Prologue

Nationality is something sentimental too; it is
body and soul at the same time.

Ernest Renan, *What Is a Nation?*

HOW DOES ONE BECOME viscerally French, English, Indian, and so on? What is it that makes one *feel* irrefragably so? What does it take for us to turn into those embodied, emotional nationals, even as we see ourselves as "so many other things," and much as we at times love to disown "our own nation"? How does this incarnation of the nation occur in our souls, minds, and bodies? Conversely, if love of the nation is spontaneous and instant, "in your guts," why does it need to be constantly reproduced and sustained?

The present entanglement of "the national and the global" has brought renewed salience to these questions. Movements of populations across national borders have increased in visibility, and discourses about "the global" in vocality. Yet neither has shooed away the reality and lived experience of nationhood. Contrary to some wishful thinking, the nation is here to stay. So are the many visceral expressions and manifestations of national belonging. The issue of civic entitlement, too, is as fraught as ever, in light not only of recent migrations but also of the dialectical redefinitions of the so-called local and global. These reflect in competing imaginings *within* nation-states the world over to the point that different visions of the nation have seen the radicalizing of the "production and reproduction of majorities and minorities," at times leading to violent confrontation. In India, the confrontation has mainly occurred between Hindu nationalists and members of the larger minority, that is, Muslims. Attempts made by extreme Hindu right-wing political parties are aimed at redefining membership in the national community along ethnic and religious lines; this entails building an exclusively Hindu raj whence the members of Muslim and

other non-Hindu—as well as "improperly Hindu"—communities would be excluded. These exclusivist endeavors have long been accompanied with repeated outbreaks of violence of varying magnitude. They have also generated activist, intellectual, and scholarly engagement.

Studying communal violence was until fifteen years ago largely the preserve of political scientists exploring nationalism and its various predicaments (Vincent 1990: 26). Today, by contrast, these topics have become central for anthropologists interested in the political. Apart from burgeoning work on democracy, much of the literature in India so far has understandably concentrated on riots and their aftermath. Yet such a trend has largely missed out on the "before" of violence, that is, the larger *upstream* processes potentially feeding into aggressive political projects. These are nurtured over many years, even decades. In the "making and continuation of contemporary political arrangements," they have largely contributed to the "production and reproduction of majorities and minorities," which historian Gyanendra Pandey (2006: 1) has called "routine violence." What feeds into exclusivist political projects indeed does not spring ex nihilo; rather, it is constantly reproduced and takes shape in the many folds of everyday life. Senses of belonging, these most seemingly natural and obvious pillars of identity, are not manifested only in forms of extreme violence. Especially in times of political stability, senses of belonging are "naturalized" in the banality of quotidian processes.

This book therefore shifts the focus away from registered sites of extraordinary communal violence onto ones of daily production of "banal nationalism."[1] The phrase refers to the experience of nationalism being so integral to people's lives that it goes unnoticed most of the time. Yet, as we shall see, the banal nationalism thus constructed in the routine of everyday life is an ever incomplete one: it is constantly in the making. The very impossibility of completion, though unnoticed as it may be in the folds of daily life, also makes this process a source of anxiety. The same obtains of many other "banal" nationalisms, and the formulation appropriately denotes the formation of patriotic sentiments in all kinds of nations, whether "established" or younger ones.[2] Similarly, the distinction between "national" and "nationalist" is a tenuous one, more a matter of perspective than of objective science. What is deemed "national only," in the sense of a justifiable and legitimate expression or manifestation of interest in the nation, versus what is condemned as "nationalist," in the sense of supposedly irrational passions of nationhood, is often really the same, depending on the onlooker's perspective. Such notional relativity informs much of this

book, and I will use the terms "national" and "nationalist" almost interchangeably. Documenting the making of banal nationalism, then, entails scrutinizing the daily, apparently benign production and reproduction of processes of local, regional, and national identity formation, or rather, identification.

Some brief clarification is in order. I find the notion of "identification," as an analytical tool, more precise and heuristic than that of "identity." It is understood that identities are neither individual nor purely collective but rather provide means for individuals to internalize belonging and for the community to instate or prescribe subjectivities (Balibar 2003). Yet the problem with the term and its usages is that in many analyses, "identities" tend to get "congealed" and "essentialized" in fixed space and time. In contrast, the term "identification" lays stress on the processual agency of social actors. It thus leaves the way open for indeterminacy and the necessarily fragmentary character of all projects of self-formation, be they individual or collective. Furthermore, this is so even if and when the *act* of social actor(s) identifying is consubstantial to the psychological *orientation* of the self in regard to the object of identification, with a resulting feeling of close emotional association; or even when the process is deemed largely unconscious and denotes the modeling by an individual or a group of thoughts, feelings, and actions after those attributed to an object are incorporated as a mental image. These definitions are neither mutually exclusive nor contradictory, and we shall see how a psychoanalytic approach may in part illuminate aspects of national and regional identifications (Chapter 3), both at a collective and an individual level (see Obeyesekere 1981, 1990 for an exemplification of how these two levels articulate in a psychoanalytic anthropology; Borneman 2004 for a psychoanalytic interpretation of the end of political regimes). To a significant extent, this book is precisely concerned with the agency *within* the internalization of socialization. Of interest here is what both becomes *and* begets an "unconscious" process (Hall 1996; Segal 1996). However much solidly grounded, identification remains fleeting and changing; it is better understood as a resource, leaving space for competing modes of action and appropriation. Where the term "identities" appears, then, it will be to particularly emphasize the fixedness resulting from identification processes—a fixedness often resonant with specific political projects that make this crystallization central to discourses and practices of representation for a given social group. But prior to identity and its attendant political repertoire awaiting deployment in myriad forms, there is "identification."

Increasingly in the world of nation-states today, local, regional, and national processes of identification are in part relayed by state institutions penetrating everyday life. Most potent among them is formal education, seen as both a prerequisite for the stability of the state and a powerful means of national integration.[3] Consequently, the socialization of children has become more intricately embedded in a multiplicity of culturally defined norms and rules from an early age (Kumar 2001). This also occurs in the western regional state of Maharashtra, where I conducted fieldwork in primary schools and kindergartens in the locality of Kolhapur in the late 1990s and early 2000s. An analysis of socialization can therefore no longer confine itself to a study of initiation rituals or everyday processes occurring at the levels of family, caste, community, village, neighborhood, and so on, all traditional objects of anthropological inquiry. For an overwhelming majority of urban and rural Maharashtrians today, patterns of authority and models of behavior are jointly produced by family members (whether parents or other elders) *and* teachers. The family, apart from mass media, may still be the primary source of influence about politics. Yet in a regional state where the literacy rate averages 75 percent, the first stages of schooling in particular play a crucial part in providing exposure to political life and symbols of nationality and nationhood, as they do in other nation-states (Connell 1975).

Formal education has become a major arena of dispute on the subcontinent in recent years. In India, in particular, its prominence in the fierce debates pitting partisans of Hindu nationalist (*Hiṇḍutva*) forces against secularists has generated anxieties among members of the minorities, social activists, intellectuals, and scholars alike. After a *Hindutva*-led coalition came into power in the 1990s, the population felt the menace of an accrued Hinduization of the core institutions of Indian society. At stake was the potential unraveling of the nation-state's secular constitutional principles. Much public attention focused on the rewriting of history and the redesigning of secondary school curriculum (Menon and Rajalakshmi 1998; Muralidharan and Pande 1998; Sahmat 2002; Sahmat and Sabrang.com 2002; Deb 2003; Habib, Jaiswal, and Mukherjee 2003; Mohammad-Arif 2005). These are definitely crucial indications of the ideological choices made by Hindu right-wing forces with respect to the production of future generations of Indian (or Hindu?) citizens.[4] The emphasis placed on secondary and higher education (in keeping with a predisposition dating back to colonial times) has nevertheless preempted a clear understanding of the very *process* of contemporary nation building. It also raises questions about the relationship of schooling to nation building and underlying theories of learning, suggesting

that children of a younger age are alien—or, at best, irrelevant—to political processes, including those of patriotism and nationalism. By contrast, I aim to demonstrate in this book that crucial to the production of local, regional, or national attachments are the educational processes taking place from a much earlier age, right from the beginning of socialization and as early as kindergarten.

Kindergartens and primary schools are unexpectedly fruitful sites for exploring the culturally gendered production of the political in modern nation-states. These spaces mediate home and nation, playing a constitutive role in the daily lives of children who move back and forth between them. Schooling does not only entail modeling of disciplined bodies and "normalized" social and political persons (Foucault 1979, 1981); just as important is social actors' embodied cultural and social (re)production of regional and national senses of belonging and identifications. Central to my demonstration is a notion that these feed on, and into, lived experiences of sensory and emotional bonding developed in the everyday intimacy of home and family.

The heart of my project therefore articulates a political anthropology of the senses with one of embodied passions and emotions. Rather than work along the Geertzian lines of a dichotomy between civil and primordial ties that would run the risk of further naturalizing an arbitrary distinction between "North/West" societies and their "less fortunate South/East" counterparts, I contend that focusing on the *emotional and embodied* production of the political provides a more radical approach in any given context. Such a framework furnishes a way out of binary models as well as intellectual and theoretical biases.[5] It also allows one to register more complex realities so far left largely unexplored. In this book, I show how processes of identity formation are embodied daily and draw upon cultural repertoires of emotionality. Emotionality is produced through, and feeds into, political, cultural, social, economic, and gender negotiations of nationhood and citizenship central to the everyday production of rights and entitlements. In these everyday processes of subject, self-, and national formation, both the state and its representatives, and ordinary citizens—including children—play a crucial part. Just as important, these processes acquire meaning as *embodied experiences involving sensory (re)configurations.*

Whereas the notion of "sense of belonging" has become commonplace in discussions of national sentiments, the emotional and sensory dimension invoked by such a phrase has received scant attention.[6] Here, by taking the "senses" seriously, I seek to illuminate the ways in which emotions and passions, as socially and culturally produced, form an integral part of forming the senses

of national belonging. Documenting the emotional sensory and embodied production entering in the daily manufacturing of nationhood and citizenship implies querying: How do the senses come into play? How are they harnessed in the everyday project of nation building at the most banal and quotidian level of experience? How are they actively produced, reshaped, and reinterpreted by social actors? To address these questions requires a phenomenological approach, which is developed in this book, particularly in Chapters 2 and 3.

A phenomenological approach does not preclude a comparative project. On the contrary, it calls for one that would jointly pay attention to the complexities of vernacular realities, not only to rightfully "decenter" Europe (Chakrabarty 2002) but also to illuminate both the contingent nature and the concomitant processes of social and political formations in different parts of the world, whether in the so-called West or in India. In their explorations of the ritual, cultural, and linguistic idioms of "other" societies, anthropologists have long demonstrated the necessity to heed local semantic and vernacular notions. With regard to the study of the political modernity–related topics of nationalism, civil society, and citizenship, however, such an idiomatic concern has remained conspicuously absent. The reason may be that reflection on, and exploration of, these topics has traditionally been the preserve of political philosophy and political science, whose theoretical instruments are grounded in a European tradition claiming universality. Nevertheless, even critical perspectives in relation to the foundational period of the Enlightenment have largely neglected vernacular languages in their reflection on the modalities of European-originated political concepts and notions in non-European contexts (for notable exceptions, see Kaviraj 1992; Burghart 1996; Rajagopal 2001).

Arguably, the neglect of vernacular categories has precluded an understanding of both their attendant social and cultural semantic repertoires and local negotiations. Yet their unraveling remains indispensable for a thorough comprehension of the cultural entailments of political processes, forms, and models, especially of the nation-state. The fact that the modern nation-state is a "foreign transplant" in India, for instance, should not monopolize the terms of debate. What requires scrutiny are the historical configurations and the modalities of the development of specific, idiosyncratic, local forms (Gupta 1995; Fuller and Benei 2001; Hansen and Stepputat 2001; Kaviraj and Khilnani 2001). Pursuing a quest of essential, irretrievably "emic" differences does not lead one very far.[7] To dismiss non-European political forms as purely nonviable under the pretense that they do not conform to either European ones or the original

model, or worse still, that they are associated with repertoires of a kind different from those deemed extant in the West is both unproductive and unfair. As I argued elsewhere (Benei 2005a), comparing Indian empirical facts with European theory has precluded heuristic understanding of both the Indian context and the analogies and similarities that might be drawn between the Euro-American and Indian cases, especially regarding the issue of secularism. The work of Peter van der Veer, for instance (1994, 2001; van der Veer and Lehmann 1999), has highlighted movements back and forth of the concomitant processes of social and political formations in the West and in India. Thus, arresting parallels and embedded developments of secularity, religious reform, and idioms of morality acquire visibility in *both* locations. This, in turn, illuminates the measure of contingency in Europe's or India's "unique" trajectories. It also reinscribes their respective uniqueness in a web of parallels, cross-borrowings, and similarities as part of a worldwide humanity. Such a comparative endeavor, although not occupying center stage, also animates the soul of this book.

Before inviting the reader to pursue further, I wish to share two incidents as a caveat. The first was related to me by one of my colleagues in Britain upon his return from a lecture tour of U.S. universities in 2003, just at the time of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. Some students, mainly American and Indian, commented to him on the mistrust of all things patriotic and nationalist they perceived in my writings. Of course, the different genealogies and realities of nationalism in Western Europe, the United States, and India probably accounted in part for their comments. Yet these comments arrested me, because, perhaps somewhat naively, I had until then assumed that being critical of patriotism and nationalism was any anthropologist's job. Don't most of our lives spent as academics revolve around deconstructing naturalized "things," be they common sense, feelings, narratives, practices, or all of these together?[8] The second incident occurred a few months later, in July of that same year. I had been invited to give a lecture at the "Gender Seminar Series" of a well-known Indian university's department of sociology. I had chosen to present the premise of what is now Chapter 3 in this book. The students were mostly female, including only three or four males, one of whom I had met earlier in the corridor. Hearing that I was visiting from an academic institution located in Britain, he quipped: "So you have come funded by the VHP or some other such *Hindutva* organization?" I was rather puzzled and unsure of the question's implications with respect to NRI funding and the general climate of communal violence in Gujarat and elsewhere in India at the time. I did not yet know this student was

Muslim. My attempts at reassuring him of my benign funding sources hardly did anything to dispel the doubtful look on his face. I then gave the talk, followed by a discussion. After a few noncommittal questions came this particular student's turn. He launched into an accusatory diatribe of pro-*Hindutva* sympathies. Apparently, what had irked him was my focusing on *Hindutva*-related practices—and exemplifying a gesture during presentation—occurring during the nationalist ritual marking the beginning of school days in ordinary Marathi schools (Chapter 1). Following some clarification on my part, the exchange continued after the seminar, the student telling me of his and his parents' secularist involvement. To this day, I have remained thankful for his sharing with me, however briefly, his experience of growing up in Bombay/Mumbai in the highly volatile 1990s and early 2000s.

What these two incidents illustrate is the acute sensitivity of the subjects I address in this book. That I, an outsider, could be understood to hold such extreme and antithetical positions on nationalism ultimately confirms the highly contentious and visceral nature of everyday processes of nation building. I have attempted to do as much justice as possible to the complexity of social, cultural, and political life in this part of India. May it provide the reader with enough to cultivate sensitivity toward these delicate issues. This, at any rate, is what I see as the wider purpose of an anthropological contribution.