

Life-Forms of Modern States: The Cultivation of National Identities and Nationalist Ideologies in Western Europe

Research Question

How can we explain the emergence of national sentiments in Western societies when they are constituted, according to Luhmann's theory, by self-interested individual agents and increasingly heterogeneous, functionally differentiated social systems?

Thesis

Modern nation states are *imagined* to be culturally homogeneous on the basis of distinct *life-forms* derived from particular agricultural or horticultural practices. Transformed into principal metaphors of philosophical, scientific, political, economical, pedagogical, and literary discourse, they are taught at schools and universities and disseminated in the public through print media. As such, distinct life-forms morph into particular national sentiments.

Results

1. **“Grafting”** in the United Kingdom after the two revolutions of 1640 and 1688 (as well as in reaction to the French Revolution):

We wished at the period of the Revolution [in 1688], and do now wish [in 1790], to derive all we possess as an inheritance from our forefathers. Upon that body and stock of inheritance we have taken care not to inoculate any scion alien to the nature of the original plant. (E. Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*)

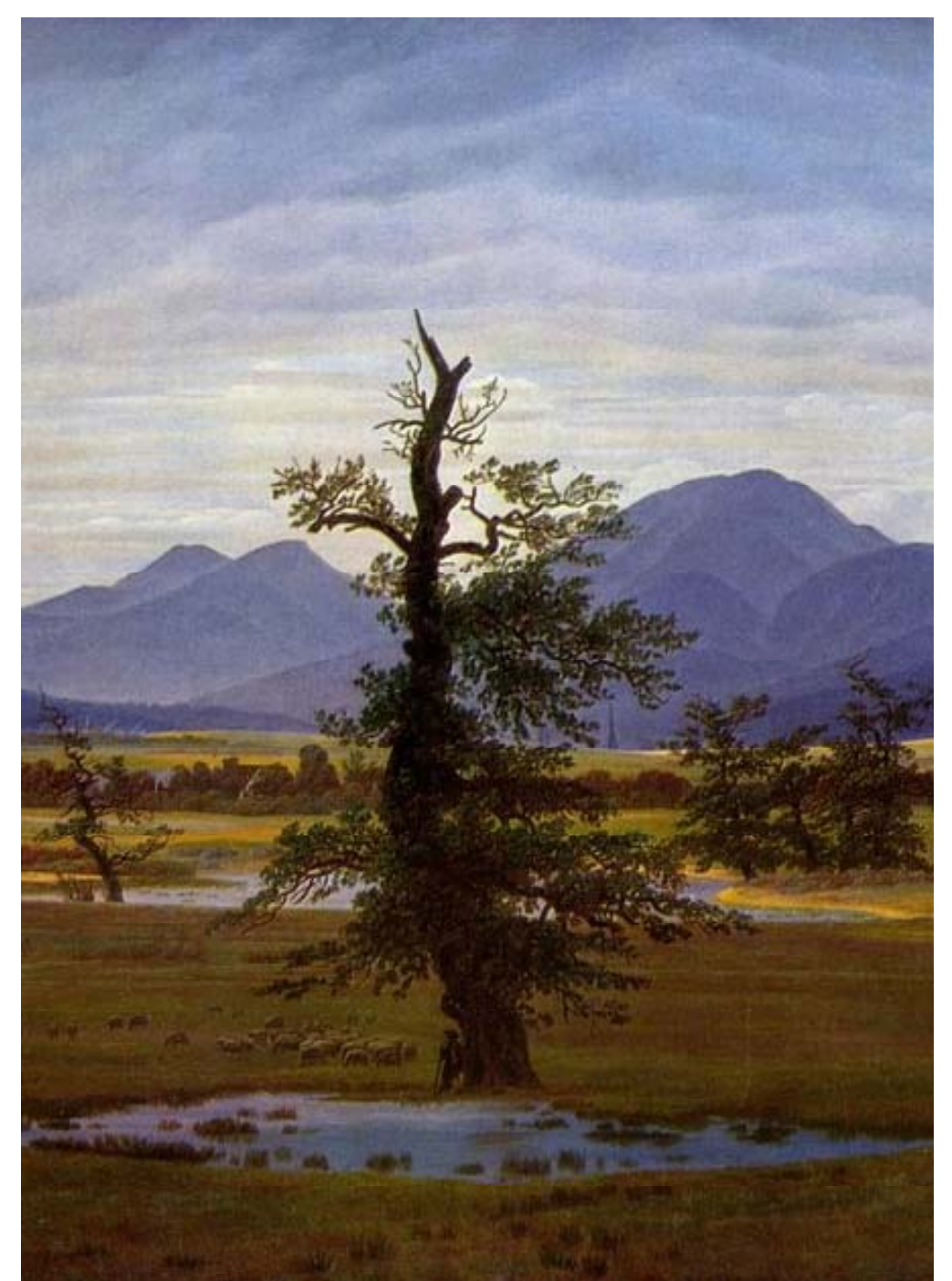
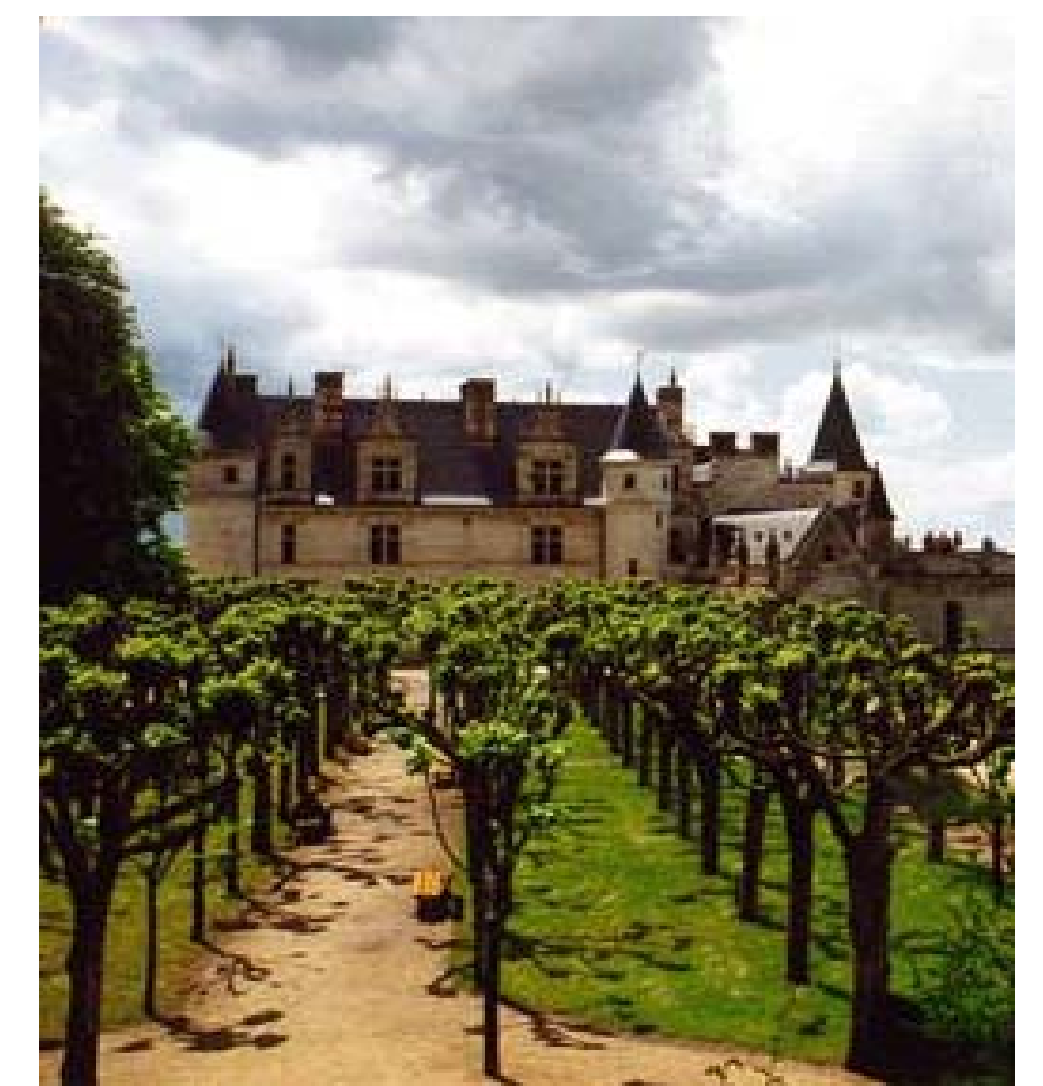


2. **“Uprooting”** of deformed pruned and trimmed trees, associated with the ancient regime, and its replacement by publicly displayed “freedom tree” in revolutionary France:

Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man. He forces one soil to nourish the products of another, one tree to bear the fruits of another. [...] For him man must be trained like a saddle-horse; he must be shaped according to the fashion, like trees in his garden. (J. J. Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*)

3. **“Self-generation”** as a model for national German recovery, esp. during the Napoleonic occupation of most German territories (1806-1813):

Are not we capable of cultivating oak trees ourselves so that they grow the hardest, highest, and purest trunk, a high towering crown with branches that will never wither; or do we want them trimmed and cut by a fancy gardener who turns our forest into a star shaped geometrical bush? (J. Möser, *Patriotic Fantasies*)



Conclusion: The Paradox of Nationalism

The more successfully a distinct life-form is in integrating autonomous individuals and groups into a stabile socio-political entity, the more this national community considers its *particular imagined* cultural model to be *real* and *universally* capable of incorporating others. Thus, by default, nation states compete with each other for the superiority of their cultural model and turn into nationalist ideologies.

Future Research

I intend to expand the project to 20th-Century models of building cultural identities in the United States, the Soviet Union, and Nazi Germany.