Nations as *Zones of Conflict*, Nations as Zones of Selection: A Darwinian Social Evolutionary Engagement with John Hutchinson's 'Culture Wars'

Abstract: This paper explores the use of Darwinian social evolutionary theory towards understanding the formation of nations through a specific engagement with John Hutchinson's *Nations as Zones of Conflict*, particularly the idea of 'culture wars'. After outlining Hutchinson's framework and the principles of Darwinian social evolutionary theory – namely, the key concepts of inheritance, variation, and selection within an environmental context – I make a case for Darwinian concepts being able to support and expand on Hutchinson's ethno-symbolic approach. I argue that Darwinian social evolutionary theory offers a powerful explanation for why particular myths, symbols, traditions, and memories endure and are revived and revitalized in nationalist contexts. The development of nationalism in Meiji Japan is used as an example to explore these ideas.

Introduction

John Hutchinson's work, *Nations as Zones of Conflict* (2005), brought together a set of ideas on the relationships between nations and their conflicting identities. The main idea in the work was that nations are not straightforward compositions: they are the creation of a variety of different myths, symbols, memories which constitute different identities within the nation. Over time certain of these elements are used over others, depending on the circumstances that a nation finds itself in. Leaders, in short, do not create nations out of nothing but with recourse to traditions, but neither are these traditions set in stone. They are constantly being revived, revised or changed to fit different challenges that a nation faces at a given moment in time. But the question of why a particular symbol, myth or memory persists and is chosen is an ongoing question (Özkirimli, 2008). This paper seeks to address this point, by venturing a Darwinian engagement with the key ideas proposed by Hutchinson (2005).

I believe that there can be a fruitful engagement between Hutchinson's version of ethno-symbolism and Darwinian social evolutionary theory, that the latter can provide a theoretical

background to the former in a way that helps contribute an alternative knowledge for why particular symbols, myths and memories survive and are able to adapt their meanings in new nationalist environments. Debates abound on Hutchinson's work (e.g. Delanty et al, 2008), and yet there is much that a Darwinian social evolutionary perspective can add to this, particularly in addressing some of the criticisms of Hutchinson's approach, and ethno-symbolism more broadly.

In this paper I will foreground the core Darwinian principles of inheritance, variation and selection as valuable tools for understanding social and cultural change (Hodgson and Knudsen, 2006 & 2010), within the context of Hutchinson's argument for the importance of 'culture wars' in the development, and continuing development, of the modern nation and national identities, through the use of particular symbols, traditions, myths and memories and their changing meanings in relation to changes in the social environment.

This paper is both an exploration into how Darwinian social evolutionary theory can complement a version of the ethno-symbolic approach and further improve understanding of nation formation and development. In addition, in demonstrating the use of the Darwinian social evolutionary approach, it contributes to a revival of interest in the application of Darwin's core ideas to understanding the social and cultural world (e.g. Runciman, 2009; Hodgson & Knudsen, 2010; Richerson & Boyd, 2006), and extends this revival into the field of nationalism studies.

In the first section I will discuss approaches to understanding nationalism, drawing on Hutchinson (2004; 2005) and his conception of culture wars and 'mythic overlaying', but also more modernist definitions as from Gellner (2006) and Sand (2010). The succeeding section will then introduce the core principles behind Darwinian social evolutionary theory and discuss how they apply to understanding of social and cultural change at a general level. The final

section will then bring Hutchinson's approach and Darwinian social evolutionary theory together, showing how they can complement one another in understanding the development of modern nations and nationalism. The example of the development of nationalism in Tokugawa and Meiji Japan are drawn on to demonstrate how a Darwinian perspective can add to our understanding of nationalism, in concert with Hutchinson's approach. Through this I will explore the distinctive way that Darwinian social evolutionary theory can improve our understanding of why particular symbols, myths and memories are preserved, but also selected, in the Darwinian sense, as a result of their being adaptable to particular environmental contexts, at particular times. This will also demonstrate the usefulness of Darwinian social evolutionary theory as a general theory for understanding social and cultural change and the development of nationalism and nations.

1. Nations, Nationalism and *Zones of Conflict*

Debates over what nations are, and what nationalism is, have abounded in the field for many years, without a settled definition. Traditionally, the divide is drawn between primordialists, who hold that nations have always been a part of human history, and modernists, who believe them to be recent constructions that are produced by modernizing process (Ichijo, 2019: 3-4). Within this ethno-symbolism, Hutchinson's approach, straddles the two perspectives, in claiming that nations are (mostly) modern phenomenon, but they have important antecedents from the past that inform and shape them (Smith, 1981; 1988). Whilst modernism and ethno-symbolism are usually pitted against one another, though Smith (2003: 359) did see ethno-symbolism as being more of a complement to modernism, the two perspectives can be brought together, via Darwinian social evolution, as I have argued elsewhere (Kerr, 2019).

What, then, is nationalism?

From the modernist perspective, nationalism comes into being with the social changes produced by modernisation. Gellner (1964: 168) provides the first statement of this thesis: 'Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist'. For Gellner (2006: 1), nationalism is 'a political principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent'. Briefly put, Gellner's (2006) theory is that nationalism brings nations into being, as a necessary function of modern societies. Industrial societies require a mobile and educated population, able to work in different areas, and so consequently there needs to be a principle and belief that will tie all the people together. Nationalism is this principle, which creates the notion that all the people within a territory share an identity (Gellner, 2006: 6-7). Similarly, this is how Benedict Anderson (2006) uses his famous notion of an 'imagined community'; a belief that disparate peoples within a territory share an identity and form a community with each other.

The broad image here, of nationalism creating nations, is perhaps too simplistic. One point of criticism that can be levelled is the sense in which nations, in this definition, are born *ex nihilio* (Smith, 1996). Gellner (1996: 357) argues that as nations are novel formation, the past is not necessary for understanding them[i]. This is a point of difference at which the ethno-symbolists, of which Hutchinson (2004; 2005) is one, arrive.

Hutchinson views nations not as being unified coherent things but rather as subject to a variety of different forces and internal and external shocks (such as war, economic revolution or collapse, migration etc.) that initiate a redrawing of insider/outsider boundaries and community identities (Hutchinson, 2005: 3-4). There are, then, a variety of different identities within the modern nation, which arises out of the historical past of the territory and culture that goes into the formation of the nation (ibid: 2-3). In short, 'nations are products of powerful and usually protracted experiences, occurring well before the modern period, that are centrally involved in directing the pathways of modern society' (ibid: 2). This is the idea of nations as

zones of conflict: that rather than being a unified and coherent identity stretching through time, nations are in fact a constant location of change and debates about identity through culture wars (ibid: 4-5).

This happens through the dynamics of ethnic identity and *ethnies*, which provide the meanings and foundations through which myths, memories and symbols can attach themselves to, and be preserved by, institutions that then have an influence on nation formation (ibid: 13-16.) These dynamics happen through four main factors: religion, where ethnic groups would often adopt religions or separate traditions within a religion as a means of defining themselves against other ethnic groups (ibid: 16-19); empires, whose dynamics of expansion and contraction in conflict with others could help promote or reinforce a sense of ethnic consciousness (ibid: 19-21); interstate competition, warfare tending to see an increasing sense of one group against another, and propaganda and stereotypes play a role in separating one group from others. State centralisation, through war, would also help diffuse a core ethnic identity to others within the group (ibid: 21-3). Finally, long-distance trade and migration helps create awareness of other cultures and people's but also a sense of difference. Migrations and invasions also see the creation of new myths and symbols, both for the indigenous and the migrants/invaders (ibid: 23-5).

All these factors work to create an ethnic formation that is *multi-layered*, which is to say having lots of different myths sitting on old ones. The old myths, however, are not relinquished, but are rather restored to suit new purposes, or held in the background until such a time as when they might become relevant again (ibid: 25-6; Hutchinson, 2004).

Under the ethno-symbolic framework, then, it is the case that nations are mostly modern, though it is possible that pre-modern nations could exist, Smith (2015) allows for the possibility of Ancient Egypt and Israel being examples, but that modern nations are built on prior

foundations. That is *ethnies* have certain symbols, myths, memories etc. that are associated with them and that are then used as foundations for the national culture.

In expanding on Gellner and Anderson's views on nationalism, this is also a point that Shlomo Sand (2010) raises. He notes that 'to reinforce an abstract group loyalty, the nation, like the preceding religious community, needed rituals, festivals, ceremonies and myths. To forge itself into a single, firm entity, it had to engage in continual public cultural activities and to invent a unifying collective memory' (Sand, 2010: 39). However, he also points to the fact that this is not a purely elite phenomenon, in that intellectuals and elites do not consciously manipulate symbols and such to produce a nation, as is implied to a certain extent in the ethno-symbolic reading, but neither is it a wholly bottom-up phenomenon of nationalism inventing nations, as Gellner has it (Sand, 2010: 41, 45). Nationalism 'springs from the intersection of various historical processes that began in the developing capitalist West about three centuries ago' (Sand, 2010: 41)[ii].

Sholomo Sand (2010: 38) provides an expanded definition of nations and nationalism, following his discussions of Gellner and Anderson, to argue that nations:

> 1. […] are a human group wherein universal education gives rise to a homogenous mass culture that claims to be common and accessible to all members.
>
> 2. The nation gives rise to a perception of civil equality among all who are seen and who see themselves as its members […]
>
> 3. There must be a unifying cultural-linguistic continuum…between the actual representatives of the sovereign power, or those aspiring to it, and every last citizen.
>
> 4. […] [T]he citizenry that identifies with the nation is conscious of belonging to it, or aspires to be part of it, with the aim of living under its sovereignty.
>
> 5. The nation has a common territory about which the members feel and assert that they are its sole owners […]
>
> 6. The aggregate economic activity within the boundaries of this national territory, after the achievement of its sovereignty, was more closely interconnected, at least until the twentieth century, than its relations with other market economies.

This highlights several factors of importance for understanding nationalism: it separates it out from older formations; places importance on a linguistic continuity; stresses the sense of equality between members; and locates a sense of identity among the people, within a defined territorial location. It can also tie in with the points that Hutchinson is making, regarding how nations build themselves. You don't have to believe that prior cultural traditions and symbols that are drawn on constitute the beginnings of a pre-nation to note that, nonetheless, having some sort of symbolic repertoire can be useful for creating senses of identity, unity and notions of territorial boundaries.

This draws back to the multi-layering element of Hutchinson's argument, where at times of social crisis there is an emergence of 'moral innovators' who provide new directions and leadership for a nation (Hutchinson, 2004: 117). This leads to a process that Hutchinson dubs 'mythic overlaying' which involves 'the creation of fresh myths by the new nationalists embodied in extraordinary contemporary collective sacrifice against a traditional "enemy" that can be presented as renovation of a national continuum when the old myths have failed' (ibid: 120). This is also the means by which the old myths are not destroyed, but instead effectively remain as back-up, although held in lesser esteem, that can be turned to for guidance and revival, should the new myths fail to provide solutions to the crisis (Hutchinson, 2005: 71).

Hutchinson's concept of 'culture wars' also derives from this. Culture wars are the result of different clusters of symbols forming within the nation through the process of overlaying, meaning that different groups in competition with one another can compete over the direction of the nation by utilising the differing, and sometimes clashing, conceptions of these symbols and myths (ibid: 77-8). The rival traditions are, effectively, alternative strategies that can be used to solve and manage changes, both internal and external, whilst also maintaining a variety, so that other traditions can be called upon and put into service should a particular conception fail in a specific circumstance.

As an example of this process Hutchinson points towards the figure of Joan of Arc and how her image and memory is used by competing political groups in France to advance their conception of the nation and gain popular legitimacy (Hutchinson, 2005: 103-4). She figured both as a memory, or symbol, of a medieval golden age and was introduced as such by the historian Jules Michelet, who wanted to use her image to ground the Revolution, embodying the democratic spirit crushed by the *ancien regime*. After World War I her image was used intensively to unite France, which led to her canonisation in 1921. Following that, however, different traditions have taken parts of her image and used them to support their own causes: right-wing monarchist groups sought to reclaim her for the extreme right, communists depicted her as a working-class warrior who was betrayed by the ruling classes and, into the modern period, Le Pen's Front Nationale has used her memory as that of someone repelling foreign invaders, used in the context of their anti-immigration agenda.

Özkirimli (2008: 7-8) criticises Hutchinson's argument here. He argues that what this shows, is that there are no national symbols of unity, that instead there are different groups who take symbols to mean different things. There can, therefore, be no internalisation of national values because each group has different national values. Joan of Arc is not some deeply resilient symbol but is rather a symbol that only became relevant in the age of modern nationalism: it is only with nationalism that she acquires status as a symbol and, had it not been her, it would have been another figure from French past that was given this status. 'If Joan of Arc did not exist, nationalists would have found another symbol, and in fact, there are many symbols that are not taken up by nationalists, and condemned to oblivion' (ibid: 8).

This is a valid and important criticism from Özkirimli, not because it is fatal to the argument, but it does identify an area where there is a need for further theoretical elaboration and engagement, on why certain symbols are chosen over others and what constraints exist on the choosing of symbols. This is what, I contend, Darwinian social evolutionary theory can

help to answer. Before I engage with this point further though, I will first explain what the core Darwinian principles are and how they relate to Darwinian social evolution and understanding societies.

2. Principles of Darwinian Social Evolution

To some extent evolution has always had a social influence running through it. Pre-Darwin many theorists drew upon evolutionary ideas, particularly those of Lamarck, to try and explain how society worked and its origins and development. Most famous, or perhaps infamous, among these was Herbert Spencer, who developed his own theory of evolution in relation to biology and sought to extend it to society. Though widely considered to be a social Darwinist, Spencer developed his own theories pre-Darwin and never particularly took to Darwin's ideas (Bannister, 1988: ch 3; Becquemont, 2011).[iii] Darwin himself was inspired by reading Thomas Malthus' essay on population, and he had read both Adam Smith and David Hume (Hodgson & Knudsen, 2010: 6 fn.7).

For a variety of reasons, the application of Darwin's concepts to society fell out of favour (Hodgson, 2004). The last few decades have, however, seen a revival of the idea that these concepts can provide a useful theory towards understanding the origins, composition and change in society and culture (Hodgson & Knudsen, 2010; Runciman, 2009; Richerson & Boyd, 2006). This paper is part of a contribution to this revival.

Darwinian social evolution, as understood here, is distinct from the tradition of social evolution in sociology. The latter is based more on pre-Darwinian understandings, that often see societies as passing through a series of stages, often ranked on a progressive scale, with the idea being that they are 'evolving' to an end point (Noble, 2000: 94-96). Darwinian social evolution is different, in that it goes back and uses the Darwinian concepts in application to society and culture, to understand why and how change occurs. It does not, therefore, have a

notion of progress, in saying one society is better than another; rather it looks at why one social formation happened to be successful in a particular environment at a particular time, rather than the available alternatives.

So, what are the key Darwinian concepts? There are three: variation, the notion that mutations will generate different variants that can be selected among; inheritance, that these variations can be passed on through generations; and selection, that environmental differences will mean that certain variants are going to be more successful in certain contexts than others (Hodgson & Knudsen, 2006). And this point needs to be emphasized: it is all *environmentally dependent*, which is to say *context dependant*. Natural selection is not an optimizing, or perfecting, phenomenon: it does not select traits, or adaptations, according some objective, or universal, standard of 'the best' or 'most progressive' (Sober, 2000: 39). It is, at heart, a relative phenomenon and all that can be said about any particular adaptation was that it happened to be the most successful, in that particular environment, at that particular time, against those other particular variants. As John Maynard Smith (1966: 15) put it 'life…is an active equilibrium between the organism and its surroundings, an equilibrium which can be maintained only if it suits the particular animal or plant, which is then said to be "adapted" to that environment.' It is a local, not a global, phenomenon.

The importance of the three principles is in the functions that they serve. When something is 'adapted' to an environment it is because it provides some kind of solution to a particular problem in a particular setting. This, such as it is, is information. The principle of inheritance concerns how this information is retained and transmitted down successive generations (Hodgson & Knudsen, 2010: 35). For organisms this, generally, takes the form of genes, which retain information that codes for proteins and pass this on. With regards to the social world, however, it takes place in the form of institutions, routines, habits and rules (ibid: 35), all of which goes towards the formation of society and culture. The principle of variety is

the route by which different solutions are found. In an environment, where there are scarce resources, different variations will be produced, which are effectively solutions to a particular problem, with each variation carrying the information to be inherited. Innovation, imitation and planning are all forms by which variation is generated in social evolutionary terms (ibid: 34-5). Lastly the principle of selection is the means by which certain variations are considered 'successful', and thus able to pass on their information structure over others (ibid: 35-6). As discussed before this is all context dependant on the environment as the same variant that would be successful in one environment (say gills in the ocean), would not be successful in another environment (gills in a desert)[iv].

Culture is a means by which information is retained and transmitted through generations, through social learning (Richerson & Boyd, 2006: 3), with social learning being the ability to acquire behaviour, or the information, through observation or teaching of others (Boyd & Richerson, 1989: 20). Cultural evolution is a cumulative process of more learning through time, with the information persisting and being transmitted down generations (Richerson & Boyd, 2006: 56-7). But culture is, of course, also about how it is represented and interpreted. Dan Sperber (1996) argues that there are two ways in which culture is represented: mentally, that is privately by an individual, and publicly, that is a representation a group shares. Mental representations consist of beliefs, intentions and preferences, whilst public representations are such things as language, texts, symbols and so on (1996: 24). The important point, here, is that public representations are 'transformed' as they are transmitted (ibid: 24) and become cultural representations when they are distributed widely within a group, such that the individuals comprising the group all have a mental representation of the symbol, object, text etc. in question (ibid: 33). But this is not the end of the process as, through acquiring and taking on a cultural representation, individuals are also involved in reinterpreting it and

transforming it when they take it in as a mental representation, a necessary process for being able to interact with other people (ibid: 34; 40).

Of course, some cultural representations are better able to be retained and transmitted due to the way they fit with the cognitive functioning of the human brain. Sperber argues that humans have a disposition to develop concepts according to a schema, and such representations that fit with the schema are more likely to be internalized and retained (ibid: 69). An example of this would be a comparison between stories and mathematical theorems: the latter are quite hard for us to remember, because it doesn't quite fit with the way our schema systems work, but stories, like 'Little Red Riding Hood', tend to be easier for us to remember because it fits more with how our schemas work at categorizing concepts and fitting them into representations (ibid: 66).

It is important to remember though that culture and society are not as easy to distinguish as this appears to suggest. Certainly, Richerson and Boyd (2006) in their account don't give much emphasis to the social and institutional aspects, concentrating instead on culture and person to person social learning. However, symbols, learning and cultural representation can be held within social intuitions and organizations, and passed on through them, without necessarily having to be a mediating culture or process of learning (Hearn, 2014: 179).

With this summation of the key Darwinian principles, and how they apply to the social world, finished we can move to the next section, where I will argue that these principles, and its background theory, can provide a strong support to Hutchinson's argument about the development of nations and the importance of culture wars in creating meanings and symbols for the nation.

3. Nations as zones of selection?

At the start of *Nations as Zones of Conflict* Hutchinson makes this claim: 'Because many national heritages are multi-layered, and globalisation itself is not unitary but multiple, disaggregated and contradictory in its forms, nations can select from a range of options by which to preserve their identity and achieve social progress' (Hutchinson, 2005: 7). If I've done a good job of outlining Darwinian social evolutionary theory then, perhaps, this passage will set a bell ringing and give a decent suggestion of where the argument of this section, on the compatibility of Hutchinson's theory and Darwinian social evolution, is going to go.

There does exist a challenge when looking at social evolutionary theories in relation to contingency loaded and voluntarist theories of social change, as Hutchinson's is[v]; namely that the one seems to preclude the other, if evolutionary theories are implied to have a series of stages that societies must go through and therefore a direction attached to them. This is a point that is worth emphasizing: Darwinian social evolution, as constituted here, does not contain notions of progress, historicism or unidirectionality (Hodgson & Knudsen, 2010; Runciman, 2009; Spruyt, 1994a & 1994b). Spruyt (1994a: 5) makes the case that evolutionary processes should be understood multilinearly, so there is not one stage succeeding another but rather multiple branching paths by which an institution or society can change, and that agency is an important part of the considerations when looking at this. Agents make choices within a range of options, that sets them on an institutional pathway and that shapes the environment around, culturally, socially and institutionally, which further opens and constrains options (Spruyt, 1994b). This then places the object of study on the interaction between agents' choices and the environment around them; or in other words places an emphasis on how contingent factors shape the field of options available, with agents picking what are perceived to be the best options available within that field. So it is that nation-states get selected over city states, not because they are the best possible social formation, or because history's evolutionary path

pushes them in that direction, but rather the environmental constraints meant it just so happened to be the best option available (Spruyt, 1994a & 1994b).

This ties back with Shlomo Sand's (2010: 41) point about how there is no shadowy conspiracy of powers that bring nationalism into being; rather it was a combination of different factors and changes that led to that being the best available option to pick. This goes back to the ways in which Darwinian social evolutionary understandings can contribute to Hutchinson's ethno-symbolic understanding, particularly through the multi-layering argument. The multi-layering that Hutchinson describes is part of the process by which variants are created. Because these traditions are not destroyed, but simply over-layered, or, as might be pointed out with reference to Sperber (1996), transformed, this leads to the possibility of differing uses of traditions and symbols to meet certain moments. Recall that Hutchinson also argues that what is required of these various symbols, and differing traditions, is their use in being able to solve particular problems and crises faced by a nation at a particular moment of time. The old traditions are held onto as possible alternatives that can be returned to and sought inspiration from, should the newer innovations fail (Hutchinson, 2005: 98). Another way of putting this is that certain symbols, traditions, myths etc. are seen as being better *adapted* to fit a particular *environmental context* than are others and hence they are *selected for*, with the differing symbols and traditions being *inherited* through cultural representations held by particular groups or institutions.

As Hodgson and Knudsen (2010: 34) have argued the element of this is in the transmission of information that provides solutions to problems, with different variants being different possible solutions to problems. Relating this to Hutchinson's arguments what is occurring here is that these differing interpretations used by moral innovators are the differing variants in response to a particular problem: the innovators are generating new variants, with the 'successful' ones being the ones that get selected and taken on as a new national symbol,

or myth, that's used to, for example, promote a sense of unity (Hutchinson, 2004: 117). In these cases there is not just one moral innovator, or one group of moral innovators, but rather competing moral innovators, with differing visions, who are competing for the scarce resource, in these cases likely political power and cultural and social influence. The social environment, which amounts to the other people which can be restricted to elites or spun more broadly, provides the constraint as to where decision making power lies[vi].

Let's take a moment to return to Özkirimli's (2008) criticism of Hutchinson. Recall that one part of Özkirimli's critique was that the symbols that Hutchinson is pointing to only become relevant with the age of modern nationalism, and that these modernist innovators are not constrained by the past. Responding to Hutchinson's example of Joan of Arc, he argues that she was chosen as a symbol for the French, but she need not have been, and it could have been something else. Therefore, there's no necessary importance to any particular symbol, myth or so on within the history of a nation.

Özkirimli has a point when he says that it was only with modern nationalism arrival that they became important symbols for nationalism: that is, of course, because the environment changed. When that occurred the meanings of the symbols changed to suit the new environment. Those that were more adaptable as symbols were selected. In this case, then, it's not necessarily the case that any other symbol would have done. Only those symbols that could fit with the new context and climate would work. Joan of Arc is, in this case, a powerful symbol precisely because her story, her representation, can be transformed into new cultural meanings whilst retaining its connection to the older forms (Sperber, 1996: 69). Joan as symbol was inherited, in different forms, down history and survived because it was adaptable to different environments, enabling its selection as a symbol. The fact that the meaning of the symbol changes does not expressly matter, of course it will change with different environments, but neither does it mean that anything can be chosen. Symbols must survive, in some form, from

their origin in order to still be an available variant for selecting and that process is down to more than just random chance.

Hutchinson's (2008: 25) own response to this argument makes the same point:

> Only an analysis that recognises the interplay between political elites, as they circulate with competing ideological programmes, institutional power, circumstances, and the range of popular ideas and sentiments that constrain and inspire such elites can account for the character of the nation (state) that emerges. I do not accept, therefore, postmodernists' claims about nationalists' freedom to select national identities or that nationalists win because they manufacture consent.

What Hutchinson, and ethno-symbolism, lacks is a way of setting out why one symbol, myth etc. gets picked out of the others; why does one persist, or is preserved or used as a representative icon and not another? As an attempt at demonstrating how this can be, and how Darwinian social evolution can help understand the process, we can look at the case of Japan, in the period immediately before and after its forced opening by the West in 1854. It was not, as the popular image sometimes suggests, just a straight line from the old feudal order, to the new modern nation-state, but rather there were a succession of competing images and ideas about the form that the Japanese government should take, a process that continued well into the Meiji period, before it settled on the emperor system (Howell, 2000; Gluck, 1985).

Nor, as the conventional image suggests, was it purely a case of imitating Western ideas (Ichijo, 2019: 1-2). The Satsuma Rebellion, led by Saigō Takamori in 1877, was an attempt to push an alternative to the prevailing system that was eventually defeated; the Freedom and Popular Rights Movement, which advocated for more democracy, was similarly an alternative that was neutered by having some of its programme adopted by the government (Howell, 2000). All of these cases are instances of moral innovators, or a group of moral innovators, attempting to push a particular vision, but it is also a case of variants being generated in response to the time of crisis, where the environmental conditions favour certain adaptations over others. In

this case the cultural role of the emperor, and the institutions symbolic status of legitimacy, constrained the field such that variants that did not involve the emperor could not be selected; likewise, the need to appear 'modern' and 'civilized', so as to stave off potentially being colonised by the West, provided a further constraint. The Satsuma Rebellion's vision of a rejuvenated old order was not possible because it would not give off the correct signal, whilst aping the Western model of nation-state with a unitary territory would (Howell, 2000: 96-100). It was not adaptive in the prevailing environmental conditions.

More than that, though, the creation of Japanese nationalism was not built out of nothing. As Atsuko Ichijo outlines (2019), in an agency focused look at nationalism in Japan, the Kokugaku school set about attempting to recover a native Japanese tradition, that supposedly existed before the importation of Chinese traditions. This would represent the "true heart", or the true uncontaminated spirit, of Japan (2019: 13-14). For Ichijo (2019: 17) this represents an "endogenous movement" that was "not triggered by colonial encounters but emerged in response to the perceived decline within Tokugawa Japan" and which shows that scholars in Japan were "engaged with imagining the Japanese nation before the form of imagination was transmitted from the West". The ideas had a wide appeal to different stratums in Japan and was later picked up by samurai in the nineteenth century, as part of their inspiration for launching a coup d'etat (Ichijo, 2013: 96-97). What this also helps to do is dispel something of the image that Japan was merely a passive receiver of Western ideas, rather than people with agency in how they approached those ideas, and which ones they chose, once the forced opening had occurred (Ichijo, 2013: 99-100).

This leads back towards Darwinian social evolutionary theory and what it can contribute to this understanding, and helps to understand why certain symbols were retained, why certain paths were chosen in terms of politics and institutional structure.

Recall, Spruyt's (1994a & 1994b) point that agents make choices within the particular environment. This is the reason why, for example, the Shogun was unable to continue, but the emperor and emperor system, though more peripheral, was: because the emperor held the cultural legitimacy that was needed for the new government, whereas the Shogun did not. The emperor as a system was also adaptable: it could be moulded to suit a representation of modernity more easily (Gluck, 1985). Nationalism, alongside imperialism and colonization (Eskildsen, 2002), is taken up as part of this: the geopolitical environment meant that in order to stave off being colonized, and to participate in the world order, the institutions had to be those that other states would acknowledge as being sovereign states (Spruyt, 1994a).

Subsequently, this is the moment at which biased transmission, the process whereby people selectively choose what they are going to imitate or learn from based on visible cases of success (Richerson & Boyd, 2006: 68-71), comes into effect. After the Meiji Restoration the elites in government, the moral innovators (Hutchinson, 2004), began to more discriminately select among the features of Westernization that they could usefully apply to Japan, adapting them to fit the circumstances of the political and cultural environment (Tipton, 2002: 55). The oligarch's objective was to downplay politics, which they feared would be divisive and counter-productive to the smooth running of government and so interfere with the modernization project and the creation of a nationalist community (Gluck, 1985: 59-60).

Shlomo Sand (2010: 54-62) points to how intellectuals are involved in the process, and this ties back towards what Ichijo (2019) points to with the kokugaku school. Whilst the kokugaku school offered a nativist interpretation, that would inform elements of Japanese nationalism (Ichijo, 2019), it was also the case that a more 'mixed-origin' thesis was developed, holding that Japanese were not homogenous but grew out of mingling of Chinese and Korean populations, and was taken to be the driving force: as it provided a justification for Japan's imperial ambitions (incorporate their Asian brethren in the Japanese Empire to defend against

the West) (Ichijo, 2013: 105-104). Again, the cultural, social and political environment sets up against this: in order to be accepted into the world sphere and acknowledged as a people, Japan proves itself by demonstrating that it is a 'nation', and institutes the various reforms to prove this; having a mass education system (Gluck, 1985), in line with what Sand (2010) identifies as an important feature, to create a shared sense of being, but also engages in a colonial project, in line with the West (Eskildsen, 2002). The intellectuals are thus engaged in this project of turning things over, but are making choices about what to do, in line with the environmental contingencies that exist and that they select among.

This also points to the reasons why some of the stronger demands for democracy in Japan at the time, embodied in the People's Rights Movement, were also selected against. The social and cultural environment of Japan, which had traditionally had close-networks of power between governing officials and other interest groups, was wary of allowing greater public participation and support, so there was a selective adoption of those of the People's Rights Movements demands that did not eat into the oligarchs control of the political process and rule-making (Howell, 2000). Of course, adopting some of these ideas again affects the environment, meaning that further changes down the road are more likely. This is true of selection: by acting on a particular population it alters it such that a given variant is more likely to be produced than it would otherwise be, meaning that the generation of certain variants is more likely in the future (Godfrey-Smith, 2009: 43). In this case the adoption of some of the reforms meant that further and wider reforms were more possible in the future due to the environmental changes.

The culture war (Hutchinson 2005) generates these new variants, and then the environmental conditions mean that certain of the variants are more adapted than others and so are selected for, with the others being eliminated. In this case, the international environment, of needing a sovereign national state, as well as the internal social and cultural environment,

of political agents wishing to maintain control, selected against the more democratic variants, in favour of picking out the Prussian model of constitution (Ichijo, 2013: 100).

This example is also a good demonstration of the oft mistaken idea that there is a correlation between 'adapted', or 'selected', and 'progressive' or 'good'. Just because a particular variant is selected, it does not mean that it is seen as good, according to some absolute standard either scientific or moral, or that it connotes a value-judgement (Runciman, 1989: 30-1). It merely means that it happened to be the most adapted available variant at that particular juncture within those particular environmental conditions. What's missing here is the placing of this within a theoretical framework that enables the understanding for why a particular symbol, idea or direction gets chosen over others, and why certain constraints exist for particular elites, groups etc. than do for others. As I have shown, Darwinian social evolution can, with the concepts of variation, inheritance and selection, provide the theoretical framework that can provide the answers to these questions, showing why the constraints exist and why particular variants are selected over others within a particular environmental context.

Conclusion

My hope has been to demonstrate the value of a Darwinian social evolutionary approach to questions concerning the formation of nations. To this end I engaged with the work of John Hutchinson (2004; 2005). I believe that this framework provides a fruitful area for discussion of these principles and showing how they can be mutually supportive with already existing ideas and arguments.

Having explored definitions of nationalism, and outlined Hutchinson's theory and that of Darwinian social evolution, I joined the two together through an extended engagement with Hutchinson's ideas, drawing on the example of Japan in the Meiji Restoration to demonstrate

the principles at work alongside Hutchinson's ideas. The intent was to show that there was a connection not only at a more abstract theoretical level, but also in a demonstrably useful way for improving understanding of national development.

Hutchinson has, following Smith (2003), described ethno-symbolism as being 'a theoretical *framework* only (ie not a *theory*), and can be inflected in different ways, depending on the *problem* to be investigated' (2008: 23[emphasis in original]). Likewise, Hodgson and Knudsen (2006: 16) have pointed out that a Darwinian framework is not enough on its own. Darwinian social evolutionary theory may be a meta-theoretical framework that can be used to address a range of questions concerning social change, but it does need additional support from other theories and approaches in the specific areas in which it is applied.

Why particular symbols survive through time and preserve their cultural significance are familiar questions frequently asked of ethno-symbolism in nationalism studies. Approaching the inquiry through Darwinian theory provides an alternative perspective, that illuminates why certain symbols are more adaptable to particular environmental contexts than others. Moreover, within the same environmental context, and the history of the symbol, constraint is also placed on what meanings they can gain, preserve and successfully transmit.

This purpose of this paper has been to demonstrate the possibility of a mutually constructive dialogue between Darwinian social evolutionary theory and Hutchinson's ethno-symbolic framework on furthering understanding of nationalism as a historical and ongoing phenomenon. Whilst there are other areas in need of theoretical examination, the relation to power being one that I have flagged up, I believe that the revival (and survival) of Darwinian social evolutionary theory points to the theory's own versatility and adaptability and, fundamentally, its value as an explanatory tool which continues to accrue refreshed interest.

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[i] Gellner likely didn't literally believe this – in his later work (c.f. Gellner, 1997 & 1998) he does acknowledge the importance of past formations on informing how nationalism comes about and in what form.

[ii] An issue that will not be directly dealt with in this paper is the way in which this view is Eurocentric, in seeing nationalism as a phenomenon that begins in the West and then spreads elsewhere, with other places only being passive followers. The paper will explore aspects of this critique, but a fuller review can be found in Bhambra, 2007 & 2014 (in relation to social theory) & Ichijo 2014 & 2019 (in relation to nationalism).

[iii] Spencer only came to accept the notion of natural selection late in his life. Though he was often associated with Darwin, even in his own day, he highly resented the constant conflation of his ideas with Darwin's (Becquemont, 2011: 14). Spencer, likewise, only came to be called a social Darwinist long after he was dead (Bannister, 1988: ch 3).

[iv] The discussion here is slightly simplified, for the reason of not wanting to complicate the discussion of both the principles and Hutchinson's work too much. It is worth noting, however, that there are other features or forces of evolution that can have an impact, such as drift, whereby particular variants survive not because they have any strong adaptive value in the environment over other variants but just due to random change (Godfrey-Smith, 2009: 27). Another feature that could be mentioned are spandrels, which are traits or elements that look like adaptations, but really only exist as a consequence of other adaptations elsewhere (Gould & Lewontin, 1979).

[v] With thanks to the anonymous reviewer for flagging this up.

[vi] The relation between power and social evolution more broadly is an area that requires more critical engagement and development and one that I plan to write on in the future. Hearn (2014) is an example of this kind of engagement.