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Entry: **Nationalism**
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The history of an idea

"Nationalism" has a bad name. It is a word that has strongly negative connotations in the English language. It implies an excessive, irrational commitment to advancing the interests of one's own nation at the expense of others. Adolf Hitler is the prime example of nationalism pushed to the extreme. When a journalist asked if he intended to nationalize private industry, Hitler famously replied that he intended to "nationalize" the German people. Fascism effectively stripped nationalism of its place in the liberal world-view. (The word "patriotism," meaning love of one's country, has more positive resonance, at least for the mainstream of American society.)

And yet the nation-state is still the basic building bloc of the international state system. It beat out rival formations, such as the small city-state and the multi-national empire. In 1919 the new global community of states chose to call itself the League of Nations, and then in 1945 the United Nations. Despite claims that globalization has made the nation-state irrelevant, the world saw a resurgence of nationalism in the 1990s.

Nationalism is compatible with a wide variety of political positions: forward looking or backward looking, liberal or illiberal, egalitarian or racist. Nationalism was born as a philosophy of liberation. In 1789 the French people rose up against their king and demanded the right to rule themselves. Prior to nationalism, people were aware of themselves as being from a particular place, being a member of a particular religious group, and being subject to a certain hierarchy of rule (typically, a dynastic monarchy). But they were not aware of themselves as a nation in the modern sense. As John Stuart Mill noted, in order for a people to rule itself (the literal meaning of "democracy" in Greek) you have to first define who are "the people." And the people were the citizens of France – the French nation. The American republic was born at about the same time, but that emancipatory project initially focused on the rights of the individual, and of the states, without a clear sense of a nation as a collective actor. It was only later that the Americans started to think of themselves as a nation – or, as Seymour Martin Lipset put it, the "first new nation," based on a written constitution and not a national community.

In the course of the 19th century, spreading the rights of man was linked to spreading the rights of nations to rule themselves. Even though Napoleon's attempt to redraw the map of Europe was rebuffed, the Napoleonic wars led to the formation of a wave of nation-states in Latin America. In the 1820s the Greeks won their independence from the Ottoman empire, but the Holy Alliance of Austria, Prussia and Russia managed to beat back the tide of nationalism in the 1848 revolutions. Nationalism triumphed with the unification of Italy (1870) and Germany (1871). But the rhetoric and content of nationalism shifted over time, as it came to be used by conservative rulers to suppress the rights of national minorities, and to build support for their regimes in the face of challenges from liberal and socialist popular movements. The rise of nationalism coincided with the rise of free trade – recall that Adam Smith entitled his master work *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). Not all nationalists embraced English economic liberalism: there was a rival school headed by the German/American economist Friedrich List, that advocated protecting domestic industries by introducing high tariffs on imports.

The surge of nationalism in the European states coincided with their colonial expansion. A nation's right

to rule itself apparently included the right to rule other peoples, especially if they were of a different race or religion. The First World War was a blow to imperialism in Europe, knocking down the Ottoman, Hapsburg, German and Russian empires (but not the global empires of Britain and France). A dozen new nation-states sprang up in central Europe, in line with President Woodrow Wilson's recognition of the interests of peoples under imperial rule. Even Vladimir Lenin, sensing the spirit of the times, paid lip-service to national self-determination, and the Soviet Union was created as a federation of sovereign republics. Anti-colonial movements in the British, Dutch and French empires rallied to the call of national liberation, but they had to wait until after World War Two had weakened their colonial masters.

The 1945 Charter of the United Nations recognized "the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples" (Article 1, clause 2). The United States – a non-colonial power – was now the dominant world player and encouraged the European states to dismantle their empires. Independence came speedily in India and Indonesia, but not without bloodshed. In Vietnam and Algeria it required protracted wars. During the Cold War, both the US and USSR appealed to nationalism in smaller countries a bid to undermine the sphere of influence of their adversary. The United States protested the Soviet occupation of East Europe, as exemplified by their crushing of the Hungarian revolution in 1956. The 1959 Cuban revolution against dictatorial rule took the form of a nationalist movement under communist leadership, endorsed by the Soviet Union.

The end of nationalism?

After the Cold War abruptly ended in 1991, the West expected that the nations formerly under Soviet control would become democracies, and the past century of polarizing nationalism and state conflict would give way to a new era of international cooperation and respect for human rights. Alas, that was not to be. Nationalism was in fact a crucial force in causing the Soviet collapse, and the shift towards democracy coincided with an *increase* not a *decrease* in nationalist mobilization. Polish resistance against Soviet rule, that took the form of the Solidarity workers' movement, was a direct continuation of the nationalist projects of the 19th century. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania had been sovereign states after 1918 until their occupation by the USSR in 1940. Once glasnost started to take hold in 1987, the Baltic peoples began agitating for their independence. Other nationalist conflicts erupted across the length and breadth of the Soviet Union: Kazakhs rioted because an ethnic Russian was appointed their party boss; Armenians living in the province of Nagorno Karabakh fought for freedom from rule by Azerbaijan.

A similar fratricidal logic played out in Yugoslavia, erupting in 1991. One after another, the republics of the Yugoslav federation declared their independence, led by Slovenia, Croatia, and then Bosnia. The Serbian minorities living in the latter two regions rose in revolt and received military support from the rump Yugoslavia. Brutal fighting caused 100,000 deaths while millions fled their homes, until fighting was stopped by a US-led military intervention in 1995. A new phrase entered the English language: "ethnic cleansing."

The bloodbath in Yugoslavia forced Western elites to reexamine the question of nationalism. How was it possible, in a globally-connected world, for this 19th century philosophy to mobilize people to acts of extreme violence? The former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia were not isolated examples. All around the globe, nationalist conflicts were erupting. The struggle for power between Tutsis and Hutu triggered the horrific genocide in Rwanda in 1994. There were secessionist conflicts under way in Asia (Kashmir, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Philippines) and Africa (Eritrea, Sudan). The Arab-Israeli conflict – a battle between competing nationalisms – showed no sign of resolution. The 1991 Gulf war was fought to restore

national sovereignty to Kuwait, and also created de-facto self-rule for the Kurds of northern Iraq. Even Latin America was not immune to these trends. A new assertiveness by indigenous peoples fueled regional insurrections from Mexico to Bolivia.

The quest for statehood

National self-determination is fine in the abstract. The problems start when it comes to deciding which nation gets sovereignty over which territory. There are more than 6,000 groups that can be identified as "nations" in the world of 2008 (based primarily on having a distinct language). But only 192 states are recognized as sovereign by the United Nations. Clearly, not every nation can have its own state. And what happens if two or more nations claim the same territory (as do the Israelis and Palestinians)? The global distribution of ethnic groups has a long tail: the 83 most commonly-spoken languages account for 80 percent of the world population. The nation-state system is well-established in Europe and East Asia, where more than 70 percent of the population in any given country belongs to the nation after which the state is named. In the Americas and the Middle East, the largest national group ranges from 40 to 90 percent. In Africa and south and south-east Asia, such national homogeneity is quite rare. In sub-Saharan Africa, the largest ethnic group often amounts to less than 30 percent of the population.

For all the talk of self-determination, the international state system that emerged in the 20th century was extraordinarily reluctant to permit secession. Only a handful of states have managed to secede: Norway (1905), Iceland (1918), Ireland (1921), Singapore (1965), Bangladesh (1971), and Eritrea (1993). The vast majority of new states were born from the dissolution of multi-national empires. The three socialist federations (Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia) broke up into the pre-existing republics that made up the federation. The sole exception is Kosovo, the Albanian populated-region which had been subordinated to Serbia, and which declared independence in February 2008. There are four regions inside the former Soviet Union (Nagorno-Karabakh, Trans-Dniester, Abkhazia and South Ossetia) that have established de-facto self-rule but were not been recognized as sovereign by any other country (until Russia recognized the last two in 2008).

The largest group currently denied self-rule is probably the Kurds, whose 20-25 million members are scattered across Turkey, Iraq and Iran. Taiwan has self-rule, but not international recognition. There are dozens of large ethnic groups within China and India, speaking distinct languages, but they are not pursuing independent statehood. Secessionist movements are confined to proportionally small groups, such as the Sikhs in Punjab, Uighurs in Sinkiang, and Tibet.

Some definitions

A **nation** is a group that identifies itself as such, based on a shared understanding of a common culture, history, land and descent. **Nationalism** is the mobilization of a nation in pursuit of political goals. These typically include national survival and self-rule (meaning that the rulers come from the same nation as the ruled). Self-rule usually means having a sovereign state of one's own. **The state**, following Max Weber, is an institution claiming to exercise a monopoly of the legitimate use of force over a given territory, and one that is recognized by other states. Most states are unitary, with a single center of authority, but some are federal – having a hierarchy of units with shared sovereignty. Ninety percent of the states currently in existence are unitary – though 38 percent of the world's population live in federal states, a category that includes India and the US.

After state sovereignty has been achieved, "nationalist" politics may involve particular concern for national defense against threats external and internal; electoral appeals based on national purity and betrayal; or defense of the rights of compatriots outside the state's borders. Nationalist policies may include state ownership of economic assets, purging the country of minorities, or placing restrictions on immigrants. Current novelties include "resource nationalism" (such as that of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela) and "consumer nationalism" (eg. Indian pride in Indian products). To outsiders, "nationalism" is usually seen in negative terms, as reflecting an exaggerated sense of threat, or an unreasonable preference for one's own nation over the interests of other nations, or over other identity groups in society (family, class, etc.)

Ethnicity, again following Max Weber, can be defined it as a subjective sense of group belonging. It is subjective in that it cannot be pinned down to objective criteria. If some people see themselves as a group and behave accordingly, the group exists. An ethnic group that develops political aspiration to self-rule becomes a nation. Ethnicity involves the perception of sharing the following characteristics:

- a specific territory (a homeland, which may or may not be where the group now lives);
- history (formative events, wars, heroes, what Otto Bauer called a "community of fate");
- descent (linked by ties of family, of "blood," perhaps extending to racial categories);
- culture (customs, food, rituals, clothing etc);
- language; and
- religion.

Any given nation will exhibit most but not all these attributes. For example, Irish nationalism was a potent force in the 19th century even though by then 90 percent of the Irish spoke only English. Analysts disagree about whether these attributes constitute a "core" identity, or merely an outward appearance. Are they innate, or learned? Are they fixed, or transient? Anthropologist Fredrik Barth argues that ethnicity is a boundary phenomenon; the product of inter-actions between groups rather than the expression of the group's inner core. Ethnic groups evolve through the selection of markers that serve to distinguish them from neighboring groups. David Laitin argues that language is a handy marker because it is flexible (it can be learned) but not too flexible, in that it takes time to learn.

Competing theories

There is a broad spectrum of theories about nationalism. They generally agree about the facts in the historical record but disagree about how to explain the rise and persistence of nationalism.

1) Primordialism

Primordialism, now known as perennialism, is best represented in the works of Anthony Smith. Primordialists see ethnicity as an enduring and natural feature of human existence, one that preceded the arrival of the modern state. They cite evidence for the emergence of French and English identities as early as the 9th century. The term "nation" originated in the thirteenth century, when Church delegates to the 1274 Council of Lyons were grouped by "nation." Nationalists themselves often invoke the pre-modern origins of their nation. Religious conflicts, such as that between Christianity and Islam, were key to the evolution of nations such as Spain, Poland or Serbia. History matters. It is mythologized and reinvented, but one should not pretend it does not exist. Primordialism has its limits, however. It has been given a bad name by writers such as Robert Kaplan who talk about "tribal hatreds" or "ancient enmities"

when trying to explain modern conflicts. Ethnic identities are not fixed, they can shift quickly in response a changing political environment.

Walker Connor argues that all nationalist deploy the rhetoric of "blood" to some degree – a blood line, or blood sacrifice. This leads into sociobiological approaches, which see ethnicity as hard-wired into our genetic code. Sacrifice for the kin group may be rational for evolutionary survival. Even non-human primates display intense group solidarity and xenophobia. Psychological experiments show an alarming propensity for human subjects to spontaneously develop group loyalty and antagonism towards the "other." However, in communities beyond 5,000 people it is impossible to sustain links based on actual kinship – so they switch to mythical kinship, the nation.

2) Structuralism

Structuralists tend to explain away nationalism by treating it as a by-product of the functional requirements of some deeper social mechanism. Echoing Karl Marx, Ernst Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm tie nationalism to the rise of capitalism. Gellner argues that industrialization requires a mobile workforce, capable of learning new skills, and trained through a public education system. It is more efficient to have one language. Hence the state-sponsored education system forges a common national identity. Nationalism has the political advantage of diverting the workers from overthrowing capitalism into hostility towards other ethnic groups and nations. Michael Hechter notes the role that ethnicity plays even in mature capitalist economies in segmenting the workforce. Minorities who play a "middleman" role, such as the Jews in Europe, Indians in East Africa, or Chinese in Indonesia, have often been the target of pogroms.

Donald Horowitz argues that ethnic conflict in developing countries is driven by status anxiety, triggered by social changes such as urban migration that accompany economic development. Ethnic groups want to rule themselves because it confers status and brings jobs and economic favors. It is often easy for the catch-all anti-colonial movement to be captured by the dominant ethnic group, who then rule in their own interest. In some societies, a multi-ethnic coalition may take root and survive for decades – as in Malaysia. In other cases, an ethnic minority that feels itself persistently excluded from power will rebel – as with the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

3) Instrumentalism

Instrumentalists see nationalism as a tool used by elites to pursue their own economic or political goals. In 16th century England monarchs appealed to nationalism to undercut the nobles and strengthen their rule. Rising elites in 19th century Europe used it to build a political coalition to dislodge the multinational empires. Jack Snyder notes that the spread of democracy has often coincided with an increase in nationalism. In countries such as Yugoslavia making a transition from authoritarian rule to competitive elections, it is easy for politicians to attract votes by appealing to the simple fact of ethnic identity ("vote for me because I will defend the Serbs"). If an excluded ethnic group turns to violence, then the logic of polarization becomes even more deadly. Those who favor compromise with the other side are condemned as traitors, perhaps even assassinated.

Rational choice theorists such as Hechter and David Laitin approach nationalism as a collective phenomenon rooted in the rational pursuit of individual self-interest. The incentive structures provided by political institutions are crucially important in channeling nationalism in one direction or another. For example, Russians living in the Baltic states after 1991 did not turn to violence to protect their group interests, because they faced strong incentives to assimilate and become citizens, which would bring higher living standards and a European Union passport. Nationalism is the product of social institutions

and is not reducible to individual choices. For example, even though personal relations between ethnic groups in Bosnia prior to 1991 were typically good (with intermarriage quite common), the changing political environment forced most people to behave in new, ethnically exclusive ways.

It is important to remember that nationalism is not solely the result of political process within a given country but also the external, international environment. That is why we see waves of nationalism, as groups try to emulate the successes of others. International support is often crucial for the success of secessionist movements. India helped Bangladesh in 1971, but no-one aided Biafra in 1969.

4) Deconstructionism

Deconstructionists such as Benedict Anderson argue that ethnicity and nationalism are essentially artificial constructs, imagined communities that arose in the new media that accompanied economic modernization. The rise of mass literacy and the spread of newspapers made it possible for people to imagine nations into existence. In contrast to primordialists and structuralists who stress the European roots of nationalism, Anderson points to the role of colonialism and the early emergence of nation-states in Latin America. He also draws on the case of Indonesia, which forged a new nation out of a vast, diverse archipelago and created a new artificial language for its colonial bureaucracy in 1928. But contra the post-modernists it is important to note that Anderson is not describing "imaginary" communities. Once the community is imagined into existence, the social movements and states that result are real.

Anderson's work has generated much cultural analysis of the aesthetics of nationalism, fusing post-colonialism with post-modernism. The general thrust of this work is to explain away nationalism as false consciousness. But symbols do matter: many serious and violent conflicts revolve around disputes over the symbolic recognition of rival ethnic groups. There is a growing literature on gender and nationalism. Nationalism is a heavily gendered concept: the mother sacrificing her son for the nation is a standard trope of war. To signal its desperation, a group may start using women as warriors (such as the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka, who first used a female suicide bomber in 1991).

Current debates

Nationalism may be particularly hard for Americans to understand since the US is an immigrant society (where every group except Native Americans came from somewhere else) and unique in basing itself on a set of political principles, a social contract. These two factors mean Americans tend to see national identity as voluntary and inclusive. Most nationalist conflicts around the world tend to be coercive and exclusionary

Rogers Brubaker and Liah Greenfeld have explored the distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism. Civic nationalism as in America, Britain or France, is inclusive, based on the assimilation of people of diverse ethnic backgrounds into a common culture, and including strong guarantees for individual rights. Ethnic nationalism, such as in Germany or Japan, stresses the group over the individual and ties the nation to a specific ethnic identity, making it hard for immigrants to acquire citizenship. Critics argue that even the "civic" nations do in fact have an ethnic core – note the long exclusion of African-Americans from civil rights in the US, and the problems that France is now encountering with absorbing its Moslem minority. Also, in recent decades the two models have converged, with the embrace of various forms of multiculturalism. In the US, there has been a shift from talking about the "melting pot" to the "salad bowl." The United Kingdom has pursued multiculturalism, trying to bring racial and religious minorities into the media, political parties and educational system. France has stuck with its

assimilationist approach, while Germany has generally pursued a "separation" model, recognizing that the minorities (mainly, Turks) are part of society but not adapting the national culture to bring them into the mainstream.

To what extent can a liberal society recognize and protect group rights without violating individual rights (or the rights of other groups)? Will Kymlicka argues that society has a specific moral obligation to respect the rights of indigenous groups (now called "first peoples" in Canada) over immigrants. US law has long recognized the "sovereignty" of the Native American nations, and similar steps have been taken in recent decades in Canada and Australia.

There has been a lively debate over whether skillful constitutional design can head off ethnic conflict. Does a federal structure give ethnic minorities the security they need? Or does it merely provide a framework for them to consolidate their political power and ratchet up their nationalist demands? Canada is still struggling to contain the demands of the French-speaking Quebecois, who came within a hair's breadth (0.58 percent) of voting for secession in a 1995 referendum. The ethnic federations of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union collapsed as soon as they started to democratize. India is the prime example of a multi-ethnic society that has been able to satisfy group demands within a democratic federation, though periodic outbreaks of "communal violence" between Hindus and Moslems continue to occur.

Arend Lijphart advanced a consociational model, based on the Dutch case, involving power-sharing between the leading groups. Such arrangements are difficult to craft and quite rare in practice. Often, politicians who propose power sharing lose the support of their own ethnic group. The first edition of Robert Dahl's influential *Polyarchy*, published in 1971, included Lebanon and Sri Lanka as successful examples – which proved premature as both countries descended into violence soon thereafter. Belgium, another common example, is looking more and more precarious as the two communities of Flems and Walloons are politically deadlocked. South Africa seems to be turning out well, with elements of federalism and consociationalism, but the most important institution in South Africa is the single dominant ruling party, the African national Congress – something that does not feature in the consociational or federal models. There are of course many cases of ethnic minorities living more or less peacefully and harmoniously within multi-ethnic states – but they usual have little or no access to state power.

Conclusion

Many observers argue that globalization has "flattened" the world, undercutting the sovereignty of the nation-state and the significance of national identity. However, such predictions are premature. The nation-state remains the basic building bloc of international society. Citizenship – formal membership in one of those sovereign states – still matters a great deal for any individual's human rights and life chances. The economic rise of Brazil, China and India has coincided with a new confidence in national identity in those countries. Thankfully, this has been channeled into economic competition and cultural pride, and not inter-state warfare. The European Union has achieved a remarkable degree of economic integration, but it shows no sign of evolving into a federal structure that will supplant national identity. The increased flow of money, goods, people and ideas across borders has heightened fears of marginalization amongst many ethnic groups, and has brought formerly distant groups into closer proximity. Note the political salience of immigrants in contemporary Europe, the US, Russia and elsewhere. There are still many people willing to die – and to kill – for their nation, and political

entrepreneurs willing to capitalize on those emotions.

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