent Terror (1792 – 1795), followed by the period of the *Directoire* (a government of five Ministers; a curtailment of the right to vote was implemented), whereupon Napoleon Bonaparte seized power in 1799. Initially as consul; in 1804, he crowned himself emperor. We have now arrived in the 19th century; during Napoleon's regime, the riots and administrative and social instability did not end. Throughout this period and despite all atrocities and terror, the foundations for democracy, the separation of church and state and the *Trias Politica* were laid in France. Napoleon's administration heralded the definite end of the old feudal relations and the power of the local nobility; central authority had arrived.

In 1808, Spain was occupied by France. This invasion was followed by a particularly bloody war (the Spanish War of Liberty: 1808 – 1814), which left deep marks on Spanish society, with Goya's famous etchings and paintings still testifying to its horrors. During this occupation and war, the Spanish colonies in South America saw an opportunity to break away from their colonizers under the charismatic leadership of Simon Bolivar (nicknamed El Liberator: 1783 – 1830), who founded the young nations of Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela, and Bolivia.

In 1813, Napoleon was defeated for the first time; after his second defeat in 1815, Napoleon left the European stage for good, whereupon a nationalist wind swept through Europe. The resolutions of the Congress of Vienna[2] saw the re-installment of many pre-Napoleonic regimes, heralding a period of Restoration.[3]

In England, a different kind of revolution took place: the industrial revolution, especially in the first three decades of the 19th century; with technological innovations taking place at an unprecedented speed. England had to find new markets for the goods that at ever greater speed left its factories. Since England had not been able to trade with Holland and Germany[4] during Napoleon's *Blocus Continental* (1806 – 1814; a continental boycott of all trade to and from England), new markets were found in the colonies,[5] as a result of which the

1 The notes that I made during the secondary school history lessons, given by Mr. P. Weiss, are the source for this overview.

2 1814 – 1815. The congress was initiated by some former Ministers and heads of state after Napoleon's first defeat.

3 Not all *ancient regimes* were reinstalled. Thus, in The Netherlands, a kingdom was created, where previously it had been a republic. The former republican *stadtholder* dynasty of the Oranje-Nassau's were bombarded to kings.

4 Until the Napoleonic period the main trading partners.

5 England (seafaring country as it was) had been colonizing the new world ever since the 16th and 17th centuries: experiencing the dreaded competition of The Netherlands: the other maritime country.

number of Britain's imperial holdings exploded. These developments left England the most powerful and influential nation in the world.

The Netherlands became a kingdom in 1815, including the Netherlands proper, Belgium and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. In Germany, the German Confederation (*Deutsche Bund*) was formed in 1815 in which Prussia and Austria were predominant. This union lasted until the Austro-Prussian War began in 1866. Meanwhile, Otto von Bismarck had become Prussian prime minister; he pushed for a united nation of Germany.

In France, the Restoration under the reactionary rule of Charles X of Bourbon lasted until 1830. In the same year, a wave of revolutions swept across Europe: a backlash to the reactionary reigns of the European nations. In France the July revolution broke out after which a more progressive "bourgeois" king came to power (Louis Philip of Orleans) and in August of that year, revolution broke out in Brussels which resulted in the secession of Belgium and Luxembourg from the Netherlands in 1831.

In February 1848, a second revolutionary wave swept across Europe. In France, the second Republic was founded (1848 – 1851) of which Louis Napoleon (nephew of) became the president. In 1851, this Louis staged a coup d'état and crowned himself emperor: Napoleon III heading the second French Empire.

Italy had been dominated by various European rulers in the first half of the 19th century. Under the leadership of Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807 – 1882), a series of bloody battles was fought for independence. In 1861 Garibaldi was able to put Victor Emanuel on the throne of a united Italy.

In 1870 – 1871, the Franco-Prussian War erupted; a particularly cruel and impactful war for both nations. An eyewitness, the still young Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900), serving as an orderly in this war, writes to his friend Carl von Gersdorff about the horrors he saw (see next chapter). Germany wins this war and France loses quite some territory (e.g. Alsace-Lorraine). As a result of this victory, Prussia and its prime chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, saw the dream of a united Germany under Prussia being materialized.

In France, in the same period (1870/71), there were once again bloody disturbances in Paris (the *Paris Commune* from March to May 1871), as a result of which the Second Empire fell and was succeeded by the 3rd Republic. It is against this background that Renan writes his tracts.

2.3 Renan

Ernest Renan (1823 – 1892) was born in Tréguier, a small fishing village in Brittany.[6] His father was an ardent Republican, his mother and older sister

6 Biographical details on life and political thought taken from: H.W. Wardman, *Ernest Renan, A Critical Biography*.

Henriette, however, were devout Royalists and Roman Catholics. His father died at sea when the small Ernest was 5 years old.[7] The boy was a bright and quick pupil; at the behest of the local clergy and much stimulated by his sister, he was therefore sent to the seminary of Saint-Nicolas du Chardonnet in Paris in 1838 to be trained for the priesthood. In 1840, he continued his studies at the seminary of Issy-les-Moulineaux.

He experienced increasing difficulty conforming to clerical rules and thought; slowly but surely, he grew distant from the idea of becoming a priest. Influenced by philosophy and the French rationalists, he became a secularist and rationalist. He decided to break with the seminary and took up a position as a teacher. Later in life, he evolved into an esteemed political thinker, known for his humanistic and liberal approach to religion, advocating for the separation of church and state, inspired by rationalism and the ideas of the Enlightenment. In 1878, he was elected a member of the Académie Française.

As a liberal and rationalist, he saw progress (both technological and an increase in learning and knowledge) as the medicine against political and social ills. He detested the use of violence, both between individuals and countries.

He maintained, however, his elitist stance. Giglioli: "Renan sees little of independent normative value in the concept of equality. Indeed, by developing an ideal-type of nobility defined on the basis of virtue and cultivation, he appears to believe that social stratification is not only inevitable and justifiable but also beneficial per se."[8] In this he did not differ from most of his contemporaries; Nietzsche too had a decidedly aristocratic conception of social stratification.

What Renan also shared with Nietzsche was his abhorrence of the French-Prussian War of 1870 – 1871. Renan advocated a united Europe to prevent any future war. In this respect, he may be called a visionary. I cannot but quote Giglioli, who summarizes Renan's reaction and consecutive stance to this (power) balance-tilting war quite adequately: "The unification of Germany through war and conquest [the 1870 -71 war and the subsequent annexation of Alsace-Lorraine by Germany] has essentially altered the status quo of Europe. Renan had the lucidity to perceive immediately that what was at stake greatly exceeded the curtailment of France's role by the appearance of a new, rising state; indeed the capacity of the European balance of power to function in its traditional manner had been fundamentally called into question."[9]

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7 It is remarkable that both Ernest Renan and Friedrich Nietzsche (I will come back to this thinker further down) share a similar background. Both were raised in a small town/village religious milieu and grew up in a household run by women and both lost their fathers at a young age.

8 M.F.N. Giglioli in *What is a Nation and other Political Writings*, E. Renan, Introduction, p. XXIII.

9 M.F.N. Giglioli in What is a Nation and other Political Writings, E. Renan, Introduction, p. XXVII.

Renan's concern was so great that he reached out, passing the frontlines of war, to another renowned thinker and theologian, the German David Strauss. In September 1870 Renan wrote him a letter, published in the *Gazette d'Augsburg* in August 1870: "Is it worthy of Germany to absorb by force a rebel, resentful province [occupation of Alsace-Lorraine] that has become irreconcilable, especially since the destruction of Strasbourg? […] How can one fail to see that the consequence of such a policy will be to occupy France indefinitely with three or four hundred thousand men? So, does Germany wish to rival sixteenth-century Spain? What would become of its great and lofty intellectual culture then? […] The principle of European federation can [..] offer a basis for mediation similar to what the church offered in the Middle Ages."[10] He thus wanted to remodel Europe into a federalist configuration, ensuring unity in culture and anchoring the possibility of mediation between nations if necessary.

His early thinking about the nation[11] was also influenced by this war. Giglioli on the subject: "Adopting a voluntarist theory of nationality to protest the German annexation required the abandonment – or, at the least, the marginalization – of the categories of race, ethnicity and national character on which much of historiographical work rested."[12]

Giglioli introduces yet another argument regarding why Renan would have assigned a secondary role to the unity of race, religion, etc., in defining what a nation is. This is evident in the fact that European countries eagerly engaged in the colonization of the "unexplored" lands on other continents. Invoking such concepts as essential would have been, of course, inconsistent with the colonialist sentiment and expansionism prevalent in Europe, especially in France, as Giglioli notes somewhat ironically. Most likely, Giglioli refers to the imperialistic and racially outspoken position Renan expressed in his "Intellectual and Moral Reform of France" from 1871, where he writes that the conquest and subsequent governance of an inferior race by a superior one is not shocking at all.

In his later work on nation and nation-building (1882), Renan does not come back to this argument. I hold, contrary to Giglioli, that, should Renan have had the above reasons, he would certainly have mentioned them in the 1882 speech, precisely because at that time it would in no way have been a taboo to argue and defend colonialism. Norwich writes on the subject:

> The second half of the nineteenth century, and particularly its last two decades, saw a spectacular growth of the second French Empire. […comprising] Algeria

10 E. Renan, " Two Letters to Mr. Strauss" in *What is a Nation and other Political Writings*, p. 166.

11 We write 1871, more than 10 years before his authoritative work " What is a nation" saw the light in 1882.

12 M.F.N. Giglioli in *What is a Nation and other Political Writings*, E. Renan, Introduction, p. XXVI.

> […] Senegal, Tunisia, Mauretania, Mali, Ivory Coast, Chad, Gabon, Morocco (a protectorate), Madagascar and Réunion; on Indochina – Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia; and on the South Pacific – New Caledonia, the Marquesas Islands and much of Polynesia. The Republicans had originally opposed the whole idea of territorial expansion, but when Germany began her own programme they changed their minds; and before long, as trade with the new colonies developed, the empire was seen as a powerful force for good, spreading Christianity, French culture and the French language and generally acquiring prestige for the motherland.[13]

It may, therefore, be concluded that the 19th-century European expansion into other continents was not so much incited by the elevation of "inferior races" unto the enlightened state of European (Christian) culture as with mutual prestige and (economic)[14] dominance.

Renan's intuition (as it was with the altered power balance in Europe – see above) to put aside race as a determining factor in the building of a nation was accurate[15]; as I will argue in the next chapter, be it from a diametrically opposite perspective.

Renan's contemporary Nietzsche also reflected on Europe and the nation. Unlike Renan, he saw not so much the advantages as he focused on the disadvantages and problems that unification (be it a united Europe or a united Germany) would bring. Accordingly, he was reluctant if not negative to the idea of a unified Germany.

Nietzsche feared that society's flaws would be magnified with geographical upscaling. Therefore, rather than for political/military unification, he argues for close-knit and vital communities of *freie Geister* to govern country or continent. Only they could, according to Nietzsche, ably handle enlargement of geographical action radius.

In *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882)[16] Nietzsche writes on Europe and the Europeans: we displaced[17] no longer feel at home in Europe,

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13 John Julius Norwich, *A History of France*, p. 326.

14 England was, at the time, conquering Africa, partly in a kind of rat-race for that continent; other competitors were France, Belgium (more specifically the Belgian king), the Netherlands and Germany. They wanted to trump each other, to stabilize their power and secure their markets. Sources: G.M. Trevelyan, *History of England,* D. van Reybrouck*, Congo and* R.C. van Caengem*, Geschiedenis van Engeland.*

15 And he was not the only one. Max Weber also disclaimed racialism as an important factor in the forming of nations; typifying it as zoological nationalism as, as a matter of fact, also Renan did – see further down. Max Weber, Gesamtausgabe, Abteilung II, Briefe, 1911-1912, J.C.B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1998, pp. 352 – 357.

16 Colli, G., en Montinari, M., ed., Nietzsche Werke – Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Volume 3, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, § 377, p. 628 ff. In this thesis, abbreviated as K.S.A., followed by volume number and work.

17 We should bear in mind that Nietzsche had given up his own citizenship in 1870 and remained stateless for the rest of his life.

> Wir „conserviren" Nichts, wir wollen auch in keine Vergangenheit zurück, wir sind durchaus nicht „liberal", wir arbeiten nicht für den „Fortschritt", wir brauchen unser Ohr nicht erst gegen die Zukunfts-Sirenen des Marktes zu verstopfen – das, was sie singen, „gleiche Rechte", „freie Gesellschaft", „keine Herrn mehr und keine Knechte", das lockt uns nicht! – wir halten es schlechterdings nicht für wünschenswerth, dass das Reich der Gerechtigkeit und Eintracht auf Erden gegründet werde (weil es unter allen Umständen das Reich der tiefsten Vermittelmässigung und Chineserei sein würde.

So he does not pin his hopes on some -ism or – ology, but on *zu jeder Verstärkung und Erhöhung des Typus "Mensch"*.[18] In *Jenseits Gut und Böse*[19] he deems Napoleon to be such a strong man: a *freie Geist* who was of a belligerent disposition.

We may conclude that both thinkers developed their ideas from an elitist and socially stratified paradigm. Also, both have a certain type of community/nation/communal federation in mind, but this is where similarities end. Renan wanted a European federation to be achieved through diplomatic and political consultation and referring to a common European culture. His goal was to prevent another war between member states.

Nietzsche advocated a vigorous, robust common culture free from human fallibilities (and therefore also free from cultural flaws); to be achieved by forceful, free personalities. His goal was to form a strong and vital community with a living culture that would have nothing to fear from geographical upscaling since, after all, the flaws had already been removed.

Renan's strategy is motivated by his repugnance for war and violence. Nietzsche's strategy, on the other hand, manifests itself as militant vitality; he does not shun violence (in the next chapter, I will elaborate on Nietzsche's attitude towards violence).

Thus, both thinkers take a (more or less) positive stand towards the unification of nations (be it Europe or Germany), however, their arguments and goals are diametrically different, as are their proposed strategies to get there.

It does not seem improper to posit here that these differences might have something to do with their respective characters[20] and therefore with their reactions to a tumultuous 19th- century Europe full of cruel and violent conflicts. Renan, the man of peaceful means and moderation, driven by the ideals of rationalism and enlightenment, secularity and liberalism and Nietzsche,

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18 Ibid.

19 K.S.A. 5, *Jenseits Gut und Böse*, § 199, p. 120.

20 It is rather peculiar – and also somewhat jocular – that Nietzsche saw in Renan precisely someone who would stand in the way of European unification. He also regarded Renan as a danger to French culture. Renan, according to Nietzsche, has an ailing will. K.S.A. 6, *Götzendämmerung, Streifzüge eines Unzeitgemässen*, § 2, p. 110 ff. This paragraph is a tasty invective against Renan, as is the whole book against a diversity of persons and (cultural) institutions. One could consider it a compliment that Nietzsche deemed Renan so important that he devoted an entire paragraph to him.

the man of passions and drives, influenced by the ideals of the Romantics and the encounter with Wagnerian music and Periclean Tragedy.

Further down in this thesis, we will see if these two seemingly opposite characters and thinkers have any unexpected similarities.
For now, let us concentrate on what Renan had to say about the genesis of nations when he delivered his famous speech on the subject at the Sorbonne on the 11th of March 1882. This being, after all, foremost on the minds of most citizens.

Renan's text appeared at the time of the Third French Republic. The Third French Republic was said to be the first republic in the world with a true parliamentary system. Also, in this period (1870-1940), republicanism and secularism entered into a close relationship. This makes this period particularly intriguing for those interested in the development of the democratic system.

Renan provides us with the elements of the nation concept in his speech "What is a Nation?"[21] I will now present a discussion thereof. I will also discuss his *ideal* of the nation; as we will need a conceptual framework in order to understand what Shakespeare's tragedies show about the nation and the development of a community into a nation and subsequently into a nation-state.[22]

2.4 The nation and other forms of human coexistence

As already pointed out in the introduction, I will use Renan's interpretative scheme of the concept of nation. Now, what is Renan's view on this concept? Renan begins in a comparative vein by saying that he wants to reflect on the "forms of human society."[23] He continues with the summing up of the following forms, dividing them into nations proper, assemblies, agglomerations, confederations, communities and independent entities:

1. "Great human agglomerations," to be found in China, Egypt and in ancient Babylon.
2. The "tribe," as we find among the Arabs and the Israelites.
3. The "city," such as Athens and Sparta.
4. "Assemblages of different lands in the manner of the Achaemenid Empire".
5. "The Roman Empire," like that of Charlemagne.
6. "Communities without a homeland" (*patrie*) and held together by a religious bond, like the Israelites and the followers of Zarathustra.

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21 Renan, Ernest, *Qu'est qu'une nation? Et autres essais politiques,* 1882, Textes choisis et présentés par Joël Roman, Presses Pocket, Paris 1992. I make use of an English translation: Renan, *What is a Nation? And other political writings*, 2018 (1882), translated by M.F.N. Giglioli, pp. 247 – 263.

22 See below.

23 Renan, " What is a Nation?", pp. 247 – 248.

7. "Confederations," as we see among the Swiss and among the Americans.
8. "Affinities" based on race, as we find among German and Slavic peoples.

Renan concludes his list with:

9. "nations," France, England and "the majority of modern independent European states."[24]

All these "modes of grouping" exist, but one must distinguish them. Why is this distinction important? Because one cannot simply transfer the institutions of, say, "small independent cities" (Sparta and Rome) to nations consisting of thirty or forty million people, as Renan says. Related but not identical to the concept of "nation" is the concept of "state." Renan does not actually address this in "What is a Nation?" and so we must turn to another classical author for the latter concept.

2.5 Max Weber's concept of the state

It hardly needs to be said that Renan's thoughts on the concept of the nation are of enormous significance for a proper understanding of the "nation-state": the combination of a nation with a state. Thus, although the concepts of "nation" and "state" are linked in the "nation-state," it is also clear that they are not the same thing. It is therefore important to distinguish the concept of "nation" from "state." What is a state?

The definition of the great German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) is authoritative here. In his *Staatssoziologie*, he points out that we cannot separate a state from (the use of) "power". Weber wants to approach the state as a sociologist, and what is important then is that the state accomplishes its goals by using a specific agent. It is that *agent* that distinguishes the political connection which is the state from other political connections. That agent, specifically tied to the state, he calls "das der physischen Gewaltsamkeit."[25] To clarify his position, Weber quotes Trotsky, who had said during a lecture in Brest-Litowsk that every state is founded on violence. Weber calls that "in der Tat richtig," and he says that if we only knew (social) institutions that never used violence as an agent, then the state would have been unknown to us ("würde der Begriff 'Staat' fortgefallen sein").[26] Indeed, we would then be living in a situation of constant anarchy.

The phraseology and exemplification already indicate that something odd is going on here. A strange discrepancy lies at the heart of these remarks that

24 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 248.

25 Max Weber, Max, *Staatssoziologie. Soziologie der rationalen Staatsanstalt und der modernen politischen Parteien und Parlamente*, p. 27.

26 Weber, Ibid., p. 27.

I find deeply problematic. How can a sociologist describe the use of violence by a state, and illustrate this with the wording of *the* renowned revolutionary?[27] Surely, in general, Trotsky's attitude towards violence (and use of it, as begotten in the communist revolt with the specific purpose of toppling society and its institutions) must be of a very different kind than Weber's. The latter's type of violence was solely meant to be used by the state to protect citizens and institutions.

To continue with Weber, he arrives at his definition of the state that has made school in the sense that it has been adopted countless times, with or without minor amendments.

> Staat ist diejenige menschliche Gemeinschaft, welche innerhalb eines bestimmten Gebietes – dies: das 'Gebiet', gehört zum Merkmal – das Monopol legitimer physischer Gewaltsamkeit für sich (mit Erfolg) beansprucht.[28]

It should be noted that, apart from violence, another element is included. Weber puts forward territory as characteristic of the state concept. The state exercises violence over people in a specific region/land: a state territory. That state does not do so "in competition" with others, but the state is the only one that can exercise that violence. One can also say: the state has – if all goes well – overcome all competing organizations with the same ambitions (criminal organizations like the Mafia or terrorist groups with territorial ambitions like ETA or IS). Weber: the state has been able to successfully defend its monopoly over the legitimate exercise of physical violence.

I now allow myself to briefly return to my above remarks on Weber's and Trotsky's use of the term violence. As said, the type of violence of Trotsky seems to me to be of an essentially different quality than Weber's. Trotsky's is an unrestrained force of destruction. This seems almost the opposite of Weber's "state violence": regulated preferably by codified law. Well now, it is these types of violence that are the special concern of this thesis. It seems to me that an in-depth study of the concept of violence within these frameworks is of some importance; perhaps to discover the precise differentiations in characteristics and effects of (the types of) violence as well as their influence on nation and state. In what way does this influence make a nation tick and what is it – seen from this perspective – that keeps its body politic healthy and vibrant? For this, I will turn to Shakespeare's tragedies. Shakespeare also seems to have a keen eye for what makes a state or, for that matter, a nation[29] deteriorate. How does he see the role of the violence, as identified above, there?

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27 Trotsky helped organize the failed revolution of 1905 and played a leading role in the October Revolution of 1917 toppling the government. He fought with the Bolsheviks in the Civil War of 1917 – 1922.

28 Weber, Ibid., p. 27.

29 In *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* a nation as we know it now had not as yet (*Macbeth*) or hardly (*Hamlet*) come into existence in the acts 1.

And can we perhaps say that his tragic protagonists have something to say about the mutual cohesion of inhabitants in a nation, or of the cementing of nationhood, or its corrosion? If so, then Shakespeare's work would have special significance for professional disciplines such as politicians, political theorists, jurists and statesmen, but also for citizens who are seriously dedicated to citizenship as an assignment for all members of the nation's community. I will embroider hereon in the next chapters, the violence associated with the birth of nations in *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* and the relationship between nation, state and violence in *Julius Caesar*.[30] For this moment, however, we continue our analysis of Renan's concept of nation.

2.6 The beginning of the nation

The first thing to notice is that Renan situates the emergence of nations much earlier than happens in literature habitually.[31] In his *What is a Nation* Renan writes that Europe can be divided into nations ever since the end of the Roman Empire or, even better, since the decline of Charlemagne's empire (c. 745-814). He expects that once sprung into existence, these nations shall be with us unto perpetuity. France, England, Germany and Russia will remain "historic individualities" and, as he writes, "never completely merge."[32]

This could be put down as a miscalculation on Renan's part, given the fact that respectively the European Coal and Steel Community (1952), the European Economic Community (1957) and the European Union (1993) were founded, the latter in particular involving a far-reaching transfer of sovereignty from nation-states to supranational governance. Given the above, Renan seems to have been overtaken by history. Yet, this might just be a conclusion too hastily made. His 1882 speech could perhaps also be read as a warning that political units, such as the European Union, cannot have a long life, as he explains on the same page. This, however, is not our theme.

We will therefore return to Renan. What follows is a presentation of Renan's analysis on the subject. The first important thing to note is that the nation is not a self-evident entity. Renan writes: "Gaul, Spain and Italy, prior to their absorption into the Roman Empire, were collections of tribes, often in alliance with one another, but without central institutions or dynasties."[33] Nor were the Persian Empire or the Assyrian Empire nations. One can further

30 Content and specific characteristics of the concept of nation-state will be discussed and analyzed when this concept becomes relevant and alive in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.

31 Many take this date to be 1648 with the Peace treaty of Westphalia, the beginning of the "*Neuzeit*". As to this issue, opinions differ. Of course, as I noted above, thought on the concept of nation started much earlier than the actual emergence of the practical development and effectuation of the concept.

32 Renan, "What is a Nation?", p. 248.

33 Renan, "What is a Nation?", p. 248.

say that all the countries and regions Alexander conquered did not lead to any nation-building.

The situation for Rome was a different one. "The Roman Empire was much closer to a fatherland. Roman domination, at first so harsh, was soon loved for the immense benefit of putting an end to war. It was a great association, a synonym for order, peace, and civilization."[34] During its development, Roman scholars and intellectuals emerged, seconding the emergence of the *Pax Romana*. This order was seen as far more satisfactory than the chaos of "barbarians."

What is characteristic of a nation? There should be a "fusion of the populations that compose them."[35] Sometimes religion can be a facilitating factor in this. "The Germanic peoples adopted Christianity as soon as they had regular contact with the Greek and Latin peoples."[36]

It is important to cite this sentence in this context because it shows (despite all that will be said about religion below) that Renan attributes a role, albeit secondary, to religion in the unification of a nation. However, as we will note in what follows, Renan believes that for a modern nation, religion can no longer be a source of social cohesion.

2.7 The nation and forgetting

Renan's starting point for his reflections on the nation (and nation-state) becomes apparent in a most intriguing part of his analysis of the concept namely, forgetfulness (the act of forgetting, oblivion).[37] *The* important point for the formation of a nation is forgetting, he posits. It is important to give some emphasis to this element of Renan's analysis because it is counter-intuitive. How can "forgetting" be important? These days, this must sound particularly incongruous when currently the search for one's "roots" is enjoying enormous interest. Yet, it is what Renan deems important: forgetting is essential.

> The act of forgetting, and I might even say historical error, is an essential factor in the creation of a nation, and this is why the progress of historical studies is often a danger to the principle of nationality.[38]

Renan seems to be making three observations here, all three of which may meet with a certain amount of resistance because, as mentioned, they are

34 Renan, "What is a Nation?", p. 249.
35 Renan, "What is a Nation?", p. 249.
36 Renan, "What is a Nation?", p. 249.
37 Renan, "What is a Nation?", p. 251.
38 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 251.

counterintuitive. Firstly, then, forgetting is positively valued. This is contrary to the idea that the acquisition of knowledge[39] is always constructive and productive. Secondly, brushing over past mistakes with a rosy colored hue is sometimes seen as psychologically wrong (in psychological terms: denial); it may, however, make a positive contribution to nationhood to forget past controversies; as a conscious decision to put aside old grudges. Thirdly, the science of history, a science to which Renan himself has made such important contributions,[40] also has disadvantages, for it may reveal matters that do not promote the principle of the nation. The latter is the case if historical research uncovers acts of violence committed in the past (even at the root of nationhood) that may not be so exalted in themselves, but which did make the nation possible.

"Unity is always achieved brutally,"[41] Renan writes. These words seem to have the decided resonance of Trotsky's. Renan *is* indeed aware of the fact that violence is at the root of nation-forming. It is based on these considerations that Renan can make the paradoxical observation that "the essence of a nation" consists in the fact that "all individuals have many things in common, including that they have equally forgotten many things."[42]

As an example of that forgetting, he mentions that all Frenchmen should forget the Night of Bartholomew (1572), as well as the massacres in the Midi in the thirteenth century.[43] Renan does not elaborate, but the idea seems clear: a nation must be able to form a unity, and you do not get this when people are consumed by resentment towards one another.[44] Resentment that is fed by the fact that old conflicts, old antagonisms are stirred up, or artificially cultivated.

I cannot but agree with Renan here, where the keeping alive of resentment between different groups towards each other is concerned. Later on in this chapter I will return to the thematic of forgetting and its opposite concept: commemoration.

39 Meant here is, of course, the accumulation of knowledge reaped from research for historical "roots" of groups and individuals.

40 The most spectacular being his contribution to the historical-critical examination of Jesus Christ in his *Vie de Jésus.*

41 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 251.

42 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 251.

43 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 251.

44 I do not rule out that Renan's attitude here partly might have been inspired by the fact that Renan himself had gone through the ordeals of war. He knew what he was talking about, he abhorred brutality and chose forgetfulness.

2.8 Nations may differ

Renan clarifies in his work that the factors contributing to nation-building can vary for different states. Sometimes, a shared dynasty is an important factor. Sometimes several provinces operate in collaboration (he mentions the Netherlands, Switzerland and Belgium as examples). But why is the Netherlands a nation, while, for example, the Grand Duchy of Parma ("the Grand Duchy of Parma") is not? How is it that Switzerland is a nation, even though several different languages are spoken there, two different religions are practiced and three (or four) races are distinguished among the Swiss?

The tribe and the city were particularly important in ancient times. These were more or less family extensions. In Athens and Sparta, all citizens were, in one way or another, related to each other. This was the case in Israel and still is with the Arab tribes.

The development of the Roman Empire was exceptional as to its development: "[f]irst established through violence, then preserved by interest, this great agglomeration of entirely different cities and provinces deals the gravest of blows to the idea of race."[45] Thus the idea of "race" was dealt a fatal blow. Apparently, the concept was not so important after all. And, of course, Christianity helped to discredit the idea of race.[46] In modern times, finally, the idea has become even more irrelevant, Renan posits.

> The truth is that there is no pure race, and that to base politics on ethnographic analysis is to surrender it to a chimera. The noblest countries, England, France and Italy, are those where blood is most mixed.[47]

A contemporary Frenchman is neither a Gaul, nor a Frank, nor a Burgundian. "He is," Renan writes, "rather what emerged from the great vessel in which the most varied elements fermented together, presided over by the king of France."[48] Whatever may be said of his earlier comments on colonialism, from these passages it becomes clear that Renan cannot, by any means, be called a racist. Indeed, he gives very strong arguments that nation-building can never be based on "race."

2.9 The nation and race

In his lecture, Renan repeatedly returns to an error commonly made. He emphasizes that, too often, nation is confused with race. In our day, Renan

45 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 254.
46 With its emphasis on personal experience of faith and redemption through Christ, rather than on race, descent or ancestry, as criteria for being accepted into the religious community.
47 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 255.
48 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 256.

states (we write 1882), race and nation are thrown together; which means that "ethnographic or rather linguistic groups are ascribed a sovereignty analogous to that of peoples that actually exist."[49]

Renan strongly emphasises the fact that the element of race has no meaning today (again: in 1882). For argumentative purposes he even compares the human life to the animal world.

> Human history differs fundamentally from zoology. Race here is not everything, as with rodents or felines, and no one has the right to go round the world, fingering people's skulls and then seizing them by the throat and telling them: 'You have our blood, you belong to us'.[50]

After having distanced himself from biological-physiological issues (man is not a rodent, after all), Renan emphasizes the significance of values. "There is reason, justice, truth, and beauty," he writes and adds, "which are the same for all."[51]. Renan here formulates notions that can be characterized as universalisms in state formation. They apply, as we may safely assume, to all peoples and all times. For this reason, they may be considered to be part and parcel of the quintessential core values for building a nation. In addition, of course, many values are perceived as important by groups of people and embedded in their culture. A "nation" is always a combination of those two forms of values. The French subscribe to "liberty, equality and fraternity" as universal values, but in addition, they also share a series of values that distinguish them from other nations.[52] Thus, each country has its own identity. Both universalities and particularities in the sphere of nation formation will be retraced in *Julius Caesar*.

Two years after Renan's death, the Dreyfus affair, the judicial scandal surrounding the wrongful conviction of the Jewish-French officer Alfred Dreyfus,[53] took place.[54] The perceptive reader, however, may notice that in Renan's time, anti-Semitism and discussions of racism played an unsavory role. At this stage in our research into his work, we may by now understand where Renan positioned himself in those discussions and – for that matter – Max Weber who is cited in a note above. These two scholars were joined by Nietzsche who rabidly railed (e.g. in *Beyond Good and Evil* of 1886 – see note

49 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 256.
50 Renan, " What is a Nation?", pp. 256 – 257.
51 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 257.
52 Each nation knows, in its cultural-sociological make-up, universal values as well as particular traditions and customs that distinguish them other nations. In addition, as we shall see in *Julius Caesar*, all human existential properties are embedded in the diverse cultures/customs in different ways.
53 Alfred Dreyfuss: 1859-1935.
54 From 1894 to 1906.

below) against the specter of anti-Semitism that was haunting Europe at the time.[55]

2.10 Renan's "open" concept of nationhood

With the words "reason, justice, truth, and beauty,"(quoted above), Renan introduces, as said above, universal ideas. These values may establish bonds between men because they appeal to a communally felt *condition humaine.* By implication, therefore, also values that are communally felt (be they universal or regional) do not drive rifts between people but, on the contrary, they connect. Values, in general, can be adopted or rejected by anyone. The implications of that idea are enormous: those who are willing to subscribe to the same values can form a nation together.

Basing the nation on a community of values, rather than a race, makes Renan's concept of nationhood "open." New entrants can freely decide to belong to the nation (or not). That is, when the dominant group within the nation uses this open nation concept as a principal starting point. A nationhood concept based on race is, by definition, exclusive. When one adopts a nation-concept based on commonly shared values, it is by definition inclusive. This premise had enormous significance; let me take as an example the Roman nation, who adopted it. This nation's success is often explained as a consequence of its being an inclusive society. One could move up in the Roman hierarchy, in the Roman public administration, in the Roman army, even if not a "born Roman." A culmination of this development is seen during the reign of the Roman emperor Caracalla (188-217), more specifically his laws.

Mary Beard (scholar of classical antiquity) formulates the merits of the Roman emperor as follows: "Caracalla took the step of making every single free inhabitant of the Roman Empire a full Roman citizen, eroding the difference between conqueror and conquered and completing a process of expanding the rights and privileges of Roman citizenship that had started almost a thousand years earlier."[56] The importance of the concept of a values-nation (in the wake of the analysis of its values – see above) will be highlighted at length in the chapter on *Julius Caesar*.

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55 *"Ich bin noch keinem Deutschen begegnet, der den Juden gewogen gewesen wäre; und so unbedingt auch die Ablehnung der eigentlichen Antisemiterei von Seiten aller Vorsichtigen und Politischen sein mag, so richtet sich doch auch diese Vorsicht und Politik nicht etwa gegen die Gattung des Gefühls selber, sondern nur gegen seine gefährliche Unmässigkeit, insbesondere gegen den abgeschmackten und schandbaren Ausdruck dieses unmässigen Gefühls, – darüber darf man sich nicht täuschen. Dass Deutschland reichlich genug Juden hat, dass der deutsche Magen, das deutsche Blut Noth hat (und noch auf lange Noth haben wird), um auch nur mit diesem Quantum „Jude" fertig zu werden – so wie der Italiäner, der Franzose, der Engländer fertig geworden sind."*, K.S.A. 5, *Jenseits Gut und Böse*, § 251, p. 193.

56 Beard, Mary, *SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome*, p. 17.

2.11 Language cementing a nation?

What Renan writes about race also applies to language. He says, "Language invites unification; it does not force it."[57] He points out that the United States and England[58] (1882) share a common language. But they do not constitute a nation. Switzerland, on the other hand, speaks four languages, yet it does constitute a nation.

One can have doubts about the first example (the United States and England) as Renan has it,[59] but the third example, Switzerland, is better, as Renan notes. The critical factor here is, as he has it, is the consent, the will of the different parts to form a nation.

2.12 Nation and will

After having epitomized and analyzed all the characteristics usually advocated as being essential to the nation (but which, in his opinion, are not) Renan produces the central thesis of his lecture. That central position is held by the will (as referenced just above). He introduces that central position of the will with a generalization about man. He puts it as follows:

> There is in man something superior to language; that is will.[60]

Man is not predestined because he has a will, as Renan postulates. Man is not determined by his language, nor defined by his race. Man can choose freely: the human capacity that provides the basis for this is the will. "The will of Switzerland to be united, despite the variety of its dialects, is far more important than a similarity often obtained by vexatious methods." This centrality of the will is presented by Renan as eminently rational.

Here again, we see a marked contrast between Renan and Nietzsche. Whereas Renan's will is the deliberate and ratio-guided faculty to freely choose, in Nietzsche's work, we meet a primordial urge to power that constitutes the will. I emphatically note that Nietzsche's *The Will to Power* is but the first draft for a book, consisting of a table of contents, mere loose notes and miscellaneous

57 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 257.

58 Conceivably Renan is here referring to the Commonwealth of Nations. Be that as it may, it is an unfortunate example (as is the United States – as already indicated in the text) to which I do not agree. Especially where not the Commonwealth is concerned but Great Britain.

59 It is unclear why Renan does not denote the US and the UK as nations. Perhaps, but again he does not explain, he refers to England's colonies which on the whole, did not feel to be part of England's nation. As to the US, he perhaps refers to the attitude towards the indigenous tribes and the as yet not completely controlled 'wild west'.

60 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 257.

ideas, written just before his mental breakdown. He meant to set about writing this major work (as he saw it), but never got to do it. After his death, his sister Elisabeth (an avid Nazi) composed the book using her brother's notes ("rectifying" them), with the purpose to pedestalize National Socialism. For those reasons, these two types of "will" are in no way related. Their similarities lie in an altogether different field.

"Let us not abandon," Renan continues to his audience in Paris, during his lecture at the Sorbonne, "the fundamental principle that man is a rational and moral being prior to being a speaker of this or that language, a member of this or that culture."[61]

It hardly needs to be said that Renan is not just describing a dimension of social reality here, but that he presents his conception of man as a free actor who chooses and who is determined neither by language nor religion. He insists on the possibility of choice that he deems of essential importance for man, to be able to behave as a rational and moral being. Renan here takes the Enlightenment position[62] of man as a reasonable being who can shape social reality based on his assumptions. Renan articulates his position thus: "[b]efore French culture, German culture or Italian culture, there is human culture."[63] Apparently there is a human nature that connects us all. Cicero also spoke of *humanitas*. Stoics like Brutus (see chapter on *Julius Caesar*) also subscribed to that idea. Do opinions diverge on this issue? They certainly do. For instance Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821) in his *Considerations on France*:

> Now, there is no such thing as 'man' in this world. In my life I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians, and so on. I even know, thanks to Montesquieu, that one can be Persian. But as for man, I declare I've never encountered him.[64]

For De Maistre, then, "man" is a nonexistent abstraction. His work would become the starting point not only for "culturalists," thinkers who consider man to be predestined by their culture, but also for "multiculturalists" who believe that any form of "integration" (or transculturation) into a new culture is a mortal sin. Renan was born when De Maistre had been dead for two years. They cannot, therefore, be characterized as contemporaries. De Maistre was a great advocate of the resistance to the principles of the French Revolution. He also greatly advocated (in several of his works, e.g. *Du Pape*) the divine right of kings. This boiled down to a divine right to rule as described by

61 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 258.

62 As described by authoritative scholars such as Israel, Jonathan I, (*Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* and *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy*, Also: Hasan, Rumy, *Modern Europe and the Enlightenment*.

63 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 258.

64 Maistre, Joseph de, *Considerations of France,* p. 42.

Bossuet in his *Politique tirée des propres paroles de l'Écriture sainte*[65] (1709). In this work, Bossuet (the private tutor of Louis XIV) exhibits on what principles the French government was based before the revolution: "*Un roi, une loi, une foi*". Thus, the form of government is monarchical, with the king preserving the unity. A unity is based on a single faith: Catholicism, albeit not blindly subservient to Rome.

2.13 Nation and religion

By emphasizing religion as essential for nationhood, De Maistre did not voice an idiosyncratic or isolated view. The intertwining of religion and nation goes back a long way. The concept was the major cosolvent for ancient Israel. In the Bible, the history is told of the people of Israel prone to apostatize and leave the God of Israel. The latter often responded with draconian punishments. In Shakespeare's time, the idea of a marriage between nation and religion was alive in the minds of many. Henry VIII, father to Queen Elizabeth (queen in Shakespeare's time), made himself head of the Anglican Church (even if he had, earlier, been exalted to the title of Defender of the Faith by the Pope) and therewith introduced his brand of religion.

I will now enlarge on Renan's opinion on the importance of religion for nation forming.

2.14 Religion is no basis for the nation; no state religion

Without any hesitation, Renan comes to the point. After rejecting race and language as essential to nationhood, he turns to the analysis of religion. Upfront, he states his conclusion in the heading above the paragraph on the subject:

> Religion cannot offer an adequate basis for the establishment of a modern nationality either.[66]

He is, however, aware of the long-standing place of religion in founding a nation. Older than language, as he had it.[67] Perhaps older than race as well. "Originally," Renan says, "religion was a matter of the very existence of the

65 Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, , " Sermon sur les devoirs des rois", in: *Sermons: Le Carême du Louvre*, pp. 231-248.

66 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p.258.

67 Here I tend to disagree since, in my professional opinion as a linguist, no predominant and developed religion can exist without the use of language. However, this is a never ending discussion of chicken and egg and no subject of this dissertation.

social group, which was an extension of the family."[68] Although ancient Israel is the obvious first example when a nation's religious foundations are concerned, Renan starts with the example of Athens. "The religion of Athens was the cult of Athens itself, of its mythical founders, its laws and customs."[69] But, it soon becomes apparent, as we read on, that Athens' mythical traditions involved "religion" in the broadest possible sense of the word; it hardly involved a relationship between the earth and transcendent powers and "it did not imply any dogmatic theology," as Renan writes.[70] It was in the "full sense of the term" a state religion.

What "full sense" means here becomes clear when he continues his reflections. Renan is not talking about religion in the traditional sense, as a perspective for individual salvation that is also supported by the power of the state, but as a political principle that is supposed to be endorsed by the citizens of the state. He says, "It was at bottom the cult of the Acropolis personified."[71] Those who swore allegiance to the Acropolis indicated that they were willing to die for the native country/fatherland (*patrie*). He therefore compares it to the deference for the national flag in our own time.[72] An ancient Greek refusing to swear allegiance to the Acropolis could very well be equated with a person refusing to enter military service nowadays.

The nature of this Athenian "state religion" has an important corollary: "there was no proselytism to force foreigners to accept it, nor did the Athenian slave practice it."[73]

Renan is vehemently against imposing a state religion on a civilian population that is resistant to it. He refers to Antiochus Epiphanes, who wanted all his subjects in the Orient (especially Judea) to convert to the cult of the Olympian Jupiter.

Renan also rejects the Roman state religion; he abhors the persecutions that took place in the Roman Empire to impose a state religion. They were a "mistake, a crime, a genuine absurdity."[74] As a reason for rejecting the persecutions to enforce a state religion, he refers (without actually using the term) to religious pluralism: "Each person believes and practices as they see fit, whatever they want or like."[75]

In other words, Renan refers to the principle of freedom of religion. But he also speaks of the consequences of this stance for a state religion; it would make it impossible. "There is no longer a state religion; you can be French,

68 Renan, " What is a Nation?", pp. 258 – 259.
69 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 259.
70 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 259.
71 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 259.
72 In the next chapter I will further discuss some aspects of the Greek worship surrounding the Dionysian rites and festivals.
73 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 259.
74 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 259.
75 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 259.

English, or German while being Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, or not practicing any religion."[76] This means that Renan also recognizes the possibility of a "departure from religion" as a fundamental right. And this is exactly how it would eventually be codified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the end (1948). Article 18 of the Universal Declaration reads, "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief (...)." Contrary to popular belief, the latter – the ability to *change* religion – is essential. Some authoritative thinkers[77] hold that it is this clause that realizes freedom of religion and I cannot but agree with them.

In line with these last observations, I hold that true religious freedom is realized only when people not only have the choice to adhere to any religion they want but also have an unrestrained choice to change or abandon their religion. The latter conception of religious freedom has only been possible in "modern culture." Henry VIII's breaking away from the "holy mother church" of Rome can therefore not be seen as an example of freedom of religion under the above definition. Religious freedom only emerged during the Enlightenment period and took constitutional-legal shape in the French Revolution and the Atlantic revolutions. Not "all men are created equal" is a manifestation of modern freedom, as the lines of the American Declaration of Independence (1776)[78] read, but Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* (1794),[79] where he (the great inspiration behind the American Revolution)[80] ties secularist consequences to his views that made many Americans recoil.[81]

However essential, to this day, the article from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has not been fully implemented. Reasons for this may be:

– countries and governments persecute believers (dissenters) or apostates, as is generally the case in the Arab world,[82]
– countries still uphold a state religion (generally in diluted form) for reasons of tradition (as is the case with the Anglican state religion today).

76 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 259.
77 Among whom Paul Cliteur in: *Theoterrorism v. Freedom of Speech*.
78 Reck, Andrew, " The Enlightenment in American Law I: The Declaration of Independence", in: *The Review of Metaphysics,* 1991, 44, pp. 549-573.
79 Paine, Thomas, *The Age of Reason,* 1794, in: Thomas Paine, *Collected Writings,* The Library of America, New York 1995, pp. 665-885.
80 Paine, Thomas, *Common Sense,* 1776, in: Thomas Paine, *Collected Writings,* The Library of America, New York 1995, pp. 5-59.
81 Paine, Thomas, *Rights of Man.* Being an Answer to Mr. Burke's Attack on the French Revolution, 1791/92, in: Thomas Paine, *Collected Writings,* The Library of America, New York 1995, p. 433-661.
82 Cliteur, Paul, Houben, Laetitia, and Slimmen, Michelle, " Death of a Princess", in: Paul Cliteur and Tom Herrenberg, eds., *The Fall and Rise of Blasphemy Law*, With a foreword by Flemming Rose, Leiden University Press, Leiden 2016, pp. 111-137.

All this is incompatible with Renan's idea of nationhood. He says, "Religion has become an individual matter; it concerns the conscience of each person."[83] Optimistically, Renan writes that religion "preserves all its importance in the heart of each person; but has ceased almost entirely to be one of the grounds that define the frontiers of peoples."[84]

When Renan wrote this in 1882, he did so against the backdrop of a past in which this was different, even in France. J.B. Bury writes in *A History of the Freedom of Thought* (1913)[85] that Renan's "sensational *Life of Jesus*" (1863), in which he had rejected the "supernatural," had cost him his chair at the *College de France*.[86] Thus, when Renan writes that religion "has ceased almost entirely to be one of the grounds that define the frontiers of peoples", he portrays a somewhat idealized condition. What reasons does Renan have for his laudatory view? Had the situation changed for the better in 1882 compared to a few decades earlier? Rather, it seems that Renan believes that religion should be treated as a private matter. Yet he is firmly in touch with reality, aware as he is that this is an ideal. An ideal that in part has been realized, while in part it is still on the agenda.

2.15 A Nation is not a "Zollverein"

Above, we noted that the nation does not coincide with language, not with race, not with religion. Nor does the nation coincide with citizens who pursue only their (economic) self-interest,[87] as is the case with, e.g., a customs union (*Zollverein*). "Self-interest," Renan writes, is not "sufficient to make for a nation."[88]

In a sense, Renan, like Cicero, opposes an apolitical antique movement such as Epicureanism. "He [Cicero] is evidently combating the Epicurean hostility to patriotism," writes the editor[89] of Cicero's *De Re Publica* in the Loeb Classical Library.[90] "The Epicureans, whose ideal of a quiet life free from pain made them discountenance participation in politics," the editor says. Cicero seems to endorse several elements of modern republican thought, e.g. the concept that is often described as "moral autonomy". He praises Xenocrates

83 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 259.
84 Renan, " What is a Nation?", pp. 259 – 260.
85 Renan, Ernest, *Vie de Jésus,* Éditions de la Bohème, Paris 1992 (1863).
86 Bury, J.B., *A History of the Freedom of Thought,* Thornton Butterworth, London 1932 (1913), p. 198.
87 The self-interest that drove Rome in its latter days. I will elaborate on this theme in the chapter on Julius Caesar.
88 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 260.
89 Ibid.
90 Cicero, *De Re Publica, De Legibus,* XVI, The Loeb Classical Library, ed. G.P. Goold, Cambridge, Mass., London 1977, p. 13.

who impressed upon his students his ideal: "To do of their own accord what they are compelled to do by the law."[91]

The same, somewhat lofty, ideals as articulated by Cicero are also found in Renan's 1882 essay. The pursuit of self-interest cannot produce a lasting political connection, the latter writes. A "community of interest only makes commercial treaties."[92] He points out that an element of "feeling" or "sentiment" is firmly housed in the concept of nationality. It is a body and soul together, or, as Renan tantalizingly puts it, "a Zollverein is not a fatherland."[93]

After saying that also territory ("geography") is not decisive for the concept of nationhood, Renan continues: "The soil provides the substratum, the field the battle and labor; man provides the soul."[94] Then he provides a description of "nation" that may appear to some to be exalted, but which seems to very well complement his republican ideals. "Man is everything in the formation of that sacred thing called a people,"[95] Renan says. Practical and materialistic issues simply will not do in themselves.

> A nation is a spiritual principle resulting from profound complications of history, a spiritual family and not a group determined by the configuration of the soil.[96]

After having systematically broken down all elements associated with nationhood – but not coinciding with it – Renan finally answers the question of what constitutes the essence of the nation. He formulates this very "spiritually." He says:

> A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle.[97]

That "soul" has two aspects: the past and the present. "One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is the present consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form."[98]

On both these dimensions of the nation concept some observations are to be made. First, the "possession in common of a rich legacy of memories." It goes without saying that a shared "rich legacy" that is collectively shared by all – and alive in their minds – will be not as abundant in pluralistic societies with a diversity in population as in relatively homogeneous societies. And

91 Cicero, Ibid., p. 17.
92 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 260.
93 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 260.
94 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 260.
95 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 260.
96 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 261.
97 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 261.
98 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 261.

because modern societies are particularly diverse, it is therefore not easy to cement nationhood in this day and age.

This brings us to the second element, the "desire to live together." The *vivre ensemble*. This desire to live together may become more prominent and alive in a population when they share a common cultural heritage. Yet, this is complicated since it is precisely this that is often lacking. "The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of effort, sacrifices and devotion,"[99] Renan wrote. Up to a certain extent this could be said about the France of 1882. It is much less true in today's France; a far greater effort will have to be made to effect "a desire to live together" along the lines of the above description. The concept has lost its self-evident character. Therefore, nations nowadays will have to put much more effort into encouraging the desire to live together.

Accordingly, the nation's motto now should be commemoration instead of "forgetting" (see above). Acquiring knowledge about the nation in all its aspects, both present and past, is a prerequisite for loving it. Renan does not hesitate to speak of the need for a "cult of ancestors," which he considers justified. And not just justified; it is, for him, a non-negotiable requirement. After all, it is our ancestors who have made us what we are today. It must be possible to tell a heroic story about the past. Renan says:

> A heroic past, great men, glory (genuine glory, I mean), that is the social capital on which a national idea is founded. To have common glories in the past, a common will in the present; to have done great things together, and to seek to do again, those are the essential conditions for being a people.[100]

The importance of a communal experience does not only lie in celebrating together, but also the having gone, as a community, through suffering and/or disaster. Perchance, the latter might be even more important than a conjoint festivity or ceremony. Anticipating the following chapters, I would like to point out that there is a specific form of "suffering together" that is related to a mode of consciousness: the tragic consciousness as seen both in the Periclean tragedies and in those of Shakespeare. I will elaborate on this idea in the following chapters.

Renan then continues with a second element which is equally important to him; the promise of a joint future. Of importance is the desire to "move forward" together: "the clearly expressed consent and desire to continue a common life."[101] And this is precisely the core message that tragedy shows us: moving forward together despite (or: due to[102]) what has been suffered

99 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 261.
100 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 261.
101 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 261.
102 As we shall see in the next chapters.

in the past. Even better: that suffering will offer prospects for continuous renewal and improvement of the construct that is called the nation-state, as I hope to demonstrate in the ensuing chapters.

Renan goes as far as to suggest banishing the metaphysical and the theological from politics. What will remain in this case is man, man with his wants and needs. To Renan, that seems quite enough. In his future vista's, he emphatically links the possibility of freedom to the nation-state. In the summary of "What is a nation?" he ends up expressing his emancipatory humanist ideal when he says:

> Let me summarize, Gentlemen. Man is neither the slave of his race nor his language, nor to his religion nor to the course of rivers, nor to the direction of mountain chains.[103]

One must be healthy in spirit and warm in heart – that is the moral principle from which nation-states spring.

In his discourse, Renan emphatically underlined man's (free) will to live together. He interpreted this will as a spiritual and continuous process set in the temporal dimensions of past and present. He elaborates upon its inherent spirituality, rather than the fact that a will could also be formed as a deliberate conscious decision of resolve on a rational basis. Also, the element of violence as a basis of this resolve is hardly present – he does mention suffering, but does not specify it – in his otherwise thorough analysis.

In the following chapters, I will therefore try to unravel and interpret what exactly Renan's will entails, and delve deeper into what he might have meant by suffering together. I will see whether it could be paired with (or even be complementary to) violence, more specifically: Shakespeare's tragic violence and Nietzsche's position concerning violence. In what way did the art form of tragedy contribute to the cementing or undoing of nation(-states); what is the exact format of violence according to Nietzsche and what is its relevance for today's politicians and jurists? Let us, in the next chapter, turn to the specifics of tragedy.

103 Renan, " What is a Nation?", p. 262.