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Stages of Ethnic Belonging in the Western Canon: Etymological Rules of the Medieval *Gens* and *Natio* Concepts

Batı Kanonunda Etnik Aidiyetin Merhaleleri: Orta Çağ'da *Gens* ve *Natio* Kavramlarının Etimolojik Açıdan Karşılaştırılması

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Öz- Günümüzde 'ulus' olarak anılan siyasi aidiyet biçiminin geçmişini incelediğimizde, birbiriyle yakından bağlantılı görülen birkaç kavramın tercih edildiği görülür. Antik Yunan'da aynı site içerisinde yaşayan toplulukları ya da daha genel bir perspektifle aynı toprak parçasını paylaşan grupları ifade etmek için kullanılan '*ethnos*' tabiri ve Yunanca konuşmayan, mutlak öteki anlamındaki '*barbaros*' terimi bu kavramlardan en sık başvurulanıdır. Özellikle Orta Çağ'da bu konudaki literatürde, '*gens*' ve '*natio*' konseptleri fazlasıyla öne çıkar. Bu Latince terimler, kan veya doğum yoluyla birbirine bağlı insan gruplarını ifade etmek için çeşitli tarihçilerin başvurduğu öncelikli kavramlar görünümündedir. Öte yandan Orta Çağ kroniklerinde artık 'ulus' olarak tercüme edebileceğimiz bu iki kavram arasında rasyonel veya hiyerarşik bir ilişki kurmak oldukça zordur. Bugünkü meşru siyasal aidiyet kategorisi olarak 'ulus'u önceleyen bu iki kavramın Orta Çağ metinlerindeki çalışma prensiplerini ya da hangi kapsamda kullanıldıklarını ortaya koymak, her şeyden önce çağdaş kimlik tartışmalarında ve milliyetçilik literatüründe önemli çıkarımlarda bulunmayı kolaylaştıracaktır. Bu çalışma, tam da bu konuyu sorunsallaştırarak etimolojik olarak 'ulus' kavramını önceleyen *gens* ve *natio* konseptlerinin tarihsel bağlamda kullanımlarını karşılaştırmayı, aralarında anlamlı bir ilişki kurmanın imkanını soruşturmayı ve etnik aidiyetin Orta Çağ'daki temsil biçimlerini detaylandırmayı hedeflemektedir. Bu doğrultuda çalışmada; her kimliğin bir öteki üzerinden anlam kazandığı prensibi üzerinden hareketle 'ötekilik merkezleri'nin varlığı soruşturulacak ve Orta Çağ literatüründe oldukça önemli üç ismin (Prümlü Regino, Sevilyalı İsidore ve Bede) yapıtlarında bu merkezlerin hangi kapsamda ele alındığı, *gens* ve *natio* konseptlerinin belirli ötekilikleri ne şekilde ifade ettiği tartışması ele alınacaktır.
Anahtar Kelimeler– *Gens, Populus, Barbar, Etnik Aidiyet, Ulus.*

Abstract – Several closely connected notions come to the fore when we examine the past of the form of political belonging that is now referred to as the 'nation.' The two most commonly used of these notions are '*ethnos*', which was employed in ancient Greece to indicate communities residing in the same *polis* or, more generally, groups sharing the same piece of land, and '*barbaros*', which refers to the unquestionable other who does not speak Greek. '*Gens*' and '*natio*' were the most significant of these divisions by the Middle Ages. These Latin terms, in particular, refer to groups of people who are linked by blood or birth. However, it is difficult to find a rational or hierarchical relationship between these two notions—which we can now translate as nation, in the medieval chronicles. Above all, it will be simpler to draw significant conclusions in modern identity discussions and nationalism literature by revealing the underlying assumptions of these two concepts, which prioritize "nation" as the legitimate category of political belonging in today's society. In order to investigate the possibility of creating a meaningful connection between the concepts of "gens" and "natio," which etymologically precede the concept of "nation," and to describe the various ways in which ethnic belonging was represented in the Middle Ages, this study will problematize this very issue. In this direction, the study will examine the existence of "centers of otherness," the extent to which these centers are discussed in the works of three very significant figures in medieval literature (Regino of Prum, Isidore of Seville, and Bede), and how the concepts of "gens" and "natio" have a certain otherness.
Keywords– *Gens, Populus, Barbarian, Ethnic Belonging, Nation.*

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In this essay, rather than focusing on methods that can be applied in a typical historical study of concepts, the adopted theoretical approach will first be embodied, and the need for a poststructuralist theoretical foundation will be described. Given that all identity forms, whether modern or premodern, are inextricably linked to an *ex negativo* 'other', it is clear that choosing a common operating principle for each era and place enables the interpretation of related modes of belonging from the same angle. Due to this, it will be argued that one of the most significant elements in the imagination of identity is the mechanism of otherness, also known as the 'center of otherness,' which establishes distinctions at the discursive level and separates communities from one another. Following that, emphasis will be placed on attempts to categorize ethnic identity against the backdrop of the *natio* and *gens* in the Middle Ages. In ancient Greece and Rome, the semantic connections between terms like ethnos, populus, or barbaros appear to represent a crucial step on the way to 'nation.' These 'proto' ideas served as the foundation for the patterns the old barbarian communities adopted to create their own identities in the post-Roman era. In the end, nevertheless, some 'landmarks' are required to create a hierarchical relationship between the frequently arbitrary terms *gens* and *natio* used in medieval chronicles. Bede,

Isidore of Seville, and Regino of Prüm will be highlighted as the primary medieval authors that can be used as a foundation for an effort in this direction in the last section of this study. When these three names are contrasted, it can be claimed that all three authors had a tendency to use subjective criteria for the groups they refer to as nations or *gentes* in their writings. As a result, these names provide highly useful hints concerning an early meaning of 'nation.'

Consequently, the adage '*gentem lingua facit*' (language makes races) undermines the determination of a common ancestry by placing *lingua*, not *gentes*, at the outset. The fact that the distinctions between human groups are not fundamental but rather have configurable cultural characteristics is one of the clearest examples of this. Most of the requirements given for belonging to a *gens* or *natio*, as shown in the clearest form in Isidore of Seville and Regino of Prüm, are not essential but obtainable. Unquestionably, the most crucial and historically persistent of these factors is language. To be clear, though, it is the languages that make the diverse communities unique rather than the other way around. Much of what has been said thus far supports modernist nationalism theorists' claims. On the other hand, this does not imply that 'ethnicity'—or 'race' as the more 'scary' version of the word, as defined as the notion that individuals who share the same language and culture are of a common 'blood'—had no significance for medieval society. Beyond these practical or rational realities, it is fairly normal for people who share the same language and cultural sign system to believe that they have a common, often always profoundly 'sacred' lineage. This belief is in fact one of the key elements supporting the legitimacy or 'mystery' of the nation.

In addition to all of these conclusions, it should be noted that up to the end of the Middle Ages, all types of ethnically based division to which *gens* or *natio* corresponds reported a cultural difference rather than a political one. Within the bounds of the *polis* or *populus*, members of feudal *regnum*s or legal citizenship categories are currently classified using criteria that are nearly never based on linguistic or cultural characteristics. This notion—that people from the same culture should coexist in the same political system, or nation-state, reflects a very contemporary and nationalist vision. It is true that the concept of 'birth' and the idea of an identity based on this issue have their roots in the Middle Ages when we look at the 'etymological rules of the game' that underlay 'nation' and consequently 'nation-state'. As is commonly noted, the *modus operandi* of the modern nation principle has unquestionably been strongly influenced by the grouping of university groups under the category of 'nation' according to the principles of 'language' and 'birth.' However, there is no pre-modern equivalent to the imagination of a political unit that is a part of a *natio*, which is totally constructed with its distinctive qualities.

INTRODUCTION

"By the word people (populus) is meant a multitude of human beings united in a region, in so far as they constitute a whole. This multitude, or even the part of it that recognizes itself as united into a civil whole through common ancestry, is called a nation (gens)."[1]

These phrases are used by Immanuel Kant as he discusses how to define specific types of people in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Perspective*. Being a part of a 'nation' for Kant appears to be based solely on sharing a common 'ancestral' past. On the other hand, Kant equates 'people' and 'nation' using the Latin terms '*populus*' and '*gens*,' respectively. The term 'nation' currently serves as the most binding, formal, and legal definition of political identity, although it is incredibly antagonistic to the constraints of the past.

This study was motivated by a student of nationalism's desire to find an etymological answer to a fairly simple question: How did the word 'nation' acquire its current inclusive meaning? All introductory literature texts trace the word *natio* back to student associations in medieval universities.[2] And I have always been fascinated by the concept's evolution from this limited connotation to the predominant political-social belonging pattern of the entire modern era. Moreover, terms like *gens* or *populus*, which were used in the Middle Ages to refer to the communities that shared a language and cultural signs, seem closer to the current definition of the nation. These words were used until the sixteenth century at least. Although there is a lot of conceptual ambiguity in the literature of nationalism,[3] understanding the historical development of a word like 'nation', which reflects the current dominant form of political belonging, is prerequisite.

To begin with, the concept of a 'nation' is predicated on political formation, rather than anthropological one.[4] In the modern era, the formation of a nation is dependent upon several aspects considered cultural, linguistic, or ethnic; that is, it is predicated on the conviction that the people who comprise the nation have an ethnic bond. A embodiment of the notion of assimilating some local linguistic, religious, or ethnic belongings under a 'higher' culture is the idea of the nation. This does not imply that the nation's smaller communities and their cultures do not exist. Subnational identities and cultures typically survive by hiding behind the surface of national identity. The nation is an ideal, and it can be said that each specific example approaches it in its own way.[5] However, every nation obtains significance in the theory that it achieves 'unity' in its own micro reality when combined with a similar language, a high culture, and a strong belief in the idea of sharing a common origin. The key takeaway, as stated in this article, is that things were very different in the premodern era and that some linguistic or ethnic *gens-natio* groupings existed concurrently, both inclusively and exclusively.

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[1] Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, tr. R.B. Louden (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 213.

[2] For a modernist study on this, see; Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 16. For a perennialist one, see; Hugh Seton–Watson, *Nations and States: An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics* (London: Methuen, 1977), 8.

[3] One of the names that is most interested in this subject in the nationalism literature is Connor, see; Walker Connor, "The Dawning of Nation," in *When is the Nation?*, ed. Atsuko Ichijo and Gordana Uzelac (New York: Rutledge, 2005), 40–47. Connor specially emphasizes the distinction between nationalism and patriotism.

[4] The study does not accept an anthropological interpretation of the nation or pre-national concepts like 'gens' and 'natio' despite the frequent use of the term 'culture' throughout it. Specifically, it is recognized to comprehend culture as a discourse form that facilitates communication within any society, as espoused by sociologist Stuart Hall. See; Stuart Hall, "The Work of Representation", in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. S. Hall, London: SAGE, 2003, 13-75.

[5] Because of this, it is essential to analyze each unique case that makes up a nation in the modern era within the context of its own historical background. National identity refers to the territorial integrity rather than the ethnic unity of nation-states like France, where there are numerous sub-linguistic or ethnic groups (Breton, D'Oc, Corsican). In Germany, on the other hand, the existence of ethnic identity serves as the only unifying factor, with distinct nationalization experiences.

The literature can be divided into roughly two categories based on the names of people who were interested in this subject.[6] When we examine the studies of nationalism theorists on the topic, it becomes clear that one of the major aspects where modernist and perennialist theories vary from one another is the existence of nations or other similar forms of ethnic belonging in the Middle Ages.[7] Gellner's claim that nations are a form of belonging specific to the modern era is commonly accepted by modernist views—which emphasize that the cultural elements holding communities together in the Middle Ages did not necessarily have to be 'national.'[8] While Hobsbawm exposes in *The Invention of Tradition* that modern national identities are primarily dependent on contemporary 'traditions' that were 'invented' in the 19th century,[9] he also contends that 'nationalism' requires 'too much belief in what is patently not so.'[10] Although Breuilly claims that the modernist approach is still the most 'effective' theory in the literature, he asserts that the studies of perennialist and ethno-symbolist theorists can be used to analyze 'pre-modern ideas of nation.'[11] In fact, the main points of interest for modernists like Gellner, Hobsbawm, Anderson, and others are that the necessity for a new and contemporary style of belonging became apparent as a result of the changing socio-economic conditions of the 19th century and the use of nationalism by political authorities to create a new type of subject. In the literature of nationalism, on the other hand, it is seen that theorists who are distant from modernism focus more on pre-modern forms of belonging and even open the argument that the nation is a modern identity.

Hastings contends in his well-known study that political communities that can be referred to as 'nations' first appeared in fourteenth century England.[12] Hirschi, using a similar approach, asserts that the first nations appeared in the Middle Ages and sought to define their own identities through particular differences in the post-Roman era.[13] Smith argues that nations are modern identity types and that they could not exist in the Middle Ages due to deficiencies like 'sharing common legal rights' or 'a common economy.' [14] In fact, Smith appears to be trying to justify his own conception of *ethnie*, which would encompass traditional types of pre-modern identities. Armstrong, a fellow ethno-symbolist, makes reference to the three elements of symbol, myth, and communication to explain the 'slow emergence of nations in the premodern period.'[15] From a broad perspective, there are a lot of perennialist studies that base the pasts of nations on the Middle Ages, but as Scales and Zimmer point out, this topic can take on more significance with customized studies that are *longue durée*-centered and primarily influenced by medieval historiography.[16]

The question of identifying communities in the past, or more broadly, approving the existence of nations in that time, is something which Davies diligently emphasized that medieval historians are

[6] For a very successful literature review on this subject, see; Claire Weeda, "Ethnic Identification and Stereotypes in Western Europe, circa 1100–1300," *History Compass* 12, no: 7 (2014): 586–606.

[7] To compare these two theoretical positions on the existence of pre–modern forms of ethnic belonging, see; Umut Ozkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 60–67, 126–127.

[8] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 1, 39–40.

[9] Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1–15.

[10] Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 12.

[11] John Breuilly, "Changes in the Political Uses of the Nation: Continuity or Discontinuity?,", in *Power and Nation in European History*, ed. Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 94.

[12] Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 35–66.

[13] Caspar Hirschi, *The Origins of Nationalism: An Alternative History from Ancient Rome to Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 10–12.

[14] Smith is known for being the middle ground between the modernists and perennialists. See; Anthony Smith, "National Identities: Modern and Medieval," in *Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Simon Forde, Leslie Johnson and Alan Murray (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1995), 21–46; Anthony Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 20–21.

[15] John Alexander Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 7.

[16] Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer, "Introduction," in *Power and the Nation in European History*, ed. Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer (New York: Cambridge University, 2005), 1–29.

usually too 'reluctant' to face.[17] This is due to the fact that modernist nationalism theories' dominant position in the literature and that historians regularly come across various forms of belonging besides 'nation' in their work. This terminological issue can be resolved by clearly defining the distinctions between identification forms with different meanings, such as *gens*, *natio*, and *populus*, or by placing them in a certain hierarchy. Bartlett claims that 'the most neutral possible translation' of *gens* would be 'people,' but translations of the terms 'nation' and even (to a lesser extent) 'race' are indeed possible.[18] In addition to claiming that *gens* most obviously correspond to 'people,' Davies notes that 'in medieval practice, the words 'people' and 'nation' in their Latin forms interchangeably and haphazardly.'[19] In another article, he states that *gens* is a subset of *natio* as it usually 'contain several peoples (*gentes*).'[20] According to Geary, *gens*—the primary concept that referred to an ethnic community, was closest to the modern term 'nation' in literature before to the ninth century, at which time the word's meaning changed to 'nation.'[21] The work of Bogdan and Bouchard highlights the slight distinction between *gens* and *natio*.[22] Consequently, when Christianity evolved into the most fundamental 'center of otherness,' *natio*, as opposed to *gens*, which was a notion used to describe non-Roman groups outside of the *populus Romanus* in late Antiquity, became the primary word used to categorize non-Christian societies. According to Mathissen, *gens* is frequently used to describe ethnic groups under the Roman identity, such as *de gente Syrorum* (Syrian by ethnicity), whereas *natio* refers to 'Non-Roman foreigners,' such as *natione Parthus*.[23] However, it appears unlikely to generalize this rule broadly, at least for late Antiquity or the early Middle Ages.

The debate on this topic in medieval historiography is split between the Bartlett-advocated viewpoint that 'medieval ethnicity was a social construct rather than a biological datum'[24] and the contrary pole, which emphasizes the significance of the concepts of 'kinship, descent, and blood,'[25] according to Guenée. Perhaps, following Weeda's idea, it can be claimed that the term 'ethnic' is more 'prefable' than national, 'when referring of medieval peoples,' in order to clear up this misunderstanding.[26] Or, in keeping with the venerable name of medieval historiography Reynolds, her *regnal* conceptualization can be accepted when describing premodern ethnically based identities.[27] In any case, defining nations or nation-like ethnic categorizations in the Middle Ages is a very challenging assignment today, and the fact that there isn't a strong consensus on this problem in the literature supports the necessity for further research in this area.

When I decided to commence on an etymological analysis of the concept of nation—but not nationalism, since it has undergone less change compared to the nation and it, again, belongs to a particular era (modern), unlike nation—I knew it would not make for an interesting study on its own. First of all, while accepting that the nation is a modern mode of belonging, I also assume that some

[17] Rees Davies, "Nations and National Identities in the Medieval World: An Apologia," *RBHC* 34, no: 4 (2004): 567–579.

[18] Robert Bartlett, "Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, no: 1 (2001): 43.

[19] Rees Davies, "Presidential Address: The Peoples of Britain and Ireland 1100–1400. I. Identities," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 4, no: 1 (1994): 4–5.

[20] Davies, "Nations and National Identities," 570.

[21] Patrick Geary, "Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct in the Early Middle Ages," *MAGW* 113, no: 1 (1983): 18–19.

[22] Michel Bouchard and Gheorghe Bogdan, "From Barbarian Other to Chosen People: The Etymology, Ideology and Evolution of 'Nation' at the Shifting Edge of Medieval Western Christendom," *National Identities* 17, no: 1 (2015): 7–8, 20.

[23] Ralph W. Mathisen, "Natio, Gens, Provincialis and Civis: Geographical Terminology and Personal Identity in Late Antiquity," in *Shifting Genres in Late Antiquity*, ed. Geoffrey Greatrex and Hugh Elton (London: Routledge, 2015), 279. For a similar study, see. Benedykt Zientara, "Populus – Gens – Natio. Einige Probleme aus dem Bereich der ethnischen Terminologie des frühen Mittelalters," in *Nationalismus in vorindustrieller Zeit*, ed. Otto Dann (München: De Gruyter, 1986), 11–20.

[24] Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change, 950–1350* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), 197.

[25] Bernard Guenée, *States and Rulers in Later Medieval Europe*, tr. J. Vale (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 49.

[26] Weeda, "Ethnic Identification," 587.

[27] Susan Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900–1300* (Oxford: Clerandon Press, 1997), 251–256.

ethnic, religious, or linguistic forms of community before the modern era, but in a way that differs from Smith's theory. The main reason of the this difference, in my opinion, is that any premodern community with an ethnic cluster at its core, such as the *ethnie*—or whatever we choose to call it, cannot exist (as it cannot be in the modern era).[28] This meant that, similarly to how modern nations are imagined, various pre-modern modes of belonging were constructed—or 'imagined,' in their own spesific ways as unique cultural patterns. While nationalism, the name for a very specific practice, was used to construct the nation in order to take into account the requirements of the modern age, premodern communities were also envisioned in accordance with what their era required. It is important and possibly necessary to assign pre-modern and modern communities different terms in order to avoid terminological ambiguity.

On the other hand, accepting all of these presumptions appears to be insufficient to provide a proper answer to the question. The terms *gens*, *natio*, and *populus*, which are used to describe pre-modern communities, are frequently used ambiguously and interchangeably in medieval chronicles. And a more complicated aspect is that some affiliations, such *gens*, which call for language and cultural uniformity, resemble the modern phenomenon of the nation.[29] This ambiguity can be clarified by first making a modest initial attempt to capture the projections of these concepts in the texts of the period and determining the differences in their use across different sources. *Gens* and *natio* are used to indicate inclusivity in terms of religion and language in Bede's eighth century *Historia* and Isidore of Seville's sixth century *Etymologiae*, but—oddly enough, both have different meanings. Also, since nations still expresses the same classification criteria, it has come to be widely used in Europe since the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to categorize university student groups into linguistic factions and unquestioning, this indicates a more limited sense of belonging.

As a matter of fact, since the nineteenth century, nationalist projects in Europe have equated the existence of a nation with having a unique language,[30] and nationalisms that aim to emphasize the antiquity of the national community as a result of their guiding principle will use the historical texts that already exist and, as a result, give history itself a national meaning.[31] This ideological problem is actually one of the most fundamental issues with an etymological study aimed at understanding the scope of *natio* in the Middle Ages and the transformations it went afterward. It is now almost impossible to read texts like Tacitus' *Germania* or Bede's *Historia* outside of the cultural context in which they (modern or national) exist.[32] The teleological fallacy of interpreting medieval realities with modern concepts (ethnicity, race, and even feudalism) is a related problem. Geary emphasizes how difficult and challenging it is to describe group belonging in the Middle Ages during the investigated periods using the terminology utilized by contemporary researchers.[33]

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[28] Or rather, I believe that a firm faith in this direction is more vital than the presence of an actual ethnic cluster in the community's core. As Geertz and Shils have emphasized, I think that certain bonds that are 'taken for granted' are essential to the legitimacy of group structures such family and nation. See; Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 259; Edward Shils, "Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil Ties: Some Particular Observations on the Relationships of Sociological Research and Theory," *The British Journal of Sociology* 8, no: 2 (1957): 130–145.

[29] Modern nations do not necessarily have uniformity of language or culture but they certainly have a discourse that idealize this fact. Different ethnic and linguistic sub-identities are recognized in countries like Switzerland, France, and the USA where national identity is formed in a territorial manner. However, sub-ethnic group identities, or minorities, do exist even in nations like Germany, Japan, Israel, and Italy where the ethnic interpretation of national identity is strong. This is because, as the article's introduction states, the nation is an ideal identity that cannot be fully 'realized' or 'homogenized'.

[30] Margrit Pernau, "Whither Conceptual History? From National to Entangled Histories," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 7, no: 1 (2012): 6.

[31] Daniel Woolf, "Of Nations, Nationalism and National Identity," in *The Many Faces of Clio: Cross–cultural Approaches to Historiography Essays in Honor of Georg G. Iggers*, ed. Q.Edward Wang and Franz Fillafer (Oxford: Berghan Books, 2006), 71–103.

[32] Guy P. Marchal, "Introduction," in *The Uses of the Middle Ages in Modern European States: History, Nationhood and the Search for Origins*, ed. R.J.W. Evans and Guy P. Marchal (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1–5.

[33] Geary, "Ethnic Identity," 16. Also see; Walter Pohl, "Introduction: The Strategies of Distinctions," in *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities*, ed. Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 6–7. On how racism in the modern era cannot be divorced from the 'configurations' of concepts such race and ethnicity in pre–modern periods, see; Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004);

The necessity of examining each specific case in its own right is one of the most important points before commencing such a study of the history of concepts – which most nationalism theorists overlook this requirement in favor of creating massive grand theories. It is impossible to adopt a common mode of belonging (*gens* or *natio*), at least within the same periods, for all of Europe because of the clear political, social, and economic differences between various regions. This is the lesson the history of the Middle Ages has taught us. England and (partly) the Scandinavia stand out as distinct instances from the rest of Europe, and it was earlier than the rest of the continent that these political authorities began to view their subject as one due to a shared culture and geographic factors.[34] Germany, however, is a region where the dual pressure of the Church and the Empire, as well as the sense of belonging that results from this pressure, are intensely felt, and it has only been recently that the German principalities have shared a unified consciousness.[35] The point that this shows the significance of a centralized, unified political structure in the spread of a nation or other typical ethnolinguistic-cultural forms of belonging to large communities deserves careful emphasis. France, on the other hand, falls between between the English and German examples; it achieved political integrity earlier than the principalities, but unlike England, it had linguistic and religious factors that prevented a common sense of community.[36] Therefore, when locating the *gens* or *natio* in various medieval texts, it is important to consider the date of the text was written as well as the political situation of the relevant region at the time.

Based on all of these presumptions, it appears crucial to identify the etymological roots of the modes of belonging that existed before the modern age, as well as their relationships and, if applicable, any hierarchical positions. It may be possible to interpret the practices of the governments in imagining their subjects in a different and 'national' manner since the 19th century on a more rational basis if we are aware of which 'preferences' lie on the basis of the legitimate inclusiveness of the nation category in the modern period. The precise nuances of the terms *gens*, *natio*, and *populus* on the path to 'nation' in Europe must be determined in this manner for both nationalist studies and medieval historiography, provided that all distinctions are taken into account. The need for such a conceptual history study is demonstrated by the nation's prominence among the terminological ambiguity in the literature and its placement in a very different environment in the fifteenth century. Most crucially, however, no one has yet provided an explanation for why the *natio*—rather than the *gens*, survived and predominated into the twenty-first century without losing its legitimacy as the most significant form of political membership in the modern age. Given that the 'nation' category is a direct result of the social and cultural developments in Europe, it is essential that a study in this direction be geographically restricted to the European continent. According to chronology, Ancient Greece is the earliest time where certain notions (such *ethnos* or, in a sense, *barbaros*) that underlie *natio* and *gens* can be found. In light of this, it is intended to begin the study in Ancient Greece and continue it into the twelfht and thirteenth centuries.

In this study, any group will be compared to others largely using the concept of 'otherness' as an essential concept to understand a particular identity, regardless of age or historical period, and notably within the context of the methodology Lorenz calls 'codes of difference.'[37] It is evident that, despite seeming to be part of the essence, all kinds of otherness—which is the core of all forms of group belonging, such as ethnicity, nation, or race, should be understood as the direct consequence of a social construction activity. Comparing identity types with comparable content, such as *ethnos*, *gens*, *populus*, and *natio*, allows one to determine whether otherness served as the foundation for the mechanisms of

Geraldine Heng, "The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages I: Race Studies, Modernity, and the Middle Ages," *Literature Compass* 8, no: 5 (2018): 315–331.

[34] Seton–Watson, *Nations and States*, 6–10.

[35] Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 275–284.

[36] Medievalist Huizinga stated that both English and French nationalism 'to be in full flower' by the fourteenth century, see; Johan Huizinga, *Men and Ideas: History, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1959), 436.

[37] Chris Lorenz, "Representations of Identity: Ethnicity, Race, Class, Gender and Religion. An Introduction to Conceptual History," in *The Contested Nation. Ethnicity, Religion, Class and Gender in National Histories*, ed. Chris Lorenz and Stefan Berger (Houndsmill: Springer, 2008), 24.

political belonging throughout the period from Ancient Greece to Late Antiquity. It also emphasizes the transitivity and relations between these concepts. A historical analysis of the concepts that refer to ethnic identity within the Western political/literary canon can proceed when the fundamental forms of belonging on a specific foundation on the basis of 'different' and 'otherness' in the historical process. On this occasion, it is possible to clarify the context in which the current identities are relevant. When the background of *natio*, a term that came to be used frequently to describe student organizations at universities in Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, is revealed, it becomes clear that it is largely based on arbitrary choices and that it is usual to use the antecedent concepts interchangeably.

The concept of identity is *ipso facto* dependent on any 'other'. As long as there is an *ex negativo* other that is distinct from the group in question, the concept of identity as a collective identification of individuals exists. Any category of identification, in this sense, acquires meaning in relation to any difference that sets it apart from others. This otherness contributes to the 'boundary' by categories like ethnicity or nation, as Barth demonstrates in his ground-breaking work, and even while these limits are socially 'constructed' as a result of a particular cultural activity, they can be traced back to the group's distant past.[38] That is, the constitutive cultural system of the identity to which they are attached transforms othernesses as quite 'relational' objects into a 'essentialist' form. Any otherness that has been created throughout history to set one identity apart from another must therefore be examined in light of the unique conditions in which they were established.[39]

Identities are ideal classifications that are created depending on the spirit of the time they exist inside. This means that centers of otherness that restricted, fixed, and defined identity throughout Antiquity, Rome, and the Middle Ages assumed various forms and had different modus operandis. In spite of having similar connotations in their broadest terms, the categories of Greek *ethnos* (pl. *ethne*), Hebrew *goy* (pl. *goyim*), Latin *gens* (pl. *gentes*), and *natio* (pl. *nationis*) all establish their own unique otherness in accordance with the contexts to which they belong.[40] A view from today largely misses the distinctions between these concepts, and the ambiguous braiding of ideas like *gens* and *natio*, even within the same context, can occasionally be perplexing. The fact that all of these many concepts can be translated as 'nation' leads to a more complicated situation, especially when you take into account the term's present usage scope. For instance, Isidore of Seville explicitly refers to a category that Bede defines with the phrase '*nostrae nationis*'[41] when he uses the term '*de linguis gentium.*'[42] Isidore refers to ethnic groups like 'Hebrew, Greek, and Syrian' in the lines that follow by using the term *gentes*, despite the fact that both of these words can also be translated as 'race,' 'nation,' or even 'people.' As a result, we know that he means 'nation,' which is a more profound sort of belonging.

In this essay, rather than focusing on methods that can be applied in a typical historical study of concepts, the adopted theoretical approach will first be embodied, and the need for a poststructuralist theoretical foundation will be described. Given that all identity forms, whether modern or premodern, are inextricably linked to an ex negativo 'other', it is clear that choosing a common operating principle for each era and place enables the interpretation of related modes of belonging from the same angle. Due to this, it will be argued that one of the most significant elements in the imagination of identity is the mechanism of otherness, also known as the 'center of otherness,' which establishes distinctions at the discursive level and separates communities from one another. Following that, emphasis will be placed on attempts to categorize ethnic identity against the backdrop of the natio and gens in the Middle

[38] Fredrik Barth, "Introduction," in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, ed. Fredrik Barth (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 9–39.

[39] See Quentin Skinner, *Vision of Politics*, vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 84: "We cannot even hope that a sense of the context of utterance will necessarily resolve the difficulty, for the context itself may be ambiguous. Rather we shall have to study all the various contexts in which the words were used – all the functions they served, all the various things that could be done with them."

[40] Werner Sollors, "Ethnic Groups/Ethnicity: Historical Aspects," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, ed. Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes, vol. 10 (2001): 4814.

[41] Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, tr. J.E. King (London, LOEB Classical Library, 1962), 10.

[42] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, tr. S.A. Barney, W.J. Lewis, J.A. Beach and O. Berghof (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 9.1.1.

Ages. In ancient Greece and Rome, the semantic connections between terms like ethnos, populus, or barbaros appear to represent a crucial step on the way to 'nation.' These 'proto' ideas served as the foundation for the patterns the old barbarian communities adopted to create their own identities in the post-Roman era. In the end, nevertheless, some 'landmarks' are required to create a hierarchical relationship between the frequently arbitrary terms gens and natio used in medieval chronicles. Bede, Isidore of Seville, and Regino of Prüm will be highlighted as the primary medieval authors that can be used as a foundation for an effort in this direction in the last section of this study. When these three names are contrasted, it can be claimed that all three authors had a tendency to use subjective criteria for the groups they refer to as nation or gens in their writings. As a result, these names provide highly useful hints concerning an early meaning of 'nation.'

1. *Ethnos, Populus* and *Barbaros*

Being a *polis* member was explicitly related to political identity, or citizenship, in ancient Greece. The most obvious categories of official affiliations taken up by *police* citizens seem to be identities like Athenian or Spartan. The *polis* is much more than a political unit; it also contains religious, and thus sacred, content. For citizens who belong to a specific *polis*, this membership is the only evidence of 'being' in the Ancient Greek world.[43] Of course, this category of citizenship mainly applies to a relatively small portion of people, and as is commonly emphasized in studies of democracy, only a very small portion of *polis* members were able to exercise their democratic rights. On the other hand, the Ancient Greeks had more identities than the city-state citizenship, which was based on territory. From Herodotus to Aristotle, Greek authors described members of the *polis* using terms like *ethnos* and *gentos*, which are binding forms of belonging. The existence of 'ethnicity' or any ethnic identity in this period—but more importantly, the relationship between these identities and *polis* membership, is widely contested.[44]

Early Greek literature on the definition of the 'other', a person who is not a member of a Greek *polis*, is clear and precise. Without a doubt, the language aspect is crucial in this situation. Whether Athenian, Spartan, or Corinthian, any polis citizen of this cultural sphere is able to speak Greek. Thus, the ability to speak Greek emerges as a fundamental center of this world's otherness. The Greek word *barbaros* (βάρβαρος) describes people who live outside the polis and either do not speak Greek or, less commonly, do so in a dialect that is distinct from the standard Greek dialect.[45] Herodotus refers to the Persians,[46] Egyptians,[47] Scythians,[48] Lydians,[49] and even Pelasgians[50]—the pre-Hellenic inhabitants of Greek geography, as *barboros*. It goes without saying that using the term *barbaros* as a pejorative identity is actually the exact equivalent of 'foreign,' and establishing this broad definition of 'otherness' based solely on linguistic differences would be recognized as one of the key characteristics of the Western canon inherited from the Greeks. Thucydides often equates the term barbarian with mere stranger.[51] In Plato's *Republic*, the barbarian is a 'slave,' and there is an inherent difference between the 'Hellenic' and the other.[52] In *Politics*, Aristotle also asserts that slaves and barbarians have a common nature.[53]

[43] On the religious or sacred character of *polis*, see; Mogens Herman Hansen, *Polis: An Introduction to the Ancient Greek City–State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 118–122.

[44] F.W. Walbank, "The Problem of Greek Nationality," *Phoenix* 5, no: 2 (1951): 41–60.

[45] Erich Gruen, *Ethnicity in the Ancient World – Did it Matter?* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 11.

[46] Herodotus, *Books I-II*, tr. A.D. Godley (London: LOEB Classical Library, 1975),1.1, 1.4.

[47] Herodotus, *Books I-II*, 1.158.

[48] Herodotus, *Books I-II*, 1.167.

[49] Herodotus, *Books I-II*, 1.6.

[50] Herodotus, *Books I-II*, 1.57–58.

[51] Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, vol. 6, tr. C.F. Smith (London: LOEB Classical Library, 1959), 6.1.1, 6.6.1.

[52] Platon, *Republic, Books I–V*, tr. P. Shorey (London: LOEB Classical Library, 1937), 5.469b.

[53] Aristotle, *Politics*, tr. H. Rackham (London: LOEB Classical Library, 1959), 1252b.

Language is the only center of otherness between Greeks and non-Greeks. But within the boundaries of the constructed belonging, the barbarian identity means more than 'non-Greek speaking.' Language-based othering also serves to express culture, customs, habits, and a wide range of other differences.[54] More precisely, as Figueira states; 'cultural difference had long been ethnicized.'[55] The issue of ethnicity or ethnic identity was complex and often contentious in ancient Greece. In this era, *genos* (γένος) and *ethnos* (ἔθνος) appeared to be the only forms of ethnocultural identity. Herodotus uses the term *ethnos* to both refer to citizens of the *polis* ('Attic ethne')[56] and to describe communities larger than that. He lists the Arkadians, Kynourians, Achaians, Dorians, Aitolians, Dryopes, and Lemnians among the seven *ethnos* that he claims live in the Pelopennes, for instance.[57] Additionally, other people that are considered as barbarians, such the Libyans and the Ethiopians, are described as *ethne*.[58] Similar to *ethnos*, the term *genos* is used to describe a lower identification, often to a particular noble family or a community to which they are related by birth.[59] According to Hall, there is a hierarchical relationship between *ethnos* and *genos*: 'In one of the standard works of reference for Greek terminology, *ethnos* is defined as a 'nation', and *genos* as a tribal subdivision of an *ethnos*.'[60]

The distinction between *ethnos* and *genos* could be comparable to 'nation' and 'race.'[61] As a result, these ideas can be regarded as being connected to the notion of birthright community membership, which is referred to as *goyim* in both Hebrew tradition and Old Testament rhetoric. Rome's conception of identity is, however, much more complex than that. As Geary emphasizes, being a citizen of Rome (*populus*) is 'a subject of constitutional law.'[62] This indicates that the Roman category can be attained and is a 'open' identity which can also be related to ancestors or inherited. While *populus* embodies the idea of a single community composed of many *gentes*, it establishes the idea of official citizenship on a completely legal basis and fixes the center of otherness on this axis of legality. For the first time, with the universalization of a belonging, Roman identity, the difference between Roman and non-Roman acquires a considerably larger field of interpretation. Codes of difference, such as 'language' in Ancient Greece and 'religion' in the Hebrews, have more transitive borders in Rome. With the spread of Christianity in the Latin tradition, the term *populus*, which is the etymological origin of the English 'people' and the French 'peuple', obtains a religious meaning and is also used to describe groups of people ruled by a common law, as in *populus Christianus*.[63]

There remain ethnic or local identities in the Roman world even though Roman identity does not fit into an ethnic categorization. First of all, there are two aspects to Roman identity: 'On the one hand, Roman citizenship, and, on the other, local, that is, *municipal* citizenship.'[64] In a sense, the *municipal* membership, based on a *civitas*, appears as a subunit of the upper Roman identity, the *populus*, and expresses the *patria* of the individual as a very local geographic unit. In his *De Legibus*, Cicero states:

"Indeed, I believe that both Cato and all those who come from the towns (T.N. *municipibus*) have two fatherlands (T.N. *patrias*), one by nature (T.N. *naturae*), the other by citizenship (T.N. *civitatis*).

[54] T. Harrison, "Herodotus' Conception of Foreign Languages", *Histos* 2, no: 1 (1998): 1–2.

[55] Thomas Figueira, "Language as a Marker of Ethnicity in Herodotus and Contemporaries," in *Ethnicity and Identity in Herodotus*, ed. Thomas Figueira and Carmen Soares (New York: Routledge, 2020), 55.

[56] Herodotus, *Books I-II*, 1.57.3.

[57] Herodotus, *Books VIII-IX*, 8.73.12.

[58] Herodotus, *Books III-IV*, 4.197.

[59] P.G.W. Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 834.

[60] Jonathan M. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 35.

[61] While Jones and Gruen approve this approach, Geary argues that *ethnos* and *genos* can be translated as 'people' and 'tribe,' respectively. See; C.P. Jones, "θνος and γνος in Herodotus," *The Classical Quarterly* 46, no: 2 (1996): 317; Erich Gruen, "Did Ancient Identity Depend on Ethnicity? A Preliminary Probe," *Phoenix* 67, no: 1/2 (2013): 1; Geary, *Myth of Nations*, 43–44.

[62] Geary, *Myth of Nations*, 50.

[63] Bouchard and Bogdan, "From Barbarian Other to Chosen People", 8. For the contribution of Augustine and Jerome to this conceptualization, see; Jeremy duQuesnay Adams, *The Populus of Augustine and Jerome: A Study in the Patristic Sense of Community* (New York: Yale University Press, 1971), 61–68.

[64] Mathisen, "Natio, Gens, Provincialis and Civis," 277.

Cato was born at Tusculum but was given Roman citizenship, and so he was Tusculan by origin, Roman by citizenship (T.N. *populi Romani*), and had one fatherland by place of birth, the other by law."[65]

Municipal identity refers to the place of birth for a Roman (even if he or she does not live there), and as such, it is a status indicator before its political or cultural meanings.[66] These local forms of affiliation do not preclude the concept of legal citizenship from an administrative and political perspective until the Roman political power begins to weaken, making them a subunit of the *populus*. The Roman definition of 'other' identities, which is based on highly stable stereotypes and fairly rigid norms, continues to place a strong emphasis on ethnic affiliation. The Latin word barbarian, which originated in Greek, is used to denote the non-Roman counterpart who serves the same purpose.[67] Greek historian Polybius (B.C. 120) states that the non-Greek speaker is the counterpart of the barbarian other, demonstrating that this center of otherness persisted even in early Roman history.[68] Sicilian historian from fourth century Diodorus (B.C. 30) is one of the few Romans who did not classify barbarians in a stereotypical manner. In Diodorus, there are ferocious, savage, and cruel barbarians, such as the Carthaginians[69] and Thracians.[70] On the other hand, there are civilized barbarians like the Corsican natives known as Cyrnus who are respected for their dignified way of life.[71] When portraying the Britons in *Agricola* and the communities east of the Rhine in *Germania*, Tacitus (A.D. 120), the sole adherent of Herodotus's well-behaved (relatively) impartial understanding of the 'other', significantly relaxes these rigid boundaries.[72] Despite Tacitus' continued view that barbarians are inferior because they are not subject to Roman law, they nonetheless possess some admirable qualities. In fact, rather than highlighting their barbarian attributes, the two works by Tacitus containing ethnographic content emphasize that the people in these areas are *gens*. The Roman identity (and barbarism as its constant other) gradually became a matter of 'procedure' in the late Roman world as the forms of belonging began to develop more complex. Beginning in the third century AD, cultural and ethnic identities were based on geographic divisions; through time, these local affiliations grew stronger in contrast to the Roman identity. These periods when the Roman political hegemony was under threat are almost exactly when *gens* and *natio* are used with a political connotation.

2. *Gens* and *Natio*

Both *gens* and *natio* in Latin clearly refer to a broad term for 'people' and to a grouping of individuals who have 'blood ties' altogether.[73] The Oxford Latin Dictionary lists 'nationality, race, nation' as the equivalents of the word *genus*.[74] The first meaning of the word *natio*, which derives from the Latin *nascor-* (to be born), is 'the birth of a child,' and the Roman goddess *Natio* is just one of the numerous goddesses linked with birth.[75] People born in the same geography and thus within its predominate cultural patterns are referred to as *natio*, a term related to birth. Belief in 'sharing the same blood ties' or being 'born in the same place' implies sharing a common—and local cultural system, language, traditions, and customs. As a result, the definition of nation, which is a concept entirely related to 'birth,' evolves over time.

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[65] Cicero, *De Republica, De Legibus*, tr. J.G.F. Powell (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2.5.

[66] Regarding the significance of one's birthplace and *municipal* identity, particularly in terms of language or dialect, see; John Percy Vyvian Dacre Balsdon, *Romans and Aliens* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 121.

[67] Patrick Geary, "Barbarians and Ethnicity," in *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*, ed. G.W. Bowersock, Peter Brown and Oleg Grabar (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 5.33.5–6.

[68] Polybius, *The Histories*, Books 5–8, tr. G.W. Paton (London: LOEB Classical Library, 1979). Technically, this means that the Roman identity that Polybius admired and belonged to is also considered to be barbarian. See on this; Gruen, *Ethnicity in the Ancient World*, 18–19.

[69] Diodorus of Sicily, *Books XII–XIII*, tr. C.H. Oldfather (London: LOEB Classical Library, 1950), 13.57.5–6.

[70] Diodorus of Sicily, *Books XII–XIII*, 21.12.6.

[71] Diodorus of Sicily, *Books XII–XIII*, 5.14.1.

[72] Geary, *Myth of Nations*, 50–52.

[73] Mathisen, "Natio, Gens, Provincialis and Civis," 279.

[74] Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 835.

[75] Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, tr. H. Rackham (London: LOEB Classical Library, 1967), 3.47.

There is no exact Latin counterpart for the hierarchical relationship between *ethnos* and *genos* in Greek. Roman authors often had a tendency to ignore the relationship of hierarchy between *gens* and *natio*. Latin grammarian Festus (AD 167) asserts that the definition of *natio* is "a race of men (*genus hominum*) who... were born in that place."[76] While it is true that the *natio* began to resemble its current inclusive form during the time of Festus, there are also other instances in earlier literature where this hierarchy is entirely turned around. For instance, *natio* and *gens*, two words that are employed interchangeably in Tacitus, hardly differ from each other.[77] Writing in the second century BC, the Greek historian Polybius favors the term Greek *ethnos* to *natio* and did not employ the terms *gens* (or *genos*) or *ethnos* to indicate an ethnic affiliation, as Gruen states.[78] The statement "the most warlike *gene* (γένη) of the Western *ethnon* (ἐθνῶν) of Europe" in Polybius' work demonstrates that the author considers *gens* to be a subdivision of *ethne*.[79] The Greek historian Appianus (AD 165), a Roman citizen with Egyptian descent, similarly uses *genos* and *ethnos* interchangeably.[80] In his *Naturalis Historia*, Gaius Plinus Secundus (AD 79), also known as Pliny the Elder, uses the word *natio* to refer to the origin of a someone or—even stranger, something. Pliny refers to the wax produced in Pontus as *Natione Pontica* while describing the locations where wax is produced.[81]

Susan Raynolds can now be stressed in particular. Reynolds, a well-known authority in medieval historiography, proposes to use a new concept, *regnal*, to clear up any ambiguity regarding *gens* or *natio* and to address the problem of belonging in the Middle Ages.[82] According to Reynolds, who argues that nationalisms—if not nations, existed during the Middle Ages, modern nationalisms are akin to how the kingdoms centered around *regna*, or particular customs and local ways of life, imagined their own communities. Taking into account the factor of belief in the imagination of communities and emphasizing that the concept that modern nations have a genealogy going back at least to the Middle Ages is a natural outcome of nationalism is what distinguishes Reynolds from others, not only from Medieval historians but also from nationalism theorists. While proposing to refer to the members of a monarchy in the Middle Ages as *regnal*, Reynolds claims that, like modern nations, they were first 'imagined.' She added, however, that it is a fairly new tradition for these to be founded on the same racial, linguistic, or religious origin. Reynolds says that neither *gens*, which is incorrectly used to replace 'race', nor *populus*, which is more closely associated with the notion of legal citizenship, can be used as a substitute for 'nation'.

Reynolds' terminology focuses more on what should be than on what really is. In fact, the term *regnal* seems to be a perfect fit for describing existent communities from late antiquity to the sixteenth century, a time when completely centralized rulers needed to envisage their citizens in a different way.[83] The use of *natio* and *gens*, however, still must be validated according to historical primary sources. Each barbarian *gens* tries to make its 'ethnic specificity' visible at the end of the historical process in which Rome was able to eliminate all differences with a legal super-identity.[84] As Pohl has clearly demonstrated,[85] communities that had to distinguish their identities from those of their neighbors in the ruins of the Roman empire tended to construct distinctive forms of belonging by merging the myths of their own origins (and migration backgrounds) with a Christian façade. These origin myths, called as *origo gents*, serve to both highlight the constructible nature of ethnic identity in the Middle Ages and to

[76] Sextus Pompeius Festus, *De Verborvm Significatv Qyaesvpersvnt Cvm Pavli Epitome*, ed. W.M. Lindsay (Stuttgart: B.G. Teubner, 1997), 165.

[77] Geary, *Myth of Nations*, 51.

[78] Gruen, *Ethnicity in the Ancient World*, 69.

[79] Polybius, *Histories*, 1.2.6. Gruen rightly criticizes Paton, the translator of the LOEB edition, for mistranslating this statement as "the most warlike nations of western Europe" by ignoring the terms *gene* and *ethne*.

[80] Appian, *Roman History*, vol. I, tr. H. White (London: LOEB Classical Library, 1972), 3.5.

[81] Plinus, *Natural History*, vol. VI, tr. W.H.S. Jones (London: LOEB Classical Library, 1961), 21.84.

[82] Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities*, 251–256; and Susan Reynolds, "The Idea of the Nation as a Political Community", *Power and the Nation in European History*, ed. Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer (New York: Cambridge University, 2005), 56.

[83] For a thought–provoking study of Norwegian identity on this perspective, see; Erik Opsahl, "Norwegian Identity in the Late Middle Ages, Regnal or National?," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 51, no: 1 (2017): 449–460.

[84] Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200–1000* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 104.

[85] Walter Pohl, "Ethnonyms and Early Medieval Ethnicity," *The Hungarian Historical Review* 7, no: 1 (2018): 12.

serve as a reminder of how important an identity the *gens* was at that time. As a result, the need to employ *gens* and its synonym *nation*, which is occasionally used as a subset or superset, is raised once more.

3. Establishing the Center of Otherness

Names that approach the issue more thoroughly and partially more 'empirically' than their contemporaries, or 'landmarks', are required in order to attempt to interpret the ethnic identities in the Middle Ages around certain centers of otherness. Such an attempt at entrenchment can be based on the works of Bede (AD 735) for England, Regino of Prüm (AD 915) for central Europe, and Isidore of Seville (AD 636) for Spain. The focus of this final section of the study will be on which centers of otherness the *gens* or *natio* usages of the above nouns have been accepted, but more crucially, the extent to which other contemporary writers have included these usages will be examined.

3.1. Regino of Prüm

In the unstable environment that shook Europe in the late Carolingian period, Regino of Prüm, a notable Benedictine monk from the ninth century and the writer of a very well-known chronicle, offers highly crucial information on the establishment of communal identities.[86] Regino asserts that 'the various nations of people' (*diversae nations populorum*) differ from each other in basis of four criteria, in a passage from his *Chronicon*, which he wrote around 900.[87] These criteria are descent (*genere*), customs (*moribus*), language (*lingua*) and law (*legibus*). Regino, above all, adopts Augustine's conception of identity, interpreting *populus* as a supra-Christian belonging and defining *natio*—rather than *gens*, as a subcategory of this inclusive identity. The concept of *gens*, or community based on pure blood ties, has been pushed to the background by this categorisation, and the actual counterpart of ethnic groups in Regino is *natio*. By the tenth century, ethnic identity in medieval Europe was of a cultural (ergo constructible) rather than a biological or racial basis, according to Regino's definition. All criteria are 'malleable' or 'earnable' variables, with the exception of 'descent' (*genere*). According to Bartlett, 'new languages can be mastered, new legal regimes can be adopted, and new customs can be learned.'[88] As Geary emphasizes, the idea of *genere* or origin is clearly related with *gens*, but it can also refer to a 'geographical (local) origin' or 'even the common origins of people.'[89] Regino's second criterion, *mores*, or customs, has a very broad definition and essentially refers to all types of societal norms, personal preferences, and modus operandi. Traditions or customs are at least as significant and determining for a group termed the *natio*, which is supposed to have an ethnically based structure. It is apparent that the post-Roman era clothing preferences, habits, or *habitus* (tendency) unique to the community or the monarchs at the head of this community play a significant role in expressing identity. Former barbarian tribes placed a high value on these cultural expression patterns when structuring their own belongings.

Language (*lingua*) is unquestionably the most important factor that Regino's 'the various nations of people' differ from each other. For the medieval intellectual, it was a fairly evident premise that all human tribes on earth were 'different' since they had to speak different languages after Babylon.[90] Language was a major factor in the Middle Ages, as evidenced by the term '*gentem lingua facit*' (language makes race), which was coined by the Marseille rhetorician Claudius Marius Victorius in the fifth century. More significantly, however, human groups had distinct ethnic identities because they spoke various languages, not vice versa. The fact that the dialects largely separated from Latin strengthened a sense of belonging among the communities that spoke them can be linked to the intensive period of 'ethnic and national consciousness' that revealed itself in central Europe in the mid-thirteenth

[86] On Regino's biography, see; Simon MacLean, *History and Politics in Late Carolingian and Ottonian Europe The Chronicle of Regino of Prüm and Adalbert of Magdeburg* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 1–8.

[87] Regino of Prüm, *Chronicon*, ed. F. Kurze (Hannover: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1890), Preface, XX.

[88] Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, 197.

[89] Geary, "Ethnic Identity," 19.

[90] Benjamin Braude, "The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no: 1 (1997): 103–142. The assumption that all humans only speak one language is a natural continuation of this idea. See; Umberto Eco, *The Search fort the Perfect Language* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997).

century.[91] Regino's final criterion, law (*legibus*), clearly shows the significance of the Roman past of communities and being a member of *populus*, in medieval Europe. This superior affinity provided legal inclusion rather than ethnic participation, and this concept was exploited over time to support more restricted, local ethnic identities. When Kisch claims that the feeling of ethnic identity in the Middle Ages was strongly tied to the 'law,' that is, to the way the political power envisioned its own subjects, refers to this tendency.[92]

Bartlett's assertion that 'medieval ethnicity was a social construct rather than a biological datum' is confirmed by Regino's standards.[93] Other medieval texts also make use of these four key factors that make up the definition or distinction of an ethnic group; although this is definitely *natio* according to Regino, *gens* is nevertheless seen in some passages up until the end of the 9th century. For instance, as Geary highlights, the Diet of Verona of 983 proposed criteria for identifying an ethnic community that were quite similar to Regino's.[94] It is stated that the primary features that distinguish diverse communities, including 'Saxons, Suevs, Lotharingians, Bavarians and Italians,' from one another are 'birth, language and customs.'

3.2. Isidore of Seville

Isidore of Seville, a very important figure of the seventh century, emphasizes *gens* and *natio* as well as many other crucial notions in his encyclopedic *Etymologiae*, providing the opportunity to see the foundations upon which post-Roman ethnic belongings formed and flourished. In Isidore, *gens* and *natio* do not appear to be in any clear opposition. Although there is a distinct difference between Christian nations and pagan ones, just as other names from the time dealing with this subject such Augustine and Jerome, it can be observed that both Christian communities and pagans are sometimes called *gens* and sometimes *natio*.[95] As a result, it is initially thought that Isidore is not a suitable name to set up a landmark between these two affiliations. The ninth book of his *Etymologiae*, however, titled 'Languages (*Linguis*), Nations (*Gentibus*), Reigns (*Regnis*) , the Military (*Militia*), Citizens (*Civibus*), Family Relationships (*Affinitatibus*),' fixes identity by connecting ethnic belonging to certain criteria, whether it is called *gens* or *natio*—just like Regino.

Isidore believes that speaking a certain language is the most obvious indication of belonging to a particular *gens*. It actually deals directly with the issue of the origins and identities of human communities that have spread over the world thanks to language. This is due to the fact that 'nations arose from languages, and not languages from nations.'[96] Isidore claimed that after the Flood, languages might become more diverse. He said that 'at the outset,' which means 'immediately after the division of Babel,' there were 'as many languages as there were nations (*gens*).'[97] On the other hand, exactly as it is in Regino, the act of speaking a language is not considered a factor connected to origin or family ties in Isidore: 'Every human is able to pick up any human languages – whether Greek, or Latin, or that of any other nation – by hearing it, or to learn it by reading with a tutor.'[98]

For Isidore, a *gens* must share the same 'origin' in addition to speaking the same language: 'A nation (*gens*) is a number of people sharing a single origin, or distinguished from another nation (*natio*) in accordance with its own groupings, as the 'nations' of Greece or of Asia Minor.'[99] The Bible's account in Genesis 10 of how human groups are derived from Noah's three sons once more illustrates the idea of a common ancestry, and Isidore's concept of 'congenital descent' does not work to establish an

[91] Peter Hoppenbrouwers, "Ethnogenesis and the Construction of Nationhood in Medieval Europe," *The Medieval History Journal* 9, no: 1 (2006): 199.
[92] Guido Kisch, "Nationalism and Race in Medieval Law," *Seminar* 1, no: 1 (1943): 48.
[93] Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, 197.
[94] Geary, "Ethnic Identity," 19–21.
[95] Raul Gonzalez Salinero, "Confronting the Other: Isidore of Seville on Pagans, Romans, Barbarians, Heretics, and Jews," in *A Companion to Isidore of Seville*, ed. Andrew Fear and Jamie Wood (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 359–360.
[96] Isidore of Seville, *Etym.*, 9.1.14.
[97] Isidore of Seville, *Etym.* 9.1.1.
[98] Isidore of Seville, *Etym.* 9.1.9.
[99] Isidore of Seville, *Etym.* 9.2.1.

interethnic hierarchy. Isidore rejects the notion that there are 'innate disparities' between 'races' or '*gentes*,' as evidenced by his propensity to describe his opinions on Jews in Spain,[100] the Gots,[101] and other 'barbarian' communities in favorable terms. A constant theme in Isidore is the appropriation and defense of Hispania's Visigoth past, with all of its inherently pagan religious and cultural traditions.[102] The Visigoths are portrayed as the true heirs of Rome, as opposed to barbarian communities like the Franks, Huns, Persians, or Basques.

The most obvious criteria that distinguish one *gens* apart from the others are language and origin, but it seems clear that Isidore used at least two more factors to categorize the different human communities. Customs are the first of these distinctive indications. Isidore claims that Gipedes (also known as Gepids in Eastern Europe) were 'used to go war on foot (pedester) rather than on horseback' and this is where the term Gipedes originated.[103] Such etymological explanations not only take up a significant amount of place in the *Etymologiae* but also demonstrate how different the various *gens* are from one another due to their unique customs: 'The Longobards are commonly said to have been named for their beards (*barba*).'[104] Isidore asserts that having a political organization, or *regnum*, is one of the requirements for being considered a *gens*: 'A reign (*regnum*) is so named from a king (*rex*), for as kings are so called from governing (*regere*).'[105] Every *gens* has a political organization in its past, even if it is not in the current situation, Isidore claims in the phrase 'every nation has had its own rule in its own periods,' and thereby, it separates itself from other communities.[106]

3.3. Bede

Notably, Regino, who lived over three centuries after Isidore, defined the terms *gens* and *natio* using very similar standards. But more significantly, for Regino and Isidore, ethnic identity is an acquired pattern of belonging rather than a set of innate traits. Regino adopts a historical position focused on the French, whilst Isidore adopts one focused on the Visigoths. This makes 'origin,' 'language,' 'custom,' and 'law'—or 'reign,' appear as the main centers of ethnic belonging's otherness, for both. In contrast to Regino and Isidore, British historian and theologian Bede, who is chronologically in the middle of these two names, uses a different discourse of otherness. Bede constructs the 'theoretical field' that would allow the English nation to emerge in *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (*Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*), which was written in 731 AD. As Davies notes, this construction effort advances the idea that Englishness is a chosen people and presents it as a sort of 'new Israel.'[107] This idea of 'being selected' demonstrates how religious affiliation shines out as a key center of otherness in Bede.

Beginning with Caesar's invasion of England in 55 BC, *Historia* focuses on the geographical and historical characteristics of the kingdoms in the area and relates the story of the Christianity's arrival in England. Bede dedicates his book to Ceolwulf, king of Northumbria, and makes it apparent that he hopes to persuade him to support the notion of a unified English monarchy with Christianity.[108] For a single British identity project he has constructed, Bede prefers the *gens* over the *natio*. The book's full title is '*Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*,' not *nationis Anglorum*. However, the term *gens*, which denotes Englishness and can be regarded as belonging to a superior affiliation, is also used to refer to the European-origin Angles, Justes, and Saxons,[109] as well as the German and Gaul communities on the

[100] Wolfram Drews, *The Unknown Neighbour: The Jew in the Thought of Isidore of Seville* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 137–145.
[101] Isidore of Seville, *Etym.* 9.2.89.
[102] Salinero, "Confronting the Other," 367.
[103] Isidore of Seville, *Etym.* 9.2.92.
[104] Isidore of Seville, *Etym.* 9.2.95.
[105] Isidore of Seville, *Etym.* 9.3.1.
[106] Isidore of Seville, *Etym.* 9.3.2.
[107] Davies, "Nations and National Identities," 574.
[108] Bede, *Historia*, Preface p. 2.
[109] Bede, *Historia* 1.22.100–101. The words '*tribus*' and '*populi*' are also occasionally used by Bede to refer to these communities, see; 1.15.70.71. Both concepts are translated as "nation" in the LOEB edition.

mainland.[110] The upper English identity, however, is sometimes referred to be a nation by Bede: 'I earnestly pray all men unto whom this same History of our nation (*nationis*) shall come.'[111] However, people who lived on the island in the past but were neither Christians nor Anglo-Saxon—such Picts, Scots, or Britons, are frequently referred to as '*natio.*'[112] In summary, Bede does not utilize *gens* and *natio* in a hierarchical order and these two terms are frequently and quite arbitrarily used interchangeably. Bede's book is the first uncluttered work to attempt to interpret the various communities on the British Isle with Latin forms of belonging and terminology containing these forms (*gens*, *natio*, *provincia*) and eventually, Bede's primary goal was to give the politically fragmented region a Christian English ethnic identity. The identification of centers of otherness that distinguish what is English from what is not is a natural outcome of this fixation, defining, and hence 'inventing' activity. Religion is without a doubt the code of difference in Bede that stands out the most. For Bede, who refers to Pope Gregory as 'he made our nation (*nostram gentem*) a Church of Christ,'[113] being English means being a Christian first and foremost. Furthermore, as Kumar notes, this Christianity is a Latin Catholic tradition that will be dependent on a single source based in Centerbury, and there is a desire to count this center as the only religious authority instead of other Christian interpretations in Britain.[114]

Indicators like language, customs, or laws that Regino or Isidore used to categorize *gentes* are not found in Bede as deciding factors. He places a high value on language, and despite the fact that he speaks a Northumbrian dialect, his influence on the development of written English is indisputable.[115] However, when looking at the '*gens Anglorum*,' there are 'five sundry languages equal to the number of the books in which the Divine Law had been written': The languages of the English, the Britons, the Scots, the Redshanks, and the Latin.[116] Furthermore, the crucial 'origin' topic in Regino and Isidore does not completely define Englishness. Angles, Justes and Saxons beyond the former British people (Brittons, Picts, Scots), dont reference a single or superior English identity. While Englishness is portrayed as a pattern of belonging above all of these origins, languages, laws, or sub-identities applied by various *regnum*s, Bede undoubtedly places religion at the center of this identity formation.[117]

Breuilly argues that Bede uses the term 'English' to designate a community that is bound together by political ties, but more crucially, by Christian faith, rather than an ethnic or linguistic group.[118] Breuilly, a devout adherent of modernist theories, draws his inspiration from a small elite for his portrayal of pre-modern British identity. At the beginning of the names that are in Breuilly's place's opposite, Adrian Hastings appears. Hastings considers England as the 'prototype' of national statehood and the practice of a political entity with a nation.[119] He takes Bede's *Historia* as unequivocal evidence that the three Germanic populations (Saxons, Angles, and Jutes) who immigrated to England were united under the English name by the eighth century.

CONCLUSION

It is not possible to clearly distinguish between *gens* and *natio* nor can a hierarchical relationship be established that would put the two in a systematic use, according to a review of pre-modern patterns of belonging in the Middle Ages. The history of how *populus* became 'people' is obviously more simpler; the concept of 'legal citizenship,' which developed around a single law independent of all racial, linguistic, sociocultural, or other distinctions, has largely persisted from Rome to the present. However, it is required to go back to the thirteenth century and beyond—even though it goes beyond

[110] Bede, *Historia* 1.2.22–23.

[111] Bede, *Historia*, Preface p. 10.

[112] Bede, *Historia*, 1.1.17.

[113] Bede, *Historia*, 2.1.184.

[114] Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 41.

[115] Michelle P. Brown, 'Bede's Life in Context', in *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 10.

[116] Bede, *Historia*, 1.1.16.

[117] At this point, Kumar is quite right, stating that Bede's "concerns were more theological rather than sociological or historical". See; Kumar, *English National Identity*, 46–47.

[118] Breuilly, "Changes in the Political Uses of the Nation," 19.

[119] Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood*, 35.

the scope of this study, in order to explain the prominence of *natio* rather than *gens*. The 'nation' must have preceded the *gens* due to at least two factors at this time.

The first is the '*nationes*,' or student unions, which date back to the thirteenth century and are found in Europe's top universities like Bologna and Paris. In medieval universities, nation groups were used to describe groups of students or lecturers who were native to a certain area and hence frequently spoke the same language.[120] Based on this precedent, it can be observed that the distinction between 'blood ties' and 'birth,' which is completely exposed in this study, is one of the most obvious disparities between *gens* and *natio*. One of the original nation groups at the University of Bologna, '*Ultramontani*,' was primarily composed of German students, while the Oxford groups '*Boreales*' and '*Australes*' were formed up of non-British students.[121] These organizations helped people maintain their 'local' identity in a foreign setting while also fostering a sense of community among students who had a common place of birth. Compared to *gentes*, which was more closely tied to kinship and shared common blood ties, this identity was more inclusive and 'adoptable.' The 'nation' is used in this context in medieval universities, indicating that the concept's political connotation, which will become more apparent in later centuries, is already present on a smaller scale.

The 'nation-state' paradigm is connected to the second factor. The Thirty Years' War in Europe came to a conclusion with the Peace Treaties of Westphalia, which opened the door for the creation of a new kind of state. The concept of territoriality was pushed to the fore in the post-feudal period by the new political machinery known as the 'nation-state,' which consolidated as of the seventeenth century. This cleared the way for people who were born in the same geography to be viewed as a new sort of subject.[122] The following section of the narrative is directly related to nationalism and deals with the imagination - and also 'construction' - of this new type of subject. To be honest, it seems highly provocative to ask why 'nation-state' is preferred over '*gens*-state.' This tendency might be connected to the idea that a 'nation' is more closely tied to people who were born in the same place and adopted similar cultural norms than to those who are related through blood ties.

Overall, this study allows us to draw a number of extremely significant conclusions concerning the composition and present-day attributes of 'nation' as a contemporary identity category. First of all, since Ancient Greece, ethnic identity categories have evolved alongside legal identity types. Being a part of the *polis* does not exempt one from having to adhere to a *ethnos*, and *populus* is a higher type of identification that is influenced by several *gens* or *natio*. The current interpretation of this statement is that legal citizenship exists as a uniting force over various sub-ethnic identities, which has a specific terminological significance. The modern nation-state, that makes the nation the only unit of political belonging, has had to confront this reality on numerous occasions. It is not an attempt to be constrained by unchanging laws, at least historically, to place a *gens* below a *natio*. This terminological ambiguity is not resolved by including terms like 'ethnicity' or 'race,' which are primarily used to express minority communities, under the term 'nation.' As can be seen, *ethnos* is only a term that is immediately related to *gens* and *natio*.

Second, from Ancient Greece to the present, forms of belonging have consistently operated on the assumption that 'every identity has an *ex negativo* other.' The Greeks and Romans - maybe because they were more outspoken—characterized 'other' with the word 'barbarian,' meaning obviously different from themselves, foreign. This naming practice has changed in the Middle Ages. Every 'barbarian' now qualifies as a *gens* in its own right, and the concept of absolute otherness becomes more egalitarian. The idea of ultimate otherness has remained the heart of national identity from the Greek to the modern era, despite the community, which is the nation's other, still symbolically correlating to the 'barbarian.' One

[120] Paul W. Knoll, "*Nationes* and Other Bonding Groups at Late Medieval Central European Universities," in *Mobs: An Interdisciplinary Inquiry*, ed. Nancy van Deusen and Leonard Michael Koff (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 95. For one of the most well–known works of literature on this subject, see; Pearl Kibre, *The Nations in the Medieval Universities* (Massachusetts: Medieval Academy of America, 1948).

[121] Knoll, "*Nationes*," 95–96.

[122] Benno Teschke, *The Myth of 1648: Class, Geopolotics and Making of Modern International Relations* (London: Verso, 2003), 19–23.

of the crucial issues in this case is that the notion that nations are 'different' from one another because 'they speak a different language' maintains its position in the theory of identity and that the most obvious 'center of otherness' of the language is still valid. Additionally, one of the trends carried over from the modern era is the practice of exploiting language diversity to legitimize ethnic difference. The idea that 'language' in a broader sense corresponds to a common cultural grammar may help to support the idea that 'barbarian' communities with distinct languages actually correspond to nations with various cultural structures or legal systems.

Consequently, the adage '*gentem lingua facit*' (language makes races) undermines the determination of a common ancestry by placing *lingua*, not *gentes*, at the outset. The fact that the distinctions between human groups are not fundamental but rather have configurable cultural characteristics is one of the clearest examples of this. Most of the requirements given for belonging to a *gens* or *natio*, as shown in the clearest form in Isidore of Seville and Regino of Prüm, are not essential but obtainable. Unquestionably, the most crucial and historically persistent of these factors is language. To be clear, though, it is the languages that make the diverse communities unique rather than the other way around. Much of what has been said thus far supports modernist nationalism theorists' claims. On the other hand, this does not imply that 'ethnicity'—or 'race' as the more 'scary' version of the word, as defined as the notion that individuals who share the same language and culture are of a common 'blood'—had no significance for medieval society. Beyond these practical or rational realities, it is fairly normal for people who share the same language and cultural sign system to believe that they have a common, often always profoundly 'sacred' lineage. This belief is in fact one of the key elements supporting the legitimacy or 'mystery' of the nation.

In addition to all of these conclusions, it should be noted that up to the end of the Middle Ages, all types of ethnically based division to which *gens* or *natio* corresponds reported a cultural difference rather than a political one. Within the bounds of the *polis* or *populus*, members of feudal *regnum*s or legal citizenship categories are currently classified using criteria that are nearly never based on linguistic or cultural characteristics. This notion—that people from the same culture should coexist in the same political system, or nation-state, reflects a very contemporary and nationalist vision. It is true that the concept of 'birth' and the idea of an identity based on this issue have their roots in the Middle Ages when we look at the 'etymological rules of the game' that underlay 'nation' and consequently 'nation-state'. As is commonly noted, the *modus operandi* of the modern nation principle has unquestionably been strongly influenced by the grouping of university groups under the category of 'nation' according to the principles of 'language' and 'birth.' However, there is no pre-modern equivalent to the imagination of a political unit that is a part of a *natio*, which is totally constructed with its distinctive qualities.

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