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The Nation in Antiquity: Unification, Civil War, and National Liberation in Ancient Kemet

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Abstract

This article supports the tendency among Egyptologists to classify ancient Kemet as a nation. In so doing, it challenges the modernist and postmodernist assertion that the nation first emerged in the West during the 18th and 19th centuries. It conceptualizes the nation in two ways: as the coincidence of common ethnicity and clearly defined territory—the nation-state; and more simply, as an entity that claims the right to control a state. Kemet's war of national liberation—the expulsion of the Hyksos during the Second Intermediate Period—illustrates the former conceptualization of the nation. However, the common ethnic identity that had been nurtured since unification was not a major factor in the civil war during the First Intermediate Period. Consequently, this quest for reunification is an example of the nation as a political movement.

Keywords

nation, ancient Kemet, ethnicity, nation-state, Intermediate Period

The Modern Nation

Modernism, the dominant school of thought among students of nationalism, sees the nation as the result of some combination of the spread of capitalism,

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literacy, and notions of citizenship derived from the ideology of the French Revolution. According to scholars in this school of thought, the nation is the product of industrialization, urbanization, secularism, and the bureaucratic state. Although modernists stress different factors—economic, political, or social/cultural—all of their analyses see the origin of nations and nationalism in the West (Anderson, 1991; Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1990; Nairn, 1981). Moreover, even though postmodernists claim to critique modernism, they ultimately see the nation as only possible within the discourse of nationalism; this discourse is also conceived as an essentially modern, European, phenomenon (Bhabha, 1990; Ozkirmili, 2010). However, despite these modernist assertions, as a student of world history, I was struck by the fact that Egyptologists have consistently characterized ancient Kemet as a nation (Redford, 1992; Van Seters, 1966). This view of ancient Kemet is most clearly articulated by Toby Wilkinson (2013) in *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt*. While many Egyptologists make a distinction between the polities that emerged in Sumer, city-states, and Kemet, nations, Wilkinson goes further by providing a concrete definition of the nation-state:

> The concept of the nation-state—*political territory whose population shares a common identity*—was the invention of the ancient Egyptians. Beginning with Narmer, the early kings found themselves rulers of an entirely new form of polity, one bound together as much by governmental structures as by shared values. The creation of a distinctive sense of Egyptianess ranks as one of the greatest achievements of Egypt's early rulers. (Wilkinson, 2013, p. 25, emphasis added)

Clearly for Wilkinson, territory and cultural identity must coincide to form the nation-state. However, throughout the book, he also uses nation as a synonym for this ethnically homogeneous, territorially defined entity. He is not alone. There are modernist students of nationalism who, like Wilkinson, use the term *nation* as a synonym for the nation-state, where territory and ethnicity coincide, though again, they usually stress its emergence in the modern era of Western hegemony (Connor, 1994). However, there are those who take issue with mandating the intersection of territory and ethnicity in defining the nation—those who offer a broader conceptualization of the nation, applying it to *any group, no matter how ethnically diverse, that claims the right to independent statehood or territorial autonomy; where "right" refers to the power or privilege to which one is justly entitled.* We need but look at many of the multiethnic African nations that strove for independence from colonial rule in the post–World War II period to see the validity of this approach. This broader conceptualization of the nation, though political in its orientation, obviously still recognizes the possibility of coincidence of ethnicity and

territory, but focuses on the desire to consolidate state power. In so doing, it is flexible enough to allow for specific historical analyses of the factors that contributed to making this desire for sovereignty and/or autonomy important. Furthermore, if common ethnicity and/or culture are among these factors, the two approaches clearly coincide. The successful nation, defined as a group that claims the right to control a state, may ultimately become the independent nation-state (King, 2014).

In this article, I contend that the civil war, during the First Intermediate Period (2190-2061) in ancient Kemet, was a period of considerable ethnic homogeneity—so much so that desire for control of state power had little to do with perceived cultural or ethnic differences.[1] Common ethnicity was assumed; it was a hegemonic discourse that buttressed the theocratic state that had been created by, and cultivated after, the unification of the Two Lands. For the patriots from Waset (Thebes), national unity was imperative.[2] In the Second Intermediate Period (1664-1569), Kemet wrested political control from an alien Asian power, the Hyksos. Common culture and ethnicity were precisely the issues that sparked this nationalist movement. And again, it was Waset that took the lead, but this time in a war of national liberation. However, before detailing the historical periods under consideration, it is first necessary to briefly examine the most clearly articulated argument that has been offered to deny nationhood to ancient Kemet.

Kemet and the Ethnie

Although he is not an Egyptologist, Anthony D. Smith is the modernist analyst of nationalism that has studied ancient Kemet most closely. Smith provides us with four criteria for the modern nation-state: (a) citizenship, (b) a unified economy, (c) a world of compact nations, and (d) mass education. He views ancient Kemet as an *ethnie*, a premodern ethnic community which, though not primordial, is exceptionally durable with a sense of continuity that persists because of external forces that help to crystallize identities: state-making, military mobilization, and organized religion, being the most crucial. Consequently, Smith (1994, 2001b) acknowledges the unifying religious practices and the relatively unified ruling class in Kemet, but stresses its locally based economy and considerable class differentiation to deny it the status of nationhood. According to Smith, even the centralized religious institutions of ancient Egypt "were unable to compensate for the regionalism that so often undermined the unity of the Egyptian state" (Smith, 1991, p. 46).

However, Smith's focus on regionalism is unwarranted. There is no question that the manipulation of the aquatic environment of the Nile Valley was necessary to prevent it from becoming an uninhabitable swamp and that any

hydraulic problems had to be solved locally (Kemp, 1991). Still, the fluctuations in the height of the Nile, when it overflowed, made it almost impossible to forecast agricultural yield. This unpredictability prompted the establishment of large central granaries to store surplus that the state redistributed as necessary. Hence, Kemet was a centralized supply economy (Assmann, 2002). Furthermore, as we shall see in more detail below, an examination of Kemet's history shows that even in the Intermediate Periods—periods of relative decentralization—we find a sense of collective identity in Kemet that is remarkable; the fundamentals of Kemet's symbolic meaning world persisted, despite a pattern of apogees and interims (Assmann, 2002). Hence, Kemet easily satisfies Smith's most problematic second requirement, a unified economy.

Smith's first requirement, in which he contends that Kemet, a theocratic state, could not possess a modern conceptualization of citizenship, may be dismissed as well. We need but look at the constitution of modern Iran to illustrate the fact that modern conceptions of citizenship and theocracy are not mutually exclusive (Algar, 1980; Saffari, 1993). Regarding the third criterion, the necessity for a world of compact nation states, few scholars would deny the existence of empires in the 20th century. And Smith freely admits that in the second millennium, Kemet was part of a regional system of states that included the kingdom of Mitanni, the Kassites of Babylon, and the Hittites (Smith, 2001a). Clearly, in this era, Kemet, like the modern theocratic state in Iran, existed side by side with empires. On the subject of mass education, the fourth criterion, Smith is ultimately also forced to concede that the best we can hope for, even in the modern era, is an approximation of the attitudes of the masses (Smith, 1994; 2001b). Nevertheless, let me stress here that "an oral tradition of instruction explicitly conveyed by the fathers" allowed the written fictional content of Kemet's "Wisdom Literature" to be cast in familiar terms for the masses (Assmann, p. 125; Lichtheim, pp. 135-139). In short, Kemet was a territorially defined theocracy in which citizens lived within a unified national economy. It also existed in an historical era in which, like the modern 20th century, empires and theocratic states existed side by side.

Having dispensed with Smith's ethnie, we can now focus on the specifics of Kemet's history. The civil war during the First Intermediate Period was a political movement for territorial control. A theocratic national culture, which had been nurtured since the unification of the Two Lands, was hegemonic and, as such, taken for granted. The War for national liberation during the Second Intermediate Period that led to the establishment of the New Kingdom, however, brought this culture to the surface; it demanded an ethnically and territorially coterminous nation and the ousting of alien rule.[3]

Unification

The doctrine of divine kingship defined pharonic civilization. In the Nile Valley, kings ruled from prehistoric times (Diop, 1991). Excavations at Abdju (Abydos) and Nekhen (Hierakonpolis) suggest that royalty dates to as early as 3800. Indeed, as a form of government, kingship was an essential characteristic of Kemet. Among the early civilizations of the ancient world, only Kemet embraced this particular mode of rule from its very beginning. As noted above, in Mesopotamia, city-states, centered on their local temples, made high-priests the holders of political and economic power. And even when kingship developed later in that region, it was never as important as its counterpart in Kemet (Wilkinson, 2013).

The crucible of kingship was Upper Kemet. The pharonic dynasty that initiated unification was established by the southern king, Narmer, around 3100.[4] His victorious armies marched to the edge of the Delta where they founded Memphis, "The White Walled-City," that eventually became the northern military citadel, as well as one of the more important religious and intellectual centers. Prior to this unification, archaeological evidence suggests that both the red crown of Lower Kemet and white crown of Upper Kemet originated in the south. However, by the middle of the First Dynasty, about a century after Narmer's conquests, these crowns had been combined into a single headdress, the double crown, symbolizing rule over the Two Lands. Moreover, as early as the reign of Narmer's successor, Aha, the vulture goddess of Upper Kemet and the cobra goddess of Lower Kemet were combined in a royal title that was used to help create a national theology "from strands of local belief and custom . . . centered on the person of the king." The king was both head of state and god on earth. "Monarchy was not just an integral part of religion; the two were synonymous" (Wilkinson, 2013, pp. 31-36). As religious, philosophical, and political concepts were gradually merged, the king of the Two Lands organized the armies necessary to protect the entire Nile Valley, below the first cataract, from invaders. For example, the kings of the First Dynasty reported that they had to "smite the Bedouins" in the east, or "hack-up the Libyans in the west" (Drake, 1987, p. 177). However, for domestic consumption, the government maintained a fiction of isolation to instill a sense of national identity, casting all foreigners as the enemy. This "xenophobic ideology" masked the practical reality of Kemet's extensive trade with its neighbors (Wilkinson, 2013, p. 42).

The first two dynasties were characterized by intermittent conflict between the pharaohs from the south and local rulers in the north who resisted the incorporation of the delta into a united kingdom. However, dynastic marriages, and the adoption of matrilineal succession—allowing a child of a

northern queen to ascend to the throne—increased national unity.[5] And by the middle of the First Dynasty, Kemet was a political reality that would be retained in art and literature throughout the course of its history. The practical effect of this political unification was to convey all land to the state. The royal government then devised a nationwide system of taxation (Trigger, 1993). The Palermo Stone, complied around 2400, but stretching back to the First Dynasty, records the level of the annual Nile flood to facilitate tax collection. To allow for even more effective political control, Kemet was also divided into 42 nomes, each governed by a centrally appointed nomarch, who was answerable to the king. High officials in this period were usually royal relatives (Wilkinson, 2013). The development of a truly national identity and administration was one of the great accomplishments of the Early Dynastic Period, and writing greatly facilitated this centralized administration.

Literacy was reserved for a small elite at the heart of government.[6] However, during the Third Dynasty, the old system of royal relatives gradually began to be replaced by a more structured bureaucracy, opened up to career professionals, drawn from a wide cross-section of society, and promoted on merit.[7] Learning to write was synonymous with training for an administrative post and low birth was, consequently, not a deterrent to ambition. This literocracy was separated from the lower classes in its language, clothing, and behavior. Hence, during the latter part Old Kingdom, bureaucrats may have been commoners but they led lives of pampered luxury (Wilkinson, 2013). To reduce the power of these bureaucrats, more responsibilities were delegated to officials in the nomes, weakening the central government, with far-reaching and long-lasting repercussions. The seeds of the collapse of central authority had been sown.

The king's absolute power had reached its zenith by the Fourth Dynasty, epitomized in the great funerary complex of Khufu at Gizeh. There is also little doubt that his status had decreased by the end of the Fifth Dynasty, as the nomarchs gained increased opportunities to become more independent of royal patronage. This local independence is illustrated best by the erection of tombs not only in the great royal necropolises but also in the nomes. Increasingly, the king came to be regarded as just one of many rulers who exercised power over a limited area of the country. The appointment of nomarchs eventually became hereditary, and they no longer regarded themselves as beholden to the king. Decentralization had reached a stage where the country had returned to the political situation prior to the unification by Narmer. Once again local rulers formed alliances and fought against each other. Furthermore, by the end of the Sixth Dynasty, Bedouin nomads on Kemet's northeastern border raided and infiltrated the country, encouraged by this internal weakness (David, 1998). Consequently, the devolution of

political power to local officials proved unstoppable and to compound difficulties, a prolonged period of Nile floods caused economic stress on a national scale. By the end of Pepi II's over 60-year reign, there was no strong candidate for the throne (Malek, 2000; Wilkinson, 2013). The seeds of destruction had come to fruition.

Civil War

Succession disputes had arisen during the Old Kingdom, but conservative forces had always managed to restore order and maintain the status quo. In the 20 years after Pepi II's demise, Kemet saw 17 kings, which later chroniclers consolidated into the "spurious" Seventh Dynasty; and only one king of the Eighth Dynasty lasted more than a year in office. These weak rulers of the Eighth Dynasty used royal privilege to cultivate regional support (Wilkinson, 2013). Furthermore, as the effects of a series of low Niles began to be felt, many nomarchs also used the crises to further their own careers, by promoting themselves as saviors in troubled times. The collapse of the state-planned economy created a supply vacuum, which many nomarchs represented as a state of chaos. Famine and provision for the nome in times of hardship were typical subjects of their tomb inscriptions and a prime source of legitimacy for these local rulers. For example, the phrase "never came misfortune over me" is extremely frequent in tomb inscriptions of the First Intermediate Period. The inscriptions of the Old Kingdom are completely devoid of this kind of pessimism (Assmann, 2002).

As the power of the monarchy waned and Egypt fragmented along regional lines, various local rulers claimed "de facto independence." However, Kheti, from Middle Kemet, emerged as "first among equals," officially ushering in the 9th Dynasty at Herakleopolis (modern Ihnasya el-Medina), the capital of the 14th nome. The House of Kheti would reign but not rule for over a 100 years (2165-2040; Wilkinson, 2013). During the 9th and 10th Dynasties, the local lords of Herakleopolis established their rule in Middle Kemet and introduced a period of comparative peace (David, 1998). However, the dynasty was not even acknowledged by everyone in the immediate vicinity of Herakleopolis. During this period, many nomarchs even dated their quarrying expeditions by "the years of their own tenure, avoiding all reference to royal reign." Despite this lack centralization, the king lists do not note any interruption in the line of pharaohs after the 6th Dynasty; the 7th to 11th Dynasties follow without a break and are presented as having ruled over all of Kemet. However, in the last days of the 8th Dynasty, the governor of one nome in Upper Kemet, Ankhtifi, provided provisions in his area when famine had spread throughout Kemet. He even "presented himself as the natural

leader of the seven southernmost provinces," while he proclaimed his loyalty to the king at Herakleopolis (Wilkinson, 2013, pp. 107-109). Ankhtifi had already formed an alliance that gave him effective control of the three southernmost nomes, but was unsuccessful in attacking the fourth—centered on Waset—and fifth nomes, which formed a defensive alliance against him.

Within a few years, the three southern nomes that had conspired with Ankhtifi were controlled by Waset. Publically, Intef, Waset's nomarch and founder of the 11th Dynasty, also feigned loyalty to Herakleopolis, as he simultaneously strengthened Waset's position and proclaimed himself ruler of Upper Kemet. The civil war that ensued between Waset and Herakleopolis dragged on for almost a century (2134-2040). Intef and his successors gained control of the vital western desert routes that connected the population centers of Herakleopolis and Waset. Ultimately, it was Intef II, who declared himself "son of Ra," claiming the title of king in defiance of the house of Kheti (Wilkinson, 2013, pp. 109-114).

By the reign of Intef II, the language of Waset's nationalist leaders had become overtly political and expansion was "cast as the removal of an affront to established order." For example, an account of one military expedition reads: "I descended upon Abdju, which was under (the control of) a rebel. I made him go down to his (own) realm from the midst of town" (Dejemi, Funerary Stela, as cited in Wilkinson, 2013, p. 115). And after conquering Abdju, which had previously been desecrated by Herakleopolitan loyalists, Intef II sent a message to the king that by failing to protect Abdju's sacred sites, "Kheti had forfeited his right to the kingship." Intef II was determined to show not only that he was a conqueror but also that he was a just and pious king. Waset now dominated the eight southernmost nomes, while Herakleopolis controlled Middle and Lower Kemet. However, "a divided nation was anathema to the ancient Egyptian worldview. Any king worthy of the name had to be lord of the Two Lands, not merely a provincial potentate" (Wilkinson, 2013, pp. 116-118). *Ethnic unity was assumed; it was not the motivating factor for unification. Political control via the restoration of a united monarchy was the primary concern.* When Intef III's successor and progenitor of the 12th Dynasty, Mentuhotep II, reached Herakleopolis with his army, he immediately installed one of his most trusted advisors as his personal representative. He also sent garrisons to the southern fortress of Abu (Elephantine) and put down resistance in the western desert. His borders secure and the civil war ended, Mentuhotep II began to focus on matters of government.

Waset had first come to prominence during the Old Kingdom. Its excellent communication links, derived from its location at the junction of the eastern and western deserts, made it an excellent capital for Upper Kemet and, after

reunification, ultimately for the entire nation. In addition to shifting the national capital to Waset, Mentuhotep II embarked on a program of self-deification that was aimed at resuscitating the ideology of divine kingship. In so doing, he strove to represent the entire nation, though he did not hesitate to portray the previously rebellious north as an enemy that needed to be controlled. Kemet was once again a nation ruled by a god-king. As he ushered in the Middle Kingdom (2061-1664), Mentuhotep II restored the symbolic importance of kingship. He also erected a national cenotaph, close to his own tomb—a ceremonial war grave that served as a powerful reminder to posterity of the sacrifices that "the king and his band of brothers" had made as the defenders and liberators of the nation (Wilkinson, 2013, pp. 119-123).

Many of the characteristic beliefs and practices that would survive until the end of pharonic civilization were forged during the period of the civil war and articulated during the subsequent Middle Kingdom.[8] The rulers of the Middle Kingdom adopted the rhetoric of crisis and salvation of the First Intermediate Period by portraying the First Intermediate itself as the locus of chaos. However, where the First Intermediate rulers portrayed disaster as everywhere, except where they themselves held sway, the rulers of the Middle Kingdom asserted that only the pharaoh could restore order and balance to a world that was threatening to fall apart. As we see in the Middle Kingdom text, the *Prophecies of Neferti*, the new role of the state was one of a savoir institution: "I show you the land in severe illness . . . However, a king is prophesied, who shall come from the south, Ameni by name . . . Then Ma'at will return to her place, while Isfet is banished"[9] (as cited in Assmann, 2002, pp. 107-108).

After the civil war, Abdju became the principle center of the Osiris cult and one of the most important holy places in all of Kemet. Indeed, under the 11th Dynasty, it had become a focus of national pilgrimage. And for those who could not afford the trip to Abdju, there were Osiris festivals celebrated throughout the nomes. Now, for the first time in Kemet's history, the ordinary person came to expect an afterlife that was no longer dependent on the pharaoh's favor but could be achieved through the performance of correct ritual and burial procedures, and a life of moral righteousness (David, 1998; Obenga, 2004). However, the Middle Kingdom not only restored the order of pharonic kingship but also reflected on that order; it not only redefined the position of pharonic kingship between cosmos and society but also publicized this relationship. The pharaohs of the Middle Kingdom went beyond propagandistic inscriptions that eternalized the pharaoh's deeds in a laudatory way; they also developed literature in which social and political norms were infused with ancient concept of Ma'at. According to Karenga, in the Middle Kingdom, "creative literature flourished" . . . and "the scribes as

writers of ethical treatises pose(d) a philosophical paradigm of righteous leadership supported by a moral culture as key to the achievement of the just society through Maat" (Karenga, 2004, p. 38). Justice is what held the world of the Middle Kingdom together by connecting consequences with deeds. Justice linked human action to human destiny and welded individuals into an even more self-conscious community. This close association between literature and politics is exclusive to the Middle Kingdom. Although in later epochs literary texts survive, they are rarely political or propagandistic[10] (Assmann, 2002).

As Amenhemat, vizier under Mentuhotep IV, transitioned to power, the 12th Dynasty emerged to become "the most stable line of kings ever to rule" ancient Kemet. For nearly two centuries, eight monarchs from a single family, governed the two Lands. Amenhemat I, who probably came to power via a coup d'etat, wasted no time in appointing trusted loyalists to key posts in the administration. Nomarchs who had served during the 11th Dynasty were dismissed. He also constructed a new capital city, Itj-tawy, strategically located south of Memphis at the juncture of Upper and Lower Kemet. Under the reign of Amenhemat II, Kemet became engrossed in the international politics of the Eastern Mediterranean, a full 350 years before it established a formal empire there. The human cargo brought back from these foreign adventures included thousands of slaves. The forcible resettlement of these A'amu (Asiatics) in the Nile Valley to work on crown lands and take part in state building projects altered the ethnic composition of Kemet's population in the delta, with ramifications that we shall discuss in more detail below (Wilkinson, 2013).

By the reign of Senusret III, many of the regional leaders had been lured away from their nomes by offers of lucrative and prestigious positions at court, increasing governmental centralization. Also, by this time, Wawat (Lower Nubia) was under Kemet's control. Close ties were also maintained with A'amu neighbors in the Sinai, where the local rulers provided logistical support for state-sponsored mining expeditions. With friendly relations established, the peaceful immigration of A'amu into the northeastern delta, "replaced the forcible resettlement" of "slaves that had taken place earlier in the dynasty"[11] (Wilkinson, 2013, pp. 154-160). As these A'amu immigrants rose in social standing, some even secured government positions. In the northeastern delta, where many of the migrants had settled, the alien community began to grow significantly, especially as the A'amu fled "the harsher climatic and economic conditions of their homelands" for "the sanctuary and opportunities" of life with their friends and relatives in Kemet. Hutwaret (Avaris), a small border settlement established under the Herakleopolitan Dynasty and utilized by Amenhemat I as part of his frontier defenses, received

many of these migrants. Once settled in Hutwaret, the A'amu built houses in their own tradition and maintained their own way of life. However, we should also note that many A'amu were already "highly Egyptianized," while others were Bedouin tribesmen. Consequently, Hutwaret was a "multi-cultural town," unlike any other in Kemet, and opportunities for A'amu advancement there were great. It is not surprising, then, that Hutwaret, with its distinctive hybrid culture, and prosperity from the Mediterranean trade, became increasingly inclined to flex its political muscle (Wilkinson, 2013).

After two centuries of rule by a single family, the government at Itj-tawy was ill prepared for the succession crisis that emerged after the brief, 4-year reign of Sobekneferu. And over the course of the next 120 years, Kemet had over 50 kings, comprising the 13th and 14th Dynasties (1786-1664)—compared with just eight in the preceding two centuries.[12] Nevertheless, the administration continued with a surprising degree of efficiency, despite the fact that pyramid building stalled, expeditions to Sinai ceased, and the Nubian and delta forts were relinquished and/or abandoned. In the delta, a man named Nehesi took charge of the fortresses and declared himself king of an independent delta state, with its capital at Hutwaret—a direct challenge to the government at Itj-tawy. For purposes of legitimacy in the eyes of Kemet, Nehesi also put himself under the patronage of the local deity, Seth. "In earlier times, the secession of a province would have met with a swift and ruthless response from the center. But the government at Itj-tawy was hardly in a fit state to win back Hutwaret by force" (Wilkinson, 2013, pp. 165-167). In fact, Hutwaret's secession cut Itj-tawy's remaining eastern trade links, starving it of vital goods and income. Within a few decades, both Hutwaret and Itj-tawy were also devastated by famine and plague. Weakened by disease, the whole of Lower Egypt became easy prey to an eastern aggressor that was armed with the latest military technology—the horse-drawn chariot. These invaders took Hutwaret and swept southward to conquer the ancient capital of Memphis.

National Liberation

For more than a century (1664-1559), the Hyksos, a Semetic-speaking elite from modern-day Syria, Palestine, and Lebanon, ruled northern Egypt and were recognized as overlords in the rest of the country. Hyksos is a Greek version of *hequa-khsaut*, "chiefs of foreign lands" (Redford, 1992, p. 111). It is important to note that the term appears in sources from the Middle Kingdom and was used to designate the foreign rulers from the east—Amorites or Canaanites. As noted above, Asiatics in Kemet and Canaan were traditionally labeled *A'amu*. Hence, Hyksos, in and of itself, is not an ethnic designation (Oren, 1997; Van Seters, 1966).

Up to this point in their history, "the Hyksos episode clearly stands out as a unique phenomenon, previously unparalleled, a time when foreign lords imposed their rule on Egypt" (Oren, 1997, p. xix). While the early Hyksos kings were content to describe themselves as rulers of foreign lands, they became determined to be recognized as true Egyptian sovereigns by adopting full royal titles. King Kyan, the instigator of this change, intended to conquer all of Egypt and succeeded in conquering the northern two thirds of the country, the southern third remaining under the control of Waset. It is even possible that the Hyksos ruled Waset directly for a brief period. The loss of the ancient capital of Memphis, which was a symbol of national unity, had forced the royal court at Itj-tawy to retreat to the south, "the traditional heartland of Egyptian independence" . . . and for many "they were still the only legitimate Lords of the Two Lands . . ." But Waset, severed from the east by the Hyksos and cut off from the lands further south by the loss of the southern forts to the Nubians, was now weak and vulnerable; famine and extreme flooding exacerbated the situation. The Hyksos rulers also consciously reduced trade with Upper Egypt in favor of dealings with Palestine and Cyprus, even as they continued to secure gold from Kush via the oasis routes (Wilkinson, 2013, pp. 168-172). Compounding matters further, during the period of Hyksos control in the north, expatriates from Kemet, living in Wawat, willingly served the powerful king of Kush, the dominant power in Upper Nubia and Kemet's sworn enemy.

As the Hyksos flourished, they established new fortified settlements in the eastern delta and Hutwaret became a great city—the capital of an empire that encompassed Kemet, as well as Southern Palestine and the Lebanese coast. At Hutwaret, Seth was the ostensible patron; however, the Hyksos worshipped Baal, a foreign God, who even began to assimilate many aspects of the worship of Seth; and they did not follow indigenous burial practices. Consequently, though they presented themselves as "traditional pharaohs," the Hyksos were equally as proud of being "rulers of foreign land" (O'Connor, 1997, p. 63). Despite Waset's resistance, Kemet was clearly under foreign rule.

Yet, the flame of self-determination was never extinguished in Kemet. As the Hyksos withdrew their forces from the south to the delta, the nationalists in Waset did not remain idle. The 17th Dynasty kings revived the cult of Osiris, repaired temples, and established military garrisons at the holy site of Abdju. They then proceeded to consolidate their power in the south. The administration revived the royal workshops and made a donation of land to the local temple, hoping that the god of the temple, Montu, who had inspired the 11th Dynasty to reunification in the civil war six centuries earlier, would aid them in their quest for national liberation. However, after an incursion into southern Kemet by Kush and her allies, the rulers of the 17th Dynasty

realized that they would first have to secure their southern flank "before they could safely launch their campaign for national reunification." In the meantime, the Hyksos formed a strategic alliance with Kush; for them, dividing Kemet between the two powers would be acceptable, if it meant the end of the national liberation movement (Wilkinson, 2013, pp. 174-176).

It was Sequenenra Taa who launched the first wave of attacks against the Hyksos forces. Killed in battle, after just a short reign in Waset, he was laid to rest by his successor, Kamose who, after taking the mantle of office, summoned his war council and said,

> Why do I ponder my strength while there is one prince in Hutwaret and another in Kush, and I sit joined with an Asiatic and a Nubian, each man holding his portion of Egypt and sharing the land with me?[13] (Carnarvon Tablet, as cited in Wilkinson, 2013, p. 177)

At the time of this statement, nationalist Kemet, centered on Waset, occupied barely one third of the area that the great kings of the 12th Dynasty had controlled. Yet, for many there, collaboration did not seem like a bad option: They were allowed to cultivate fields, pasture herds, and receive supplies of animal fodder in return for the taxes paid to the Hyksos rulers. Moreover, as noted above, the Hyksos had expanded Mediterranean commerce and introduced the horse and chariot (Oren, 1997). But, as the civil war had shown, a divided Egypt was intolerable. And even though there were collaborative sentiments in Waset, for the nationalists, "foreign occupation of any part of the beloved land was anathema" (Wilkinson, 2013, pp. 184). For Kamose, national liberation was the only option: "my desire is to deliver Egypt and to (?) smite the Asiatics" (Carnarvon Tablet, as cited in Gunn & Gardiner, 1918, p. 46). In short, *Kamose and his nationalist followers demanded both an ethnic and territorial unity of the state.* However, to achieve this nationalist goal, Kamose first had to secure his southern flank. Consequently, he moved into Wawat, gaining strength from supporters from Kemet who had defected to Kush earlier, and re-established formal control in the area. Kamose now turned his attention to the Hyksos in the north:

> I sailed down as champion to overthrow the A'amu by the command of Amun . . . my army being valiant in front of me like a blast of fire. . . . I turned back the A'mu who had encroached (?) upon Egypt . . . (Carnarvon Tablet, as cited in Gunn & Gardiner, 1918, p. 46)

As Kamose marched through Middle Kemet, a message from the Hyksos, requesting Kushite support, was intercepted. Taking this request for support as a sign of weakness, Kamose set out to strike the alien heartland in the

north. Although he faced little sustained opposition, he was unsuccessful in taking Hutwaret, having ultimately to return to Waset. He died suddenly, after just 2 years in power, leaving no sons to ascend to the throne. Kamose's successor, Ahmose, the first king of the 18th Dynasty, was only 10 years old at the time. Fortunately, for the nationalists in Waset, the weakened Hyksos were in no position to launch a counter attack. The final push came in 1559; by that time, Ahmose was old enough to lead a military campaign. The king led his army through Middle Kemet toward the delta to conquer the ancient city of Memphis. Next, with naval support, Hutwaret fell.[14] Ahmose then followed his former oppressors across the northern Sinai to Shahuren (modern Tell el-Ajjul), a major center of Hyksos power, east of the Nile, and laid siege to it for 3 years. After intimidating the surrounding coastal area, Ahmose returned in triumph to Kemet. The alien power had been expelled. Kemet was now unified under a strong king for the first time in over a 100 years (Wilkinson, 2013). The nation had been liberated and the New Kingdom (1569-1081), the most glorious international period in Kemet's history, had begun.

Conclusion

For ancient Kemet, as for many states in the contemporary world, the price of national unity was theocratic rule. The centralization of state power was predicated upon Ma'at, the connective order and justice that guaranteed the prosperity and survival of the realm. We have seen that the people of ancient Kemet portrayed their society as a civilization apart. But at times of political weakness, such as at the end of the 12th Dynasty, Kemet was vulnerable, especially in the delta, where foreigners came, first as slaves, and later as conquerors. It is important to remember, however, that this brief overview of Kemet's political history, from the unification of the Two Lands in the third millennium to the inauguration of the New Kingdom, spans a period of more than 1,500 years. Keeping this fact in mind is critical when utilizing any criteria to determine nationhood or the lack thereof in ancient Kemet. Smith (1994, 2001b) clearly loses sight of this when he identifies economic regionalism as the most salient factor preventing the ancient Egyptian ethnie from creating the cultural and political bonds that he deems necessary for national unity. During the period under consideration here, the economic unity of the state only became a critical issue during the First and Second Intermediate Periods, relatively brief interludes, when viewed within the total temporal context. Moreover, and perhaps even more importantly, I have shown that this *economic regionalism and the crises arising therefrom, actually helped to spawn political fragmentation that increased national sentiment in both*

the civil war and the national liberation movement in ancient Kemet. The civil war was a political campaign for reunification. The national liberation movement was fought to ensure that Kemetic ethnicity remained dominant. If the centuries long acknowledgment of the coincidence of ethnicity and territory—the creation of a centralized supply economy and an ethnocentric national administration after unification—is not enough of a nationalist display for Smith and other modernists, military mobilization for the end of alien rule certainly should be.

The question still remains, however, as to whether we can legitimately utilize modern categories in the analysis of past societies. Are we not guilty of retrospective nationalism? (Eley & Suny, 1996). I contend that historical study is always a dual process: We cannot help but use contemporary concepts to help us interrogate the past, while we attempt to understand past societies as they understood themselves. Doing otherwise would render meaningless much of the historical scholarship that is premised upon recent social science concepts such as culture, race, class, and of course, ethnicity and nationalism.

Appendix

Dynastic chronology and capitals (all dates B.C.E.)

Early Dynastic Period, 3100-2687

Dynasty I (Memphis), 3100-2850
Dynasty II, 2850-2687

Old Kingdom, 2687-2190

Dynasty III, 2687-2649
Dynasty IV, 2649-2513
Dynasty V, 2513-2374
Dynasty VI, 2374-2190

First Intermediate Period, 2190-2061

Dynasty VII, Numerous ephemeral kings
Dynasty VIII, 2190-2165
Dynasty IX-X (Herakleopolis), 2165-2040 Dynasty XI (Waset—civil war), 2134-2061

Middle Kingdom, 2061-1664

Dynasty XI (reunification), 2061-1991
Dynasty XII (Itj-tawy), 1991-1786
Dynasty XIII-XIV, 1786-1664

Second Intermediate Period, 1664-1569

Dynasty XV-XVI (Hutwaret), 1664-1569 Dynasty XVII (Waset), 1600-1569

New Kingdom, 1569-1081

Dynasty XVIII, 1569-1315 (Waset—Hyksos expelled)

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Notes

1. All dates are B.C.E. unless otherwise indicated. There is considerable debate regarding Kemet's chronology. See, for example, Shaw (2000), Assmann (2002), and Wilkinson (2013). The chronology used here is adapted from Redford (2001), the generally accepted compromise (see Appendix for more details).
2. In addition to Kemet, indigenous place-names are used in this article, unless directly referring to the work of a particular scholar who uses Greek names.
3. The division of Kemet's history into Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms, separated by Intermediate Periods, dates back to the birth of European Egyptology in the 19th century. The division into dynasties, however, goes back to the chronology advanced by a priest in Kemet, Manetho, who drew upon older sources to write a history in Greek in the first half of the third century.
4. Egyptologists' opinions differ as to whether Narmer was an historical figure or a consolidation of a series of rulers into a symbol of unification. See Obenga (2004); see Shaw's (2000) study for a discussion of the pertinent factors relating to Narmer's conquest as reality and/or symbol.
5. See Diop (1991) for a discussion of the importance of matrilineality in Kemet and Nubia.
6. Mesopotamia, especially the southern city of Uruk, is considered by many archaeologists to be the place where the idea of writing first developed, but

according to Wilkinson (2013), the hieroglyphs themselves represent the ancient Egyptian language and environment so well "that they must represent an indigenous development" (p. 41).

7. During this period, pyramids were a national enterprise and the organization of the workforce engendered a strong sense of corporate identity and pride on a variety of levels.
8. It was during the Middle kingdom, as Osiris eclipsed a number of more ancient funerary deities, that concepts of original sin, a final judgment before the great god, and the promise of resurrection, so prominent in the Judeo-Christian tradition, were developed.
9. For a complete translation, see Lichtheim (1973). Ameni here refers to Amenhemat I (1991-1962) and Ma'at can be loosely translated as order, justice, or universal balance; Isfet is disorder or injustice. For detailed discussions of Ma'at, see Asante (1990) and Obenga (2004).
10. See, for example, *The Story of Sinhue* in Lichtheim (1973) or any of the "Didactic Literature" (pp. 134-192), which provided a blueprint for correct behavior and moral action. The emergence of this kind of literature was an integral part of the reorganization of the state undertaken in the 12th Dynasty. Only then did Instructions advance to the status of central cultural texts in Kemet.
11. In the official dynastic records, most A'amu bear assumed Kemetic names, often compounded with Ptah.
12. Amenhemat III (1843-1797) had no youthful male heir. Consequently, Sobekneferu (1790-1786), Egypt's first female king, ascended to the throne after Amenhemat IV had ruled for about a decade. Her reign lasted for only 4 years.
13. For a translation of the complete tablet, see Gunn and Gardiner (1918).
14. Knowledge of this campaign is derived primarily from the tomb inscription of Ahmose, son of Abana, a naval officer serving under King Ahmose. See Bourriau, in I. Shaw (2000, pp. 210-217).

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