Nationalities Papers, 2017
Vol. 45, No. 5, 739–741, https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2017.1341870

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
Check for updates

A modernist beyond modernization theory: Walker Connor and his time

Daniele Conversi [a,b*]

[a]*Ikerbasque, Basque Foundation for Science, Bilbao, Spain;* [b]*Department of Contemporary History, University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU, Leioa, Spain*

(*Received 7 June 2017; accepted 9 June 2017*)

Walker Connor (1926–2017) was one of the finest twentieth-century thinkers in political science and a pioneer in the study of nationalism, having helped to identify some of the key issues and problems in his area of study. First and foremost, he finely diagnosed the misuse of the predominant terminology at the time; this was pervaded by the simplistic "modernization paradigm" with its unilinear vision of progress and unshakable faith in state-led "nation building" – which Connor elegantly dismantled (Connor 1969, 1972, 1978). Some of his most influential articles were collected in the book *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Connor 1994).

Before the end of the Cold War, Connor conducted ground-breaking archival research on nationalism in the Communist world. This was condensed in his book *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy* which he wrote, when the field was dominated by the subsequently discredited discipline of Soviet Studies, also known as Kremlinology, which implicitly adapted an equivalent of the modernization paradigm to the socialist world (Connor 1984b).

Armed with a panoramic command of political geography, Connor was also inspired by the work of the US historian and diplomat Carlton Hayes (1882–1964) as well as, to a certain extent, the Harvard-based politician and political scientist Rupert Emerson (1899–1979) – both of whom published on nationalism and more carefully used terms like "nation" as clearly distinguished from "state" and "nationalism" as possibly separable from "patriotism" (Emerson 1970; Hayes 1926, 1960). Connor exercised considerable influence on the work of some of the most important scholars of nationalism and ethnic conflict of our time, such as Anthony D. Smith, Brendan O'Leary, John Coakley, Cynthia Enloe, Paschalis Kitromilides, John Stone, Myron Weiner, John Edwards, Joshua Fishman, Donald Horowitz, William Safran, and Thomas Spira, many of whom contributed to the Festschrift *Ethnonationalism in the Contemporary World* (Conversi 2004), as well as on a new generation of younger scholars.

Like Anthony Smith, Connor identified the ethnic essence lying at the core of nationalism. But, unlike Smith, he believed that nations could not exist before the era of nationalism and the latter was quite a recent phenomenon: he originally agreed with the prevailing view of the time that nationalism materialized as a mass movement in the wake of the Napoleonic campaigns in Europe. However, he subsequently shifted the chronology

*Email: dconversi@telefonica.net

© 2017 Association for the Study of Nationalities

https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2017.1341870 Published online by Cambridge University Press

forward: after reading Eugen Weber's milestone work, *Peasants into Frenchmen* (Weber 1976), he reached the conclusion that it was unlikely that national identity could develop extensively beyond the elite level before WWI – so that the modern state's homogenizing pressures upon its citizens materialized under the exceptional circumstances of war, as described in detail in Weber's work on France (Connor 1990, 2004; Conversi 2012b).

Also crucial was Connor's insistence that economic factors should not be placed at the center of explanations or etiologies of ethnic conflict and nationalism (Connor 1984a, 2001). Contingent events such as economic crises and recessions cannot cause ethnonational conflicts per se. At most, they can reinforce pre-existing or latent conflicts, the nature of which remains eminently political and largely dependent on the legitimacy or illegitimacy of existing public institutions, including the way the state responds to the problem of political representation of national minorities and non-dominant groups.[1] As fully anticipated in Connor's reshuffling of the modernization paradigm, other reinforcing factors such as globalization, mass migration, and demographic expansion have contributed to reasserting the central place of ethnonationalism in the contemporary world (Conversi 2009, 2012a).

I would like to conclude on a personal note: for those who knew him in person, it is hard to forget Walker Connor's contagious enthusiasm and passion for our area of study, his warm character, his supportive and encouraging attitude toward younger scholars, his love for arts and culture, and his dedication to humanitarian causes. These are not qualities that the entirety of academia is equally blessed with or which are evenly distributed among scholars. So, I believe we should celebrate Walker, both as a scholar and as a man.

Note

1. The recent rise of Catalan secessionism vindicates the necessity to de-emphasize the role of economic factors, while specific intercultural nationalist policies were not altered following the 2008–2014 recession (Conversi and Jeram 2017).

ORCID

Daniele Conversi http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6618-2738

References

Connor, Walker. 1969. "Myths of Hemispheric, Continental, Regional, and State Unity." *Political Science Quarterly* 84 (4): 555–582.
Connor, Walker. 1972. "Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying?" *World Politics* 24 (3): 319–355.
Connor, Walker. 1978. "A Nation Is a Nation, Is a State, is an Ethnic Group Is a ... ." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 1 (4): 377–400.
Connor, Walker. 1984a. "Eco- or Ethno-Nationalism?" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 7 (3): 342–359.
Connor, Walker. 1984b. *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Connor, Walker. 1990. "When Is a Nation?" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 13 (1): 92–103.
Connor, Walker. 1994. *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Connor, Walker. 2001. "From a Theory of Relative Economic Deprivation Toward a Theory of Relative Political Deprivation." In *Minority Nationalism and the Changing International Order*, edited by Michael Keating and John McGarry, 114–135. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Connor, Walker. 2004. "The Timelessness of Nations." *Nations and Nationalism* 10 (1–2): 35–47.
Conversi, Daniele, ed. 2004. *Ethnonationalism in the Contemporary World: Walker Connor and the Study of Nationalism*. London: Routledge.

https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2017.1341870 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Conversi, Daniele. 2009. "Globalization, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationalism." In *International Handbook of Globalization Studies*, 1st ed., edited by Bryan S. Turner, 346–366. London: Routledge.
Conversi, Daniele. 2012a. "Irresponsible Radicalisation: Diasporas, Globalisation and Long-Distance Nationalism in the Digital Age." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38 (9): 1357–1379.
Conversi, Daniele. 2012b. "Modernism and Nationalism." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 17 (1): 13–34.
Conversi, Daniele, and Sanjay Jeram. 2017. "Despite the Crisis: The Resilience of Intercultural Nationalism in Catalonia." *International Migration* 55 (2): 53–67.
Emerson, Rupert. 1970. *From Empire to Nation: The Rise to Self-Assertion of Asian and African Peoples*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
Hayes, Carlton J. H. 1926. *Essays on Nationalism*. New York: The Macmillan Company.
Hayes, Carlton J. H. 1960. *Nationalism: A Religion*. New York: Macmillan.
Weber, Eugen. 1976. *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2017.1341870 Published online by Cambridge University Press