CHAPTER SIX

Race and Ethnicity

Conceptual Knots in Early Modern Culture

NOÉMIE NDIAYE

In *The Merchant of Venice*, the racism that fuels Portia's rejection of the Prince of Morocco often gets diluted when read in the wake of her rejection of a series of foreign suitors that includes the Prince of Aragon, the Neapolitan Prince, the County Palatine, the French Lord, the Duke of Saxony's nephew and – last but not least – the young Baron of England and the Scottish Lord, his neighbour. Read as one item in that list, the Prince of Morocco, an early modern avatar of the adoring magus Balthasar represented as Black in European iconography since the fifteenth century, could be construed as the embodiment of one Euro-Mediterranean ethnicity among many others, all of which are unsuited to the tastes of the Italian Portia (Figure 6.1). In her burlesque series of national stereotypes, Germans are drunkards, Iberian Neapolitans are obsessed with horsemanship, Frenchmen are hyperactive and affected, Englishmen know no languages and they ape other nations. And yet, the Prince of Morocco does not feature in Portia's catalogue of national characters; rather, he is rejected on the basis of his physical appearance: 'if he have the condition of a saint and the complexion of a devil, I had rather he should shrive me than wive me' (1.2.111–13). After Morocco fails to pick the right casket and thereby win her hand, she rejoices and reiterates: 'Let all of his complexion choose me so' (2.7.79).

His case is adjudicated differently. As the field of early modern critical race studies has shown since the 1990s, early modern anti-Black discourse was informed by properly racial modes of thinking.[1] As entangled as racial thinking might have been with ideas of ethnicity, it was distinct from them. Such confusion is not unique to readings of the early modern period: the Chicago School of Sociology, for instance, which dominated approaches to race and race relations in the United States until the 1960s, subsumed racial difference into ethnicity, thereby stalling political progress until the civil rights movement forced sociological discourse to move beyond that paradigm (Omi and Winant 1987: 14–20). The civil right's movement knew that racism cannot be dismantled when race is studied through the lens of ethnicity. What was true in the 1960s was true in the early modern period: for Portia, the Prince of Morocco's difference is *different*. This chapter seeks to disentangle the often conflated notions of race and ethnicity in the early modern world, with a particular focus on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English, French and Spanish cultures.

This chapter was completed with the generous support of the Folger Shakespeare Library.

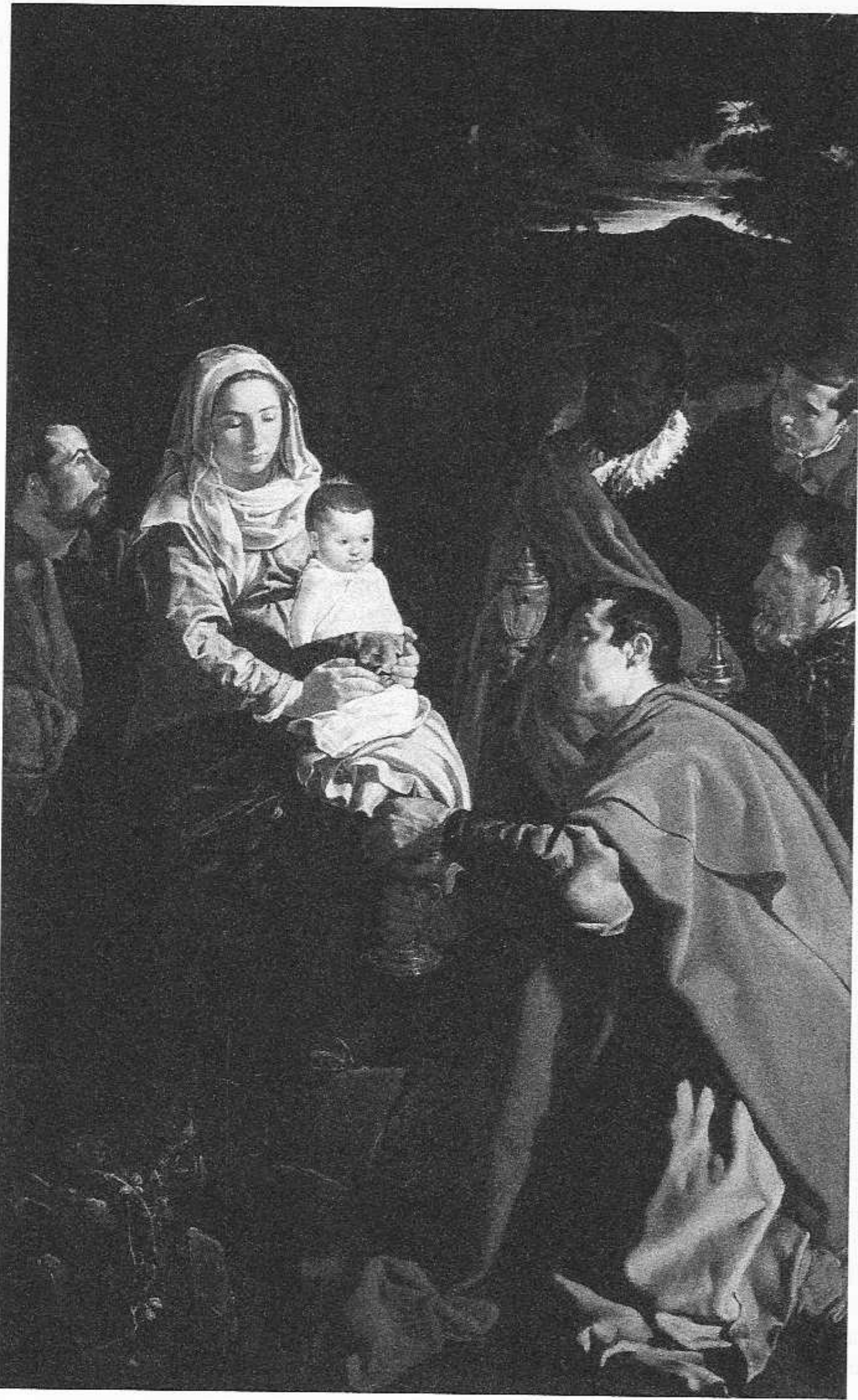

FIGURE 6.1 Diego Velázquez, *The Adoration of the Magi*, 1619. © Universal History Archive/ Universal Images Group/Getty Images.

KEYWORDS: ETHNICITY, NATION, RACE

Ethnicity is a concept whose usefulness to appraise early modern identity formations is limited. In early modern Europe, the term 'ethnic' strictly meant pagan, or non-Christian: thus, Europeans, assembled in Christian nations, certainly did not think of themselves as having any sort of 'ethnicity'. And yet, while the validity of the term 'race' in historical discourse focusing on the early modern period has been under constant scrutiny ever since the inception of the field of early modern critical race studies thirty years ago, the term 'ethnicity', widely favoured by scholars who deem the term 'race' anachronistic, has remained conspicuously unexamined.[2] Given the semantic gap between early modern and contemporary understandings of 'ethnicity', the reasons behind modern scholars' enthusiastic use of that category warrants a preliminary analysis.

To people whose native language has no equivalent for the English word 'ethnicity', such as the author of the present essay,[3] that term is, perhaps ironically, an ethnographic curiosity in itself. As Werner Sollors reminds us, the term was first used by American sociologist W. Lloyd Warner in 1941, 'to conceptualize ethnic differentiation on a broader basis than "national origin" (which does not include Negroes and presents problems with native-born descendants of immigrants)' while 'race was discredited by the emergence of fascism' (Sollors 1996: x). Thus, 'the term was intended to substitute for "race" at a time when the older word had become deeply compromised by racism' (xxix). Such attempts at substitution prove that the widely acknowledged fallacy and dangerousness of the concept of race are not coterminous with race's demise as a powerful epistemological tool. The term 'ethnicity' was thus, from its very inception, spurred by a reluctance – regardless of whatever laudable intentions might have motivated that reluctance – to use the word race in order to talk about race.

That reluctance explains the contradictions at the core of the concept of 'ethnicity'. The term is broadly defined as 'status in respect of membership of a group regarded as ultimately of common descent, or having a common national or cultural tradition; ethnic character' (*OED Online* 2019). The slippage between culture (which is constructed and can be acquired) and descent (which is not) within the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition is also at work in the dominant definition of the term used among social scientists today, which was articulated by R. A. Schermerhorn:

> An ethnic group is ... a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic element defined as the epitome of peoplehood. Examples of such symbolic elements are: kinship pattern, physical contiguity (as in localism or sectionalism), religious affiliation, language or dialect forms, tribal affiliation, nationality, phenotypical features, or any combination of these. A necessary accompaniment is some consciousness of kind among members of the group.
>
> (quoted in Sollors 1996: xii)

Stuart Hall gets to the heart of the matter when he explains that, although ethnicity is the sum of 'shared languages, traditions, religious beliefs, cultural ideas, customs, and rituals that bind together particular groups' (2017: 83),

> it is experienced and imagined by many not as a discursive construction but as having acquired the durability of nature itself ... it is the discursive form in which cultural

> identity appears as part of 'kith and kin,' rooted in 'blood and soil' ... whereas race is grounded in the biological and slides toward the cultural, ethnos or ethnicity ... appears to be grounded exclusively in the cultural ... yet it constantly slides – especially through commonsensical conceptions of kinship – toward a transcultural and even transcendental fix in common blood, inheritance, and ancestry, all of which gives ethnicity an originary foundation in nature that puts it beyond the reach of history.
>
> (2017: 107–9)

It is that very potential for 'sliding' towards the naturalized and biologized that conveniently allows the term 'ethnicity' to talk about race without saying so.

Because of the structurally fraught relation between the terms race and ethnicity, this chapter will not use the latter; in its stead, it will invoke the early modern category of the nation, a structure articulating the central questions of community and belonging relevant to our theme. As Nicholas Hudson observes, until the late eighteenth century, nation was the dominant concept used to categorize people around the world, outweighing 'anything approaching a modern tendency to identify a particular skin-color or physiognomy with a "race"' (1996: 250). Benedict Anderson famously and usefully defines the nation as

> An imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion .... The nation is imagined as limited because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind .... It is imagined as sovereign because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm .... Finally it is imagined as a community because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.
>
> (1983: 6–7)

Although Anderson would not argue for the existence of nations as he defines them prior to the late eighteenth century, this chapter shares Marcus Keller's premise, influenced by Etienne Balibar, that 'the idea of nationhood and the process of nationalization are not tied to the existence of the nation-state' (2011: 5). Anderson's vision can illuminate early modern nations.[4]

English lexicographer John Baret defined a nation as 'a people: sometyme a kindred. *Gens, gentis*, f. ge. Virg. *ἔθνος* .... A nation, a people hauing their beginning in the countrye where they dwell' (1574). That definition was to remain fairly stable in English lexicons for almost a century. Early modern definitions of nations thus hinged on a sense of 'from here-ness': a nation was imagined as a community of natives bound to one another and to their land by birth. David J. Baker comments on the elasticity of the early modern nation as 'both a distinct geopolitical entity, and, variously, as one among the "peoples," "ethnic cultures," and/or "locally defined communities" that such an entity may have displaced, subsumed, or integrated in the early modern period' (1997: 6). That elasticity was not unique to the British definition: the Spanish definition of the terms, for instance, makes room for what we would read as regional identities, making the *nación* a synonym for 'realm, or large province, such as the Spanish nation' (*vale reyno a provincia estendida como la nacion Española*) (Covarrubias 1611: 560). In all

cases, the nation designated a people bound by birth into a community that mapped onto a clearly designated geographical area (Figure 6.2).[5] Such communities, Keller notes, were often evoked through the essentializing metaphors of family, blood and grafting (2011: 4) – although the processes by which one could become incorporate into a nation were performative in nature.

FIGURE 6.2 Marguerite Van der Mael, *Tableau des nations de l'Europe sous le règne de Louis XIII, en tout victorieux*, 1669. © BNF Gallica. Public domain.

Indeed, legal historian Tamar Herzog compellingly argues that 'the exercise of rights, rather than legal enactments of official declarations, defined the boundaries of early modern communities' (2003: 6) in Spain, Latin America, France, England and Italy (15). Belonging to a political community then 'was constituted on its own, at the moment when people acted as if they felt attached to the community' (7) by complying with specific duties and exercising specific rights. In other words, the early modern nation might have been theoretically defined by an ideal of nativeness, but in practice 'nativeness had its own logic. This logic determined that people who were integrated in the community and were willing to comply with its duties were indeed natives, independent of their place of birth or descent and independent of formal declarations' (9). Nativeness was a performative practice.[6] The present chapter focuses on the complex relations between the nation thus defined and the concept of race as it emerged and evolved in the early modern period: a core idea here is that race affected the performative processes through which early modern nations defined themselves by determining who could efficiently engage in the performative practices of national belonging.

Race as discussed in the field of critical race theory is a system of power falsely packaged as a system of knowledge in order to justify unequal distributions of rights, resources and privileges in multicultural societies.[7] Racial thinking selects attributes strategically (those can be, for instance, religious, status-based or appearance-based), it somatizes those attributes (often through the symbolism of blood, as noted by Kimberly Anne Coles et al. 2015), and it essentializes them, by turning them, with the help of the dominant epistemic discourses of the time, into hereditary markers that justify the position of those attributes' owners in the social hierarchy. Thus, race is not defined by its content, or what it is – which changes across time and space – but by its effect, or what it does – which remains stable across time and space. In the sixteenth century, the dominant paradigms of race hinged on religious and status-based attributes – but the encounter with Africans and Indigenous Americans in the age of discovery followed by the development of de facto colour-based slavery in the Iberian world at the end of the fifteenth century led the early modern racial matrix to produce a new paradigm, hinging on phenotypical attributes, for which skin color quickly became a shorthand.[8] It is the interaction between that emergent racial paradigm and the performative contours of early modern nations that this chapter unpacks.

That interaction is usually described as some type of messy entanglement. Early modern critical race scholar Joyce Green Macdonald sees it as a 'mutual articulation',[9] and Lara Bovilsky uses the model of 'slippage' and 'shared vocabularies' to analyse that mutual articulation.[10] The present chapter reads the messy entanglement of race and nation as a dialectical movement. I argue that, in early modern Europe, a crucial reason why the old and powerful logic of the nation, which, in theory, should have halted the spread of racial thinking along new paradigmatic lines, proved so weak to do so in practice, is that the racial matrix was simply too good at helping performative nations strategically negotiate their own boundaries at specific junctures to be stopped. The usefulness of racial thinking in the process of nation building ensured that the new racial paradigm would become a key feature of early modern epistemes of identity.

THE LOGIC OF NATION AND THE LOGIC OF RACE

Bound to a specific land and terroir, each early modern nation was imagined as unique. In line with a literary tradition initiated in the thirteenth century, in his *Discourse upon Usury* (1572), Thomas Wilson paints national characters based on the idea that 'as

everyone of these countreys hath its especial faults, so they have their proper vertues and several qualyties, more excellent than any other nation' (quoted in Hoenselaars 1992: 21).[11] Here again, this mode of thinking is not limited to England: Ellen Welch notes that, in the French cultural context,

> In Antoine Furetière's words, '*chaque nation a son caractère particulier*' [each nation has its own character], an assumption conveyed in common phrases such as '*l'humeur de la nation*' [the humour of the nation] or '*le génie de la nation*' [the genius of the nation]. This conception of nationality as ethnicity is what allowed seventeenth-century French writers to refer to 'Italiens' or 'Allemands' centuries before Italy or Germany had come into being as nations in the modern, political sense of that term.
>
> (2013: 7)

Early modern Europeans may have held xenophobic and caricatural views of their neighbours, but those views relied on the notion that each nation had its own unique quality. The logic of the nation, because it hinged on the idea of uniqueness, was at odds with the logic of racial thinking, which makes invisible all singularities in order to enhance its one strategically selected attribute. And yet, despite its antiquity and its hold on collective imagination, the logic of the nation proved surprisingly weak to stem the expansion of racial thinking in the early modern period.

Naturally, the logic of the nation had long coexisted with discourses that lumped people into larger supranational bodies by virtue of some essentialized quality. Such, for instance, was the religious discourse that mapped global human population upon the descent of Noah's three sons, giving Europe to Japhet, Asia to Sem and construing Africans – the descendants of the cursed son Ham – as naturally fit to serve the rest of Noah's posterity. That division of mankind into hierarchically organized continental groups endowed with their own set of qualities travelled from religious to geographical and ethnographic discourse, manifesting in the allegorical aesthetics of the four continents which came to pervade early modern culture through genres as varied as court masques, street pageants, atlas frontispieces, or even almanacs (Figure 6.3). In the realm of medical discourse, the logic identified by Mary Floyd-Wilson as 'geohumoralism' – according to which the world was divided into three large regions whose different climes affected the humoral complexion of their inhabitants and thus their temperament and character – similarly erased national singularities without a blink (2003: 23–47). Although geohumoralism could be – and often was – scaled down to account for the character of individual nations, it was predicated upon a lumping logic that could potentially be mobilized for racializing purposes. All those discourses obtained across Renaissance Europe, and across the porous boundaries between elite and popular culture.

The racializing potential of that discursive nexus was activated – that is to say, the racial matrix started mobilizing it – when the economic interests accrued during the age of discovery required it. When the new racial paradigm for which skin tone was quickly becoming a shorthand expressed itself through that discursive nexus, the logic of the nation infallibly yielded the place. Travel writing provides a good view of the strategic nature of negotiations between the logic of nation and the logic of race. In *The Golden Trade* (1623), for instance, Richard Jobson recounts his attempt at entering the trans-Saharan gold trade, and he encourages his fellow Englishmen to join his efforts. Jobson describes the various 'nations' he encountered 'within four leagues of the river Gambra' (1623: 8): they include 'Blackmen alias Mandingos or Ethiopians' 'who are Lords, and

FIGURE 6.3 Marguerite Van der Mael, *L'Adoration des Nations*, 1672. © BNF Gallica. Public domain.

Commaunders of this country, and professe themselues the naturall Inhabitants' (37), but also the 'Fulbies', a 'tawny people' (33) speaking a language different from their Mandingo masters, whom Jobson likens to 'Gypsies', whose female beauty he praises, and whose cleanliness he commends as superior to that of the 'Irish Calios' (37). Finally, he describes the treacherous Portingall of mixed African and Portuguese descent, mulattoes who retain the Portuguese language but not the Christian religion, and, whom Jobson thinks the English would do well to remove from the region (28–33). In his detailed account, Jobson overwhelmingly uses the logic of the nation, moved as he is by a desire to develop and impart a granular knowledge of potential Gambian business partners, like any keen tradesman would. By contrast, the slave trading captain John Hawkins, when he recalls his attempt at abducting 'some Negrose' in Cabo Verde and along the Guinea coast on his way to the West Indies in 1569, is thoroughly uninterested in the granular singularities of the various sub-Saharans he encounters. When a local king forms an alliance with him by promising slaves in exchange for military help, Hawkins simply describes his ally as a generic 'Kynge oppressed of other Kynges his neyghboures' (Hawkins 1569: A3r). The only moment in the whole account when Hawkins uses the word 'nation' is when he berates his ally for failing to deliver as many slaves as he had hoped for: he resents 'the Negro (in which nation is seldom or never found troth)' (A4r). Here, Hawkins is obviously not referring to his ally's specific African nation – which he does not even care to name. Rather, he uses the phrase 'Negro nation' to refer to a supranational group defined by one strategically selected attribute (black skin) construed as the mark of essential qualities (such as treachery) and fit for one specific social condition (slavery) – the 'Negro nation', in other words, refers to a race. As early as 1569, in the mind of a slave trader whose interests in intercultural encounters are obvious, the logic of the nation recedes, and the elasticity of the word 'nation' adopts racially recognizable contours.

The imbrication of the nation/race antithesis within dynamics of strategic power play is particularly palpable in one of the dominant media of early modern culture: theatre, which, based as it is upon the performance of identities, was a privileged medium for shaping, pressuring, complicating and disseminating discourses of the nation that mobilized ethnic and racial types. For instance, in his play *Escarmientos para el cuerdo* (*Word to the Wise*), published in 1636 but written about twenty years earlier (Gonano 2005: 221), Spanish playwright Tirso de Molina dramatizes the well-documented shipwreck of Manuel de Sousa y Sepulveda, the Portuguese captain-general of the island fortress of Diu, India, off the Cape of Good Hope on his way back to Lisbon (Tirso de Molina 1636).[12] Sousa y Sepulveda, along with his wife and crew, died – as early modern accounts go – because the Kaffir nation, which controlled the territory comprising Sofala and Mozambique, suspicious of European incursions into the African continent, refused to give them hospitality. At the end of Act 2, spectators meet two Kaffir characters, Quingo and Bunga, who, as they comment on the regular Portuguese incursions into their territory, provide a clear mental map of the scene's location in line with the logic of nations: we are two hundred leagues by sea from Sofala and one hundred leagues from the river Espíritu Santo (Tirso de Molina 1636: 67r). Their exchange is written in standard Castilian, construed by Spanish spectators as the exemplary language of mutual intelligence among members of the same nation. Enter the shipwrecked soldier and poet Carballo, to whom Bunga, despite the cannibalistic habits of her nation, takes a fancy; the moment Carballo becomes aware of their presence, the linguistic perspective of the scene

shifts, as spectators are led to perceive the Kaffir characters through Carballo's Galician ears – thus, they start speaking in gibberish (69r).

Carballo is taken by the Kaffirs, whose king later sends him as a messenger to Sousa y Sepulveda: negotiations are mediated by a Kaffir interpreter named Curguru, who 'knows our language more or less, because he has been involved in Portuguese ransoms' (*Éste sabe nuestra lengua / bien que mal, porque trató / en rescates portugueses*) (Tirso de Molina 1636: 31). Curguru speaks neither standard Castilian nor gibberish: he speaks the stage dialect known as *habla de negros*, or Blackspeak, in Hispanic studies – a stereotypical accent explicitly scripted in the playtext and meant to caricature the accent of enslaved people of African descent in the hispanophone world. That stage accent flattened the richness and uniqueness of the numerous Afro-Iberian accents that existed offstage into one unified grotesque Black sound.[13] In other words, the moment Tirso de Molina's play enters the realm of strategic negotiations involving captivity, ransom and slavery between Europeans and sub-Saharan Africans, spectators enter an acoustic and linguistic space predicated upon the logic of race – and not the logic of the nation any longer.

COLOURING THE NATION

The antithetical relation between the logic of nation and the logic of race did not survive the early modern period: it was gradually replaced by a synthetic relation informed by the same strategic and utilitarian motivations as its antithetical predecessor. It is by virtue of this synthetic relation that, in the words of Jean E. Howard, early modern English nationalism 'shares with modern nationalism a supposed fraternity of subjects within an imagined community defined in part by a bounded geographical essence and in part by cultural and racial differences from other such imagined communities' (1994: 101). Indeed, race proved to be a tool of critical purchase for nations to negotiate their boundaries in an age of nation-building.

For Benedict Anderson, such a synthetic relation between race and nation is unthinkable:

> From the start, the nation was conceived in language, not in blood, and one could be invited into the imagined community. Thus today, even the most insular nations accept the principle of naturalization, no matter how difficult in practice they may make it .... The fact of the matter is that nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies, while racism dreams of eternal contaminations, transmitted from the origins of time through an endless sequence of loathsome copulations: outside history ... the dreams of racism actually have their origin in ideologies of class, rather than in those of nation: above all in claims to divinity among rulers and to 'blue' or 'white' blood and 'breeding' among aristocracies.
>
> (1983: 145–9)

Anderson is right to identify class (or status) as a paradigm within the early modern racial matrix, but he fails to perceive racism's use to national thinking. In that respect, Etienne Balibar's analysis proves more productive. For Balibar, nationalism precedes the existence of nations: it is the discourse of nation building that produces 'fictive ethnicities', and those ethnicities are produced 'against other possible unities'. It is the 'historical system of complementary exclusions and dominations' known as racism that 'contributes to constituting [nationalism] by producing the fictive ethnicity around which it is organized'

(Balibar and Wallerstein 1991: 49). Thus 'racism is not an expression of nationalism but a supplement of nationalism, or more precisely a supplement internal to nationalism, always in excess of it, but always indispensable to its constitution and yet always insufficient still to achieve its project' (54). In the early modern period, the emergent paradigm of phenotype-as-race quickly started functioning as a 'supplement internal to nationalism', or a necessary yet not sufficient condition in the process of nation-building.

As such, the new phenotypical paradigm in the racial matrix followed in the footsteps of the older and dominant paradigm of religion-as-race, which had served, for instance, to expel Spaniards of Jewish and Muslim descent, as Spain fashioned itself into a Christian nation of fictive Gothic stock during and after the *Reconquista*.[14] The racial matrix had long functioned as a supplement internal to nationalism: the encounter of the logic of phenotype-as-race with the logic of the nation was thus less of a sudden collision than a brutal flare of a chronic condition.

The extension of strategic exclusionary functions from the dominant racial paradigm to the emergent one is palpable in *The Merchant of Venice*, a play that stages the parallel exclusion of Jews and Blackamoors from the Venetian body politic – often read as a proxy for the English body politic that produced and consumed the play. The character of Shylock is construed as an outsider who perceives himself as a member of a 'sacred nation' (1.3.42), a term he uses thrice to refer to the Jewish people. He lives in a cosmopolitan city whose 'trade and profit ... consisteth of all nations' (3.3.30), and as integrated as he is in the commercial life of the city, in the end, he loses all he owns because he is an alien:

> It is enacted in the laws of Venice,
> If it be proved against an alien
> That by direct or indirect attempts
> He seek the life of any citizen,
> The party 'gainst the which he doth contrive
> Shall seize one half his goods; the other half
> Comes to the privy coffer of the state.
>
> (4.1.346–52)

In that sense, Shylock is reminiscent of another Jewish character of the early modern English stage: Pisaro, the Portuguese *Marrano* in William Haughton's 1598 *Englishmen for my Money*, who married an Englishwoman and lives in London, but whose obstinate desire to have his daughters marry foreigners, 'wealthy merchants in the town / All Strangers, and my very speciall friendes' ([1598] 1616: B1r) – despite their inclination to marry Englishmen – bespeaks an imaginary Jewish refusal to become one with the English nation.

A similar fate befalls Black people. As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, the Prince of Morocco who, through Portia, hopes to marry into a European nation, is rejected by her before he even takes the casket test on the basis of his skin colour. In that sense, the play, first printed in 1600, eerily echoes Elizabeth I's 1596 warrant, which, to compensate Caspar van Senden for bringing eighty-nine English prisoners back to England from Spain, allowed him

> to take up so much blackamoors here in this realm and to transport them into Spain and Portugal ... for those kind of people may be well spared in this realm, being so

> populous and numbers of able persons the subjects of the land and Christian people that perish for want of service, whereby through their labour might be maintained.
>
> (Loomba and Burton 2007: 136)

This edict was the second in a series of deportation edicts stretching from 1596 to 1601: the first two repeatedly refer to Blackamoors as 'those kind of people' and the third orders a general deportation of Black people from the kingdom, where by 'the queen closes borders, and gives priority to "her own natural subjects"' (Bartels 2006: 317) along colour-based lines.

The Merchant of Venice, while staging clear mechanisms of exclusion from the nation on the basis of racial paradigms such as religion and phenotype, also suggests that those exclusion mechanisms are doomed to fail eventually. Indeed, regardless of whether Shylock's forced conversion ultimately invalidates his racial difference or not, his daughter Jessica marries a Christian man, and we know that at least one white man, the clownish servant Launcelot is responsible for the 'getting up of a negro's belly' (3.1.33). That is to say, blood-mixing across racial lines is in the works at the end of the play. While staging the exclusionary operations of race at work in defining the borders of the nation, the play also suggests that tougher racial negotiations of national identity await the next generations.

The various paradigms of the early modern racial matrix do not always function analogically in relation to the nation (as is the case in *The Merchant of Venice*); sometimes, they are edged against each other in the process of nation-building. For instance, in his 1655 petition to Cromwell to grant Jews re-entry into England whence they had been expelled by Edward I in 1290 after nearly two centuries of anti-Semitic persecutions, massacres and local expulsions, the Dutch Rabbi of Portuguese descent Menasseh ben Israel – sometimes dubbed 'the ambassador of western Jewry to European Christendom' (Katz 2004) – strategically mobilized the phenotypical racial paradigm to renegotiate his people's relation to the English nation. Here too, the opportunistic dynamics that drive conceptual formations and reformations in the context of interracial power play are patent. Ben Israel emphasizes in the opening line of his address his awareness that he is writing at a strategic moment – as he puts it 'at such a juncture of time' (1655: A2r) – when Cromwell's government is showing signs of willingness to undo the past deeds of the English monarchy, his hope being that 'the kingly Government being now changed into that of a Commonwealth, the ancient hatred towards them [Jews] would also be changed into good will' (A3r). On the frontispiece of the petition, he frames himself as writing 'in behalfe of the Jewish nation', and he uses throughout the rhetoric of the nation to refer both to Jews and to England, 'having some years since often perceived that in this [English] nation, God has a people that is very tender-hearted and well-wishing to our sore-afflicted nation' (A3v).

The bulk of the petition eloquently argues that Jews are faithful subjects to princes and beneficial to the countries where they live, and it debunks the slanderous myths about alleged Jewish proselytism, usury and the blood libel. Ben Israel also makes more unexpected moves. First, he argues, based on scripture, that the Messiah cannot 'come and restore our nation' until 'the dispersion of the Holy people [is] completed in all places'; and since Jews live in all parts of the world except England, admitting them into the English nation is the way to haste 'the restoring time of our nation into their native country' (ben Israel 1655: A4r). Here, ben Israel is using a rhetoric that blends self-contradictory diasporic fantasies of national integration and separation. Even more

strikingly, he enlists shared whiteness between Jews and Englishmen in support of his petition. Indeed, he opens his rebuke of the blood libel with a vivid image:

> As for killing of the young children of Christians; it is an infallible truth what is reported of the Negroes of Guinea and Brazil, that if they see any miserable man that has escaped from the danger of the sea or has fallen or suffered any kind of ill-fortune or Shipwrake, they persecute and vex him so much the more saying God curse thee. And we that live not amongst the Blacke-moors and wild-men, but amongst the white and civilized people of the world, yet we find this an ordinary course that men are very prone to hate and despite him that has ill fortune, and on the other side, to make much of those whom fortune doth favour.
>
> (ben Israel 1655: 21)

This reference to 'Negroes', 'Blackemoors' and 'wild-men' might seem extraneous to the argument at first sight, but I would argue that it is more than a rhetorical flourish. Indeed, it bespeaks an awareness that for many Europeans in the mid-seventeenth century (ben Israel had lived in the Low Countries most of his life), whiteness and blackness formed the axis of a new racial paradigm that warranted the realignment of former arrangements. In his petition, the logic of phenotypical race does not triumph at the expense of the logic of nation, rather, it triumphs because it is called upon to shape the borders of a nation racially united in whiteness. As ambivalent as its diasporic fantasies of blending and separation were, the new arrangement between Jews and Englishmen that ben Israel called for could only take place because 'Negroes' and 'Blacke-moors', like 'wild-men' did not belong in the British nation (Figure 6.4).[15]

It has been argued, and rightfully so, that the logic of race does not always close the borders of the nation: sometimes, it opens those borders up. For instance, Marjorie Rubright, foregrounding an epistemology not of difference but of resemblance and approximation, focuses 'our critical attention on the ways in which English representations of Dutchness were meditations on the elasticity of the self-other divide, revealing a picture of English culture as far more alive to variations by degree than has generally been appreciated' (2014: 19). Central to Rubright's argument are early modern references to the Dutch and the English as part of a common race descended from one common stock, such as Thomas Scott's statement in *The Belgicke Pismire* (1622): 'neither need wee be ashamed of such tutors [the United Provinces], who come of the same race originally that wee do, as our speech witnesseth' (quoted in Rubright 2014: 56). The use of the racial logic to establish relations of kinship between European nations was not limited to the Anglo-Dutch connection, far from it, and in most cases, it was – like any occurrence of racial discourse – opportunistically deployed, for strategic purposes, at specific 'junctures'. For instance, in *A Comparison of the Englishe and Spanishe Nation Composed by a French Gentleman Against those of the League in France which Went about to Persuade the King to Break his Alliance with England and to Confirme it with Spaine* (1589), the anonymous author's incentive to deploy the logic of race is obvious:

> And I pray you, what people is there in the world, that has juster occasion to love us than the English, which are allied unto us in blood, conformable in manners, and brotherly given to the selfsame virtuous inclinations? ... Nothing can be said more brotherly than these two nations. ... If the French and English may not be called by the term of Charondas *homosipnoi*, that is, living together, or according to Epemenides

FIGURE 6.4 *Hottentot (Black African tribes), South Africa, from voyages made to Persia and India* 1727, by Johan Albrecht de Mandelslo (1616–1644). © World History Archive/Alamy Stock Photo.

> *homokapnoi*, that is partakers of the same smoke, or as they say brought up together at board and at bed, yet may they by right good be termed *homophuloi*, that is, descended of the self-same extraction.
>
> ('Gentilhomme françois' 1589*:* 5–9)

Homophuloi literally means 'made of the same wood': the author here is using the racial logic to render the limits of the nation malleable for clear geopolitical purposes. However, to put pressure upon the borders of the nation is not to renounce fashioning it. The logic of race, whether it draws up the boundaries of the nation or brings them down, ultimately helps the nation negotiate its borders in a self-aware manner. It is in the very to and fro between those movements of narrowing and widening that nation-building happens. It is by questioning both its own proximity to the Dutch or French people and its own distance from specific phenotypes and religions that the English nation (like any European nation) slowly and recursively crafted its fictive ethnicity.

One of the best reflections of this dual process of nation-building via the logic of race is the '*Ballet des Nations*' which closes Molière's hyper-canonical *comédie-ballet, Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (*The Would-Be Gentleman*) first performed in 1671.[16] In the first entry of the '*Ballet des Nations*', a man enters to sell the ballet's libretto and converses with the many spectators who want to buy his copies (Molière [1671] 1688: 101–4).

Those spectators vary in status (they include gentry, courtezans, bourgeois families) and in origin, since they include 'people from different provinces' (*des gens de provinces différentes*), either French (from Gascony) or French-adjacent (from Switzerland). All characters speak in French, but those from Gascony and Switzerland have heavily scripted accents that signal their difference as hybrids living in-between the French, Spanish and German nations. The third and fourth entries of the ballet continue in the same vein by bringing foreigners on stage: the third entry includes three Spaniards who sing in Spanish, dance and perform their Spanishness in ways that underline their closeness to and distance from the Gascony characters of the first entry (104–6). The fourth entry includes Italian musicians who sing in Italian and *commedia dell'arte zanni* Scaramouche, Trivelin and Harlequin, who dance 'in the manner of Italian actors, in measure' (*à la manière des acteurs Italiens, en cadence*) but probably remind spectators that Harlequin was an Italian born in Paris, and thus a national hybrid from his very inception (106).[17] The fifth entry stages two musicians and dancers from Poitou, who sing without any accent and dance French *menuets*, as if to try to re-stabilize the category of Frenchness (107–8) – but in vain, since the final entry of the ballet triumphantly stages 'the mixing of the three nations' (*le mélange des trois nations*), while the libretto has the whole company present on stage approve, applaud and join in the dance (108).

What this '*Ballet des nations*' illustrates, ultimately, is the difficulty, for the early moderns themselves, of drawing up stable separations between European nations. The ballet foregrounds the pleasurability of neighbourly commixing to which cultural, linguistic and aesthetic mixture irrevocably attest. Race happily pressures the borders of the French nation here, yet this performance must be understood in the larger economy of the play that embeds the '*Ballet des Nations*'. The plot of *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* presents M. Jourdain, a Parisian bourgeois, who, as the title announces, entertains delusions of grandeur, wishes to become an aristocrat, and thus refuses, against common sense, to let his daughter Lucile marry her wooer Cléonte, who has no aristocratic pedigree. Cléonte and his servant Covielle devise a trick to overcome the *senex*'s opposition: Cléonte pretends to be the son of the Great Turk, and successfully claims his beloved's hand from a M. Jourdain who values the aristocratic status of his new son-in-law over his race, both in the religious and phenotypical senses of the term. The mariage takes place, M. Jourdain remains deluded until the very end of the play, which closes with the aforementioned '*Ballet des Nations*', performed to celebrate the marriage of Cléonte and Lucile. M. Jourdain is blamed by every rational person in the world of the play for marrying his daughter to a Muslim and a Turk: his punishment is enacted onstage when, during the mock-Turkish ceremony, he converts to Islam in order to be ennobled by his future son-in-law. M. Jourdain receives a bastinado, a treatment fit for the king of misrule that he is: 'The Turks ... beat him with a stick rhythmically' (*Les Turcs ... lui donnent plusieurs coups de bâton en cadence*) (Molière [1671] 1688: 89). The comedy that embeds the '*Ballet des nations*' is thus driven by a desire to close the borders of the French nation to the racial Other that is the Muslim Turk, which is why the play foils M. Jourdain's attempts at opening those borders in order to improve his own race, understood as the old status-based paradigm in the early modern racial matrix. The borders of the French nation that the *Ballets des nations* pressures are thus drawn back up with a vengeance in the comedy that frames it: *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* – a play commissioned directly by Louis XIV, the King most often associated with French nation-building – illustrates the very to and fro between approximation and distanciation, between the drawing up and bringing down of borders through which the racial logic dually helped early modern nations fashion themselves into fictive ethnicities.