

Nationalism, Modernity, and Ancient Egypt

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Abstract

The criteria utilized to support the contention that the nation originated in modern Europe--citizenship, a unified economy, a world of compact nations, and mass education--are most clearly articulated by Anthony D. Smith and emphasized, to varying degrees, by most scholars who study nationalism. Accepting the fact that ancient Egypt was a theocracy and using evidence from post-1979 Iran, this paper begins by showing that a theocratic state does not necessarily preclude the development of citizenship. It also shows that the economy of ancient Egypt was linked by centrally controlled granaries and that this unified territory existed in a Mediterranean world influenced by empires, just as the world of the twentieth century was influenced by the Soviet empire. The paper concludes by focusing on the Wisdom Literature of the Middle Kingdom of ancient Egypt--an educational system that was designed to impart the requirements of citizenship to the masses.

Keywords: Ancient Egypt, Modernity, Nationalism, Theocratic Iran, Soviet Empire, Wisdom Literature

1. Introduction

Many scholars have offered definitions of the nation and nationalism (Ozkirmili, 2000). Most are modernists: members of a Eurocentric school of thought that see the nation resulting from some combination of the spread of capitalism, literacy, and notions of citizenship derived from the ideology of the French Revolution (Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1990; Anderson, 1991). Perhaps the most prolific modernist, Anthony D. Smith, maintains that nations are modern in that:

1. they require a unified legal code of common rights and duties, with citizen rights where the nation is independent;
2. they are based on a unified economy with a single division of labor and mobility of goods and persons throughout the national territory;
3. they need a fairly compact territory, preferably with natural defensible frontiers, in a world of similar compact nations;
4. they require a single 'political culture' and public, mass education and media system, to socialize future generations to be citizens of the new nation (Smith, 1991, pp. 44-5).

This essay is not an attempt to define the nation and nationalism; its goals are more modest. It will simply show that Smith's four criteria can, with only minor alterations, be applied to ancient Egypt, the state created by the earliest inhabitants of the Nile Valley.

Smith argues that although nations are modern, some premodern states are closer to the modern nation than others (1991, pp. 52-71). In so doing, he couches his definition of the nation in modernist terms without totally sanctioning modernist explanations for the origin of nations. He maintains that his approach is a critique of modernism and consequently, considers himself an ethno-symbolist--a term used to describe scholars who attempt to uncover the "symbolic legacy" of premodern ethnic identities for contemporary nations (Smith, 1998, p. 224). According to the ethno-symbolists, nations should be examined *in la longue duree*. The genesis of contemporary nations must consider their ethnic predecessors. Nations must be examined within an ethnic context. Furthermore, the ethno-symbolists suggest that ethnic identities change slowly; they can persist for centuries. In short, the modern era is no *tabula rasa* (Ozkirmili, 2000, pp. 168-74).

Smith sees the *ethnie* (premodern ethnic community) not as primordial but as 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. However, the relationship between the modern nation and the *ethnie* can be problematic. There are many instances of modern nations without immediate ethnic antecedents (Ozkirmili, 2000, pp. 176-7). For example, in immigrant nations, such as the United States and Canada “colonist-immigrants have pioneered a providentialist frontier nationalism” that encouraged a “plural conception of the nation” which “accepts, and even celebrates, ethnic and cultural diversity within an overarching political, legal, and linguistic national identity” (Smith, 1998, p. 194). In Smith’s estimation, these nations use an ethnic model to fabricate a coherent mythology and symbolism to ensure national survival and unity (1991, pp. 40-1). For Smith, this resolves the problem of nations without strong ethnic antecedents, allowing him to focus on two types of *ethnies*, lateral and vertical:

[The lateral] type of *ethnie* was usually composed of aristocrats and higher clergy, though it might from time to time include bureaucrats, high military officials and the richer merchants...it was at once socially confined to the upper strata while being geographically spread out to form often close links with the upper echelons of neighboring lateral *ethnies*. As a result, its borders were typically ‘ragged’, but lacked social depth...in contrast, the ‘vertical’ type of *ethnie* was more compact and popular. Its ethnic culture tended to be diffused to other social strata and classes. Social divisions were not underpinned by cultural differences: rather a distinctive historical culture helped to unite different classes around a common heritage and traditions, especially when the latter were under pressure from the outside (1991, p. 53).

According to Smith, these two types of *ethnies* engendered two different paths of modern nation formation. It is this presupposition of the modernity of nations that allows us to classify Smith as a modernist, despite his assertions to the contrary.

Smith views ancient Egypt as an *ethnie*. He acknowledges the unifying religious practices and a relatively unified ruling class in ancient Egypt, but stresses its locally based economy and considerable class differentiation to deny it the status of nationhood. Moreover, Smith maintains that it is difficult to ascertain how completely any elite inspired nationalist discourse in ancient Egypt actually reached the masses. He is forced to concede, however, that the best we can hope for, even in the modern era, is an approximation of the attitudes of the masses (Smith, 1994, p. 393; Smith, 2001a, pp. 20-2). We must, consequently, tease national identity from the available historical sources. To that end, this paper will focus on point four, arguing that the “Wisdom Literature” of the Middle Kingdom provides us with insight into minds of the masses of ancient Egypt. However, to begin our analysis, we will briefly examine points one through three. Smith’s point one, the “unified legal code” distinction between *ethnie* and nation, can be addressed by showing that the nation can be articulated within a religious idiom—that citizenship is not solely a product of the secular state. A brief examination of Iran since the 1979 revolution will support this assertion.

2. Citizenship and the Theocratic State

In Iran, throughout the 20th century, there was a struggle between the increasingly secular state and the *ulama* (religious scholars), joined by many Muslim intellectuals who were also disenchanted with the negative effects of modernization. Reza Shah, who had come to power in a military coup in 1921, had rapidly decreased the *ulama*’s control over education, the judiciary, and some aspects of sexual segregation. He was deposed in 1941 by the Allies and for the next thirty years secularism remained a focal point of resistance. For the *ulama*, secularism was associated with ever-increasing state control and modernist anti-religious policies; for many other Marxist oriented intellectuals, it was also seen as the paramount expression of dependent capitalism and imperialism. During this period, the call for a return to Islam became a collaborative effort between intellectuals and the religious establishment (Omid, 1992, p. 676).

In 1979, a myriad of factions with differing objectives united briefly to depose the Pahlavi monarchy. After the revolution, the Khomeinists worked to create a state ruled by the *ulama*. They succeeded in establishing a theocracy, utilizing the doctrine of the Guardianship of the Jurisconsult (*velayat-e faqih*) as the legal, constitutional, foundation of an Islamic Republic (Saffari, 1993, pp. 81-2). However, the first draft of the constitution in 1979 paid little attention to Khomeini’s political theories and, though it designated Iran as an Islamic Republic, it also limited the role of the *ulama* in state affairs.

Khomeini's initial endorsement of the original draft may have been an indication that he viewed the constitution as secondary to his authority. He believed that both his legitimacy as the leader of the Revolution and his position as the *faqih* were accepted by the masses. And his authority was, in fact, "widely regarded as legitimate with or without a constitution that legally established his status as supreme leader" (Saffari, 1993, pp. 66-7). However, despite Khomeini's acceptance of the initial document, later in the year, the Provisional Government, which had been ineffective in its attempt to check Khomeini's power, submitted a second constitutional draft to the Assembly of Experts. Subsequently, the first of seven articles directly related to Khomeini's doctrine was passed. Article 5, which decisively established the *faqih's* authority over the people made the president subservient to the supreme leader. Shortly after the passage of Article 5, the Assembly passed six other articles—107-112--that more precisely defined the role of the *faqih* and the election process in post revolutionary Iran. None of these articles passed by less than 79% of the vote, though "the opposition made only cursory attempts" to challenge Khomeini's Islamic Republican Party "because of their fear of the consequences"(Saffari, 1993, pp. 69-77).

For our purposes here, we should focus on Article 112, which states that "[T]he Leader or members of the Leadership Council are equal before the law with all other citizens" (Algar, 180, p. 66). This article, along with the inclusion of additional articles relating to the creation of Provincial Councils "to carry forward swiftly social, economic, development, public health, cultural, and educational programs," (Algar, 1980, p.63) clearly illustrates that the concepts of common citizenship and equality were articulated in theocratic Iran. As we shall see below when we examine the Wisdom Literature of the Middle Kingdom, a similar conception of citizenship and equality within a religious framework also obtained in ancient Egypt.

3. The Economy of Ancient Egypt

Regarding point two, Smith maintains that Egypt, the *ethnie*, was divided into districts in which production was directed to subsistence rather than interregional trade. Indeed, according to Smith, even the centralized religious institutions "were unable to compensate for the regionalism that so often undermined the unity of the Egyptian state" (1991, p. 46). However, these Intermediate Periods--periods of relative decentralization in ancient Egypt--were not the result of economic regionalism. The length of time that we find a sense of collective identity in Egypt is remarkable. The fundamentals of Egypt's symbolic meaning world persisted, despite a pattern of apogees and interims (Assmann, 2002, p. 19). And this sense of cultural awareness, persisting as it did through millennia, defies comparison to the brief two hundred and fifty year period of modern, European focused, nationalism. Indeed, ancient Egypt is one of the oldest and most durable civilizations that the world has ever known. Perhaps this is because its origins differed in significant ways from other early centers of civilization.

An example of this uniqueness can be seen when we consider the theory of "hydraulic societies," which maintains that the earliest civilizations evolved in river valleys--the Nile, Tigris-Euphrates, Indus and Yellow river--because of the necessity to raise the considerable workforce required to complete huge irrigation projects (Wittfogel, 1957). This theory is not supported by any archaeological data from ancient Egypt. 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, but the annual inundation meant that the interventions required for cultivation were not extreme and any hydraulic problems had been solved locally, long before the realm was unified. Nevertheless, the fluctuations in the height of the Nile when it overflowed made it almost impossible to forecast agricultural yield. The unpredictability of agricultural yields prompted the establishment of large central granaries to store surplus that the state redistributed as necessary. Ancient Egypt was a centralized supply economy (Assmann, 2002, pp.74-5).

Compared with some other early civilizations, scant attention has been focused on the economy of ancient Egypt. The primary reason for this inattention is the lack of a large number of economic texts. Still, the letters of the Eleventh Dynasty (2134-1991 B.C.E.) priest, Hekanakhte, "reveal a tight-fisted and irascible official who rented extra land, lent substantial amounts of grain, and had at his disposal surplus copper, oil, and cloth woven from flax grown on his estate, all of which he used for commercial transactions (Trigger, 1993, p.27). The activities of this First Intermediate Period (2190-2061 B.C.E.) local official can be better understood if we view them within the context of the administrative innovations of the Old Kingdom (2687-2190 B.C.E.). In Egypt during the Old Kingdom, the state was divided into bureaucratic divisions called *nomes*. These nomes were not based on predynastic territorial considerations; they were administrative districts imposed by Memphis. The nomes assured supplies to the pharonic center, while this center simultaneously assured supplies to the provinces (Assmann, 2002, p. 47).

In the Old Kingdom, taxes were levied on grain and livestock produced by estates and peasant communities. These taxes were fixed by a biennial census. Later, tax revenues were collected in kind in the nomes, from which revenues not required to manage government affairs at the local level were forwarded to the court at Memphis (Trigger, 1993, p. 44). However, taxation, though important, was not as important as the storage of agricultural produce. As noted above, the primary official concern was to ensure against the unpredictability of the Nile floods and against fluctuations in local harvest yield to keep the standard of living as consistently high as possible. Consequently, despite Smith's assertions to the contrary, during the Old Kingdom, "[T]he individual regions *were no longer self-sufficient* (italics mine), but were dependent on a centralized supply system" (Assmann, 2002, p. 48).

4. Empires Ancient and Modern

Similarly, the issue of bounded territory in point three requires only a brief examination, since elsewhere Smith freely admits:

...[i]f territory is vital to nationhood, what better example than the ancient Egyptians? Confined to a narrow slither of territory on the banks of the Nile, with deserts on either side...clearly perceiving their difference from other nations and languages, what reason can there be for denying the ancient Egyptians the title of 'nation'... (2001b, p. 103).

Smith also notes further that in the second millennium B.C.E. Egypt was part of a regional system of states that included the kingdom of Mitanni, the Kassites of Babylon and the Hittites. Smith's inclusion of the Hittite Empire here, as a particular type of state, is instructive and deserves further analysis. As noted above, this paper does not attempt to define the nation. The following analysis also does not attempt to define empire. It will instead offer a description of the term, as it is commonly used.

Suny notes that "notions of vast size, supreme authority, diversity of peoples or realms and the inequitable and discriminatory rule of one people over others" are part of the typical usage of the term empire (2000, p. 488). Similarly, Grosby maintains that "[A]n empire, by its very nature, contains many peoples...it is a consequence of more or less momentary relations of power" (1991, p. 245). Furthermore, when contrasted to the nation, Grosby maintains that "the boundaries of a nation are conceptually fixed or stable, those of an empire are in flux (1997, p. 22). This idea of empire forces us to pose two questions: 1) if there are empires in the both the first millennium B.C.E. and in twentieth century, should we question the world of "similar compact nations" that defines the modern era for Smith; and 2) does this conception of empire presume a national core?

Grosby explores the latter question in his analysis of the Hittite empire. According to Grosby, Suppiluliumas, Mursilis, and Muwatallis (1375-1282 B.C.E.) ruled the empire. Yet, he also identifies repeated references to the phrase the "Land of Hatti" in Hittite inscriptions during that period and postulates the possibility of the emergence of a Hittite nation in the area of the Halys river basin during the previous three centuries (Grosby, 1991, pp. 252-3). He also considers similar possibilities with the Edomites, Israelites and Assyrians, all of which interacted with Egypt in the world of the ancient Mediterranean (Grosby, 1991, p. 259; Grosby, 1997). For example, we witness this interaction in the Merneptah Stele which states "Israel is laid waste and his seed is not," after an Egyptian military victory (c. 1207 B.C.E) (Grosby, 2005, pp. 80-1).

Regarding the first question--is a world of compact nations emblematic of the modern era--few scholars would deny the existence of empires in the twentieth century. Still, however, for modernist oriented scholarship that supports Smith's argument, we need but look at any world history textbook in which the events leading up to WWI and the subsequent dismantling of the Ottoman and Habsburg empires are represented as the triumph of self-determination that hastened the spread of nationalism. Thus, modern nationalism is seen to have advanced at the expense of empire. However, in these texts, we also witness anti-colonial nationalism both during and after WWII which, in areas such as Africa, lasted until 1980 (Bulliet 2007; McKay, 2011). These world history texts argue that this desire for self-determination resulted from a blueprint obtained from Europe--a blueprint that ultimately ended Europe's overseas empires. Before assessing this assertion, it will be instructive to examine the transformation from tsarist Russia to the Soviet Union. This examination will show that the overseas empire was not the only type of empire that persisted throughout the twentieth century.

Tsarist Russia was an empire and Central Asia was its most colonial possession. For example, the protectorates of Bukhara and Khiva were under indirect rule, while Turkestan was dominated by Russian settlers (Khalid, 2006, p. 866). After the revolution, Central Asia, which was replete with clan and tribal divisions, made the process of soviet construction difficult and national delimitation was seen as a process that would consolidate populations and facilitate their incorporation into the Bolshevik state. This nationalization was also seen as a necessary step on the road to communism (Khalid, 2006, p. 875). Hence, the Soviet Union can be seen as “an empire that cloaked its own colonial policy in anti-imperialist rhetoric”—an empire in which nationality policy was a variation on Western colonial policy. This is not to imply that Soviet administrators were not serious about the creation of a new type of socialist society. For these administrators, colonization was “a necessary means to achieve modernization” and integrate “the former territories of the Russian empire into a new Soviet economic and administrative structure.” The Soviets dismissed the Western Civilizing Mission and replaced it with Marx’s evolutionary stages of human development. In so doing, the nation became a transitional stage along the evolutionary timeline. However, where the Western colonizers saw themselves in opposition to the colonized, the Soviet regime “saw its own interests linked to its population’s rapid national-cultural development.” Therefore, so-called backward peoples became nations with clearly delimited boundaries, through a range of institutions, including the Communist Party (Hirsch, 2000, pp. 201-4).

This work of nation-making furthered the assimilation of Central Asia’s official nationalities into the Soviet Union. For example, prior to this emphasis on national territories, the population of Tashkent had used compound identities such as “Tajik-Uzbek.” However, by the 1930s, as local elites constructed their nationalist histories, they also wrote “Tajiks” and “Uzbeks” into “the meta narrative of a Soviet history.” This meta narrative presented Tajiks and Uzbeks as two nations that “the Bolsheviks had liberated from the imperialistic Russian empire” (Hirsch, 2000, pp. 224-5). For our purposes here, it is important to note that the creation of these official nationalities made the Soviet Union—an empire of nations—an empire that lasted until 1991.

Thus, we see that even at the end of the twentieth century, Smith’s “world of similar compact nations” fails historical scrutiny. This observation aside, perhaps the modernists have a point. Perhaps nationalism is an uncontested European ideological legacy, if it is viewed simply as a blueprint for independence in all of the world’s future states. European political and cultural hegemony over the last two centuries certainly permits this possibility. *But an exaggerated emphasis on nationalism does not equal the birth of the nation.*

5. Ma’at, Literature, and Education

This brings us to Smith’s fourth and final point: that the nation requires “a single political culture” and “public mass, education.” In ancient Egypt, religion was an integral part of both government and society; politics and religion were interwoven and identity was focused on both (David, 1998, p. 3). After the Archaic Period (3100-2687 B.C.E.), the Old Kingdom, and the relative political decentralization of the First Intermediate Period—the pharaohs of the Middle Kingdom (2061-1664 B.C.E.) redefined the relationship between the cosmos and society and publicized that relationship in a literary genre that Egyptologists call “Wisdom Literature.” Texts such as *The Instruction Addressed to King Merikare*, *The Prophecies of Neferti*, *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*, *The Dispute Between A Man and His Ba*, and *The Story of Sinhue*, written by a professional caste of scribes, conveyed to the masses what it meant to be an Egyptian, living under what Assmann calls “the connective justice” of *Ma’at* (2002, pp. 117-193).

The Old kingdom, prior to unification by Narmer (c. 3100 B.C.E), had been preceded by a phase of rival chiefdoms that culminated in a clear-cut dualism between north and south. One thousand years later, after the decline of the Sixth Dynasty (2374-2190 B.C.E.), the state once again disintegrated into regions ruled by local *nomarchs* that were only nominally under the central administration at Memphis. The Theban Eleventh Dynasty (2061-1991 B.C.E.) eventually reunited the land under Mentuhotep II. However, only with the accession of Amenemhet in 1991 B.C.E. and the founding of the Twelfth Dynasty did the pharonic state really regain its stability (Assmann, 2002, p 117). This Twelfth Dynasty is a cultural apogee in the civilization of ancient Egypt. In the New Kingdom (1569-1081 B.C.E), the writings of the Middle Kingdom were elevated to canonical status and they retained this status until the end of pharonic history. Subsequent epochs considered the cultural achievements of the Middle Kingdom the timeless and definitive expression of the nation’s civilization.

The kings of the unified Twelfth Dynasty, having to assert themselves against the largely literate, economically and militarily powerful local nomarchs, also had to win over the lower strata. These objectives could be achieved neither by force, nor by impressive monumental architecture alone. The pharaoh also had to reign by the power of the word. Thus, we find in *The Instruction Addressed to King Merikare*, a treatise on kingship: “If you are skilled in speech, you will win; The tongue is [a king’s sword]; Speaking is stronger than all fighting” (Lichtheim, 1973, p. 99). The kings of Dynasty Twelve placed kingship on an entirely new plane of legitimacy; they supplemented but did not replace the traditional religious foundations of the state by preserving a stylized memory of rule by nomarchs as “the chaos that their newly restored state would prevent from recurring.” And, works such as *The Prophecies of Neferti* helped to make the chaos of the First Intermediate Period a classical motif (Assmann, 2002, pp. 119 and 143).

The kings of the Middle Kingdom drew on a new genre—literature—and developed it for their own propagandistic purposes. They emphasized the king as one chosen by the gods and created and disseminated a form of “Loyalist Religion.” This literature, in the form of narratives, lamentations, instructions and dialogues was produced in the domain of schools. In the schools of ancient Egypt the ability to write was acquired through learning texts by rote and rewriting them from memory. Consequently, learning to write meant acquiring a fund of established knowledge. This knowledge was not, however, expertise on administrative and religious duties, but on the “fundamental and normative attitudes of Egyptian culture, the acquisition of which made an apprentice scribe into an educated, well-brought-up, right thinking Egyptian” (Assmann, 2002, pp. 121-4). Knowledge of how to behave, *though still communicated orally*, was now codified in writing. According to Assmann, “In the ancient Egyptian world the implicit form of initiation into ‘right living’ through imitation doubtless existed alongside an oral tradition of instruction explicitly conveyed by the fathers” (p. 125). This traditional paternal practice provided the fictional framework for the Wisdom Literature, allowing its content to be cast in familiar terms, such as the authority of the father, or the review of life on the threshold of death. *The Instruction of King Amenemhet* is a prime example of this genre (See Lichtheim, 1973, pp. 135-139).

Moreover, by establishing a connection between doing something for one another and the human capacity for memory, some of these texts also emphasized the temporal dimension of *Ma’at*. The covetous man thinks only of himself and needs no memory, thus, in the *Dispute Between A Man and his Ba*, we read: “To whom shall I speak today? The past is not remembered, Now one does not help him who helped” (Lichtheim, 1973, p. 167). Memory and action belong together. Without the past, there is no action. The *Dispute* focuses specifically on the problem of solitude; its message is not that man is alone in this world, but that without *Ma’at* he is bound to become increasingly isolated. The concept of *Ma’at* is justice—an ordered legal system among men and the gods. The pharaohs represent god on earth and the state translates and ensures the justice of this rule. The world is held together by this “connective justice” and does not need another world in the hereafter. The judgment of the dead is not a great divide between this world and the next; rather it binds both worlds inseparably (Assmann, 2002, pp. 181-2).

Likewise, in *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant* we read:

The slothful has no yesterday, no memory, no conscience,
no responsibility, no past... A Good character returns to his
place of yesterday, for it is commanded: do something
for him who does something in order to ensure that he
remains active. This is to thank him for what he has done...
(Assmann, 2002, p. 128).

Here, there is clearly an altruistic ideal. *Ma’at* guarantees, as noted in *The Instruction Addressed to King Merikare*, that “A blow is repaid by its like, to every action there is a response” (Lichtheim, 1973, p. 105). Justice links human action to human destiny and welds individuals into a community. In short, we are not in the presence of amorphous masses, but of society welded into community by a system of education predicated upon justice. The image of humanity in ancient Egypt saw the aim of the individual in the development of social connections (Assmann, 2002 pp. 133-6).

To further illustrate this point, we need but turn to *The Story of Sinuhe*, which is one of the central texts that every educated individual in ancient Egypt knew by heart. This fictional story, like most of the literature of the Middle Kingdom, became *an instrument of self observation for the culture in general*.

It impressed upon every citizen of ancient Egypt that while one could live happily and successfully in a foreign land, it was an abomination to die and be buried there. *Sinuhe*, and indeed the entire literature of the Middle Kingdom, presented pharonic rule not only as a political system, but also as a religion, a doctrine of salvation on the road to immortality that pointed the way to harmony with the gods and within the community (Assmann, 2002, pp. 138-142). For example, in *Merikare* again we read: “[D]o not prefer the wellborn to the commoner, [C]hoose a man on account of his skills, [T]hen all crafts are done” (Lichtheim, 1973, p. 101). This passage illustrates that the political hierarchy of the state is the means by which the ruler “saves the weak from the hand of the strong,” thereby keeping the world habitable. The operative assumption here is that people can be brought to respect the law and spare the weak, not just through threats of punishment, but above all, *through education*. Though man may not be just by nature, he has an innate leaning toward justice and can be educated by “appeals to that instinctive proclivity” (Assmann, 2002, pp. 155-6).

Furthermore, the idea of judgment of the dead was crucial to both the Osirian religion and this new propaganda of the Middle Kingdom. Osiris only really started to become a cult figure in the Fifth Dynasty (2513-2374 B.C.E.). The advent of Osirianism opened a new path to salvation parallel to the monumental route. Now, alongside of monumental stone tombs, were pronouncements such as “The (true) tomb is built by doing right” or [T]he (true) monument to a man is his virtue” (Assmann, 2002, p. 159). Moreover, in the list of offences punished in *The Book of the Dead*, the most prominent are sins against human fellowship, transgressions of moral obligations to help and protect, to be considerate and public-spirited, modest and self-effacing:

I was not covetous; I did not steal; I have never killed anyone...
 I have not robbed portions, nor practiced grain usury...
 I have not lied...I have not turned a deaf ear to the words of truth...
 I have inflicted no pain, I have not let others go hungry...
 (Assmann, 2002, p. 165).

In ancient Egypt, we see a single sphere that was shared by gods and humans alike and governed by the same laws of harmony--*Ma'at*—that demanded a communal citizenry.

The collapse of the Old Kingdom had called traditional values into question. The literature of the Middle Kingdom and the systematic education policy initiated under the Twelfth Dynasty codified the social norms that were central to the reorganization of the theocratic state. However, as we have seen, these texts were addressed not only to the court officials and royal subjects, but also to the pharaohs themselves. According to Assmann, “(The Wisdom Literature) conveyed *a comprehensive educational program for the king and his subjects alike* (italics mine) and encouraged profound reflection on the fundamental structure of society, extending even to the position and role of the king within the larger community.”(p. 124).

6. Conclusion

There are many schools of thought on nationalism and the origin of the nation. Despite the recent popularity of postmodernist thought (See Ozkirmili, 2005), modernism is still the school that is embraced by most social scientists. Yet, the idea that nationalism emerged in Western Europe, as a by-product of capitalist industrialization and the flowering of liberal democracy, and thereafter became the blueprint for global political organization, was more a consequence of European hegemony than it was the development of a new kind of state. The idea that the state and the ethnic unit should be coterminous, coupled with a new secular understanding of citizenship, does not imply that the modern era was the first era to produce national citizenship. Moreover, even if we accept Smith’s four criteria--citizenship, a unified economy, a world of compact nations, and mass education—as indicative of the model that the many polities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries aspired to, we must also acknowledge the existence of these phenomena in the Mediterranean world of ancient Egypt. Ancient Egypt was a territorially defined theocracy in which citizens under the guiding principle of *Ma'at*, lived within a unified national economy. It also existed in an historical era in which, like the modern twentieth century, the empire and the theocratic state existed side by side. Clearly, though the nation may have come of age in the modern era, it was born in antiquity.

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