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## **NATIONAL IDENTITY THROUGH THE LENSES OF MODERNISM**

### **Abstract:**

Nationalism arose in Europe in the years 1880 and 1920 and then spread globally. The twentieth century showed nationalist aspirations almost everywhere be that in old states or new ones, large states or small ones. Nationalism has not disappeared from the political scene, nor is it possible to disappear in the near future. A number of studies on nationalism and national movements focus not only in the aspects of politics but also in other aspects such as culture, language, religion, and art. However, globalization seems to have given a new direction to the world order. Or is globalization just another effort to minimize the importance of national identity and nationhood. The proclamation of nationality, voluntary separation of a group into a nation, which distinguishes itself from its surrounding neighbors even when in the same state, government or administration not to mention broader areas shows that national identity should be protected by all means. The aim of this paper is to tackle the issue of national identity through the lenses of modernism.

### **Keywords:**

identity, nationalism, nationality, modernism, globalization

## Introduction

The relationship between classes, states and nations has always been and it still remains an important factor in the whole spectrum of global events, political and economical events. We saw the end of the 20th century and the changes throughout the decade of the 90s when the world community recognized the revival of Slavic nationalism and ethnic conflict which spread violently in the former Yugoslavia. This kind of nationalism challenged interstate relations in the region and international relations, especially when countries in Europe and others in the world were facing a new way of living, that which promotes, encourages and strengthens human rights and with it promotes and encourages the diversity and multiculturalism. Obviously globalization will have its impact on a number of areas and fields of human lives: economy, politics, culture, identity since it is minimizing geographic distances and is enabling relationships in a different form and approach. This approach influences different identities in different ways. Some authors argue that globalization will, in one way or the other, overshadow ethnic identities of the peoples as a result of the possibilities for cultural, social, economic, educational, and political exchanges between people on a global level regardless of geographic location and time zone. However, very often these increased opportunities are seen pessimistically as soft powers which through involving varieties of identities decrease the power of separate identities thus raising the question whether globalization strengthens or weakens identities of the nations.

## Defining nationalism and national identity

There are different definitions on identity and nationalism based on the field of interest. Identity may be defined as the distinctive characteristic belonging to any given individual, or shared by all members of a particular social category or group. In political sciences and International Relations, however, 'identity' is defined and described in a number of ways. Hogg and Abrams(1988) define identity as "people's concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others" (Hogg and Abrams 1988: 2); Jenkins (1996) argues that identity "refers to the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities" (Jenkins 1996: 4); Wendt (1992) argues that identities are "relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self" (Wendt 1992: 397); Katzenstein (1996) stresses that "The term [identity] (by convention) references mutually constructed and evolving images of self and other" (Katzenstein 1996:59); whereas Taylor (1989) argues "My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose" (Taylor 1989:27). As one can see the definitions on identity are different because even the understanding of the word *identity* depends on the circumstances used. Another definition of identity is the widely accepted one: 'ethnic' and 'civic', both of which are linked to the development of nations and states in Europe. Civic identity regards the nation as the totality of people living within the boundaries of that state and abiding by its laws; whereas ethnic national identity is characterized by an attachment to one's ancestry, tradition, culture and language – and not necessarily to the state a person was born and lives in. This is why an ethnic national identity is exclusive: if you are not born into it, you cannot acquire it (Ignatieff, 1995). As it can be noticed one of the key points in each science is consistent and completely understandable terminology. Even today it is almost impossible to give a

theory or an acceptable approach in relation to nationalism, too, especially when arguments associated with nationalism are almost always negative. Such an approach can refer to the arguments of intellectuals, movements and political organizations, state policies, thoughts and ideas that vary. It was not possible to define nationalism in its entirety neither as an ideology nor as a politics. In literature nationalism is accepted as a support for the nation by the members of that nation, whereas in the ideological aspect, nationalism is focused on loyalty and pride of a nation by encouraging confidence among citizens that their country is important and that their individual identity is closely connected with their place. But there are other concepts that define it, too. Motyl (2001) holds firm position in defense of nationalism as an idea, or as he calls it the "ideal". He argues that because nationalism is based on ideas such as a nation state, self-determination, national identity and national superiority, these actions based on these ideas cannot be the basis to define nationalism "unless we do not make any absurd supposition that the beliefs automatically change into behavior". Hutchinson and Smith (1994) define nationalism as "ideology, sentiment, movement" and there are scholars who try not to judge the idea of nationalism, thus consider it as the right of nations to self-determination. (1994:45). Robert Wiebe (2002) argues that "we too often conflate nationalism with what states do in its name. By indiscriminately blaming it for terrorism, ethnic cleansing and military thuggery, we avoid reckoning with nationalism for what it is: the desire among people who believe that share a common ancestry and destiny to live under their own government on land sacred to their history." (2002: xii).

Nationalism as a state policy or national ideology leaves room for disagreements and disputes. Gellner (1983) in his "*Nationalism*" explores the phenomenon of nationalism since its beginnings until the modern nation-state was established and defines nationalism as "a political principle which considers that political and national entity must comply"(1983:1). According to him nationalism "is a theory of political legitimacy."(ibid). However nationalism as a political phenomenon may be subject to different interpretations and led by different and/or distinct factors. Craig Calhoun recently concluded that:

"Nationalism is too diverse to allow a simple theory to explain it. Much of the content and separate orientation of different nationalisms is defined by historically distinct cultural traditions, creative actions of leaders and unpredictable situations within the international world order." (Calhoun, 1997:123)

Nationalism is preceded by the existence of a nation, but also by the feeling and the belief that creates 'commitment' to the nation. Therefore, the nation is the center of gravity to support national identity. This means that the nation and national identity are closely linked, and are associated with the term 'nationalism'. Gellner explains that "nations, as well as nationalism, are modern phenomena", in the sense that 'the basic features of the modern world involve both nations and nationalisms; you cannot have one without the other. (The Warwick Debates: Anthony D. Smith's opening statement "Nations and their pasts")

## **The Modern State**

In the Balkans the geo-political, political, economic landscape has changed fast. Albanians lived as a nation in larger areas that belonged to them but over the time and under the well-known historical and political circumstances the territory was divided,

but the efforts to preserve and protect the national identity did not cease. The proclamation of nationality, voluntary separation of a group into a nation, which distinguishes itself from its surrounding neighbor's even when they are in the same state, government or administration, will result in political activities. Even if many within the nationalist movement in question do not seek political autonomy for their nation, they will require changes within the institutional framework or policy of the state or existing government or state regulation. Also the influence of nationalism in a political system is not limited to that country solely. Many national groups exceed all existing state borders. For example, the collapse of Yugoslavia or the collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in the establishment of several independent states, many of them with major national groups within them. These national groups, regardless of being a minority or majority of the new population of the state, seek political power for their own nation and directly challenge the existence of the state in its current form. The creation of a new state requires giving up a part of the territory and population, and such cases are a basic example to understand the political nature of nationalism. Let's turn to Albanians for a moment. Albanians have resisted foreign occupation, although not without consequences. Albanians were alone in the Balkans when the collision of great powers for greater interests occurred. This has made the consequences of the invasion onto Albanians to be more evident, including the division of the nation into three religious confessions and in five different territories, Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. But the resistance helped Albanians to preserve their ethno-cultural identity, to cultivate and develop, and even establish their own nation-state, although it became a nation state being divided in more units. Even nowadays Albanians are a nation that lives in separate parts, in other countries, and the creation of one ethnic state would require the return of the taken territories and unification of its people. After the fall of communism, a wave of attempts for various changes in societies was caused; this wave of change was characterized by the development of democracy in some but not all post-communist societies in Central and Eastern Europe. New processes in these societies caused specific problems, such as uncertainty with the new changes especially uncertainty about the establishment of democracy, its stability, and development. In addition to all the changes, a phenomenon that has characterized most societies in transition is strong nationalism. Moreover, it was often manifested as ethnocentrism (closed, exclusive and intolerant ethnic nationalism), and as such contributed to the prevention of democratization. An example to such forces of nationalism is Serbia, which soon after the breakup of Yugoslavia started bloody wars in almost the entire territory of former Yugoslavia, fueled by nationalist destructive forces. But for some other countries, nationalism has been the driving force of positive democratic change, especially in post-communist countries which for the first time in their history, in parallel with the establishment of democracy, gained the state independence, such as Slovenia and Croatia. Given that nationalism is a very complex phenomenon to be clearly defined, it can be even less understood outside the particular social and political context. For this reason, the processes of modernization and democratization that characterized the history of already established democracies are not entirely comparable with those in transitional societies. Therefore, conclusions about specific phenomena including nationalism and nation-state building that result from such comparisons are often inaccurate, false and vague. Albanian nation is always portrayed as a nation strongly connected with the culture, history, blood and language. It has always been and continues to be described clearly as a nation that differs from its surrounding neighbors, different from Serbs, Macedonians, Greeks, Bulgarians or Montenegrins.

Albania is a 102 –year-old state. Kosovo declared its independence seven years ago. Even though we are two separate units of one whole ethnicity, we are the nation which tends to build a democratic civil society. Nevertheless, we should not forget history because history condemns every nation that has not been able to learn from the mistakes; it condemns every nation that allows the history to repeat itself.

## Conclusions

It is not possible to reach an agreement within debates about nationalism. There are no satisfactory theories that could give a concise definition and approach as a whole. Usually nationalism is referred to arguments of scholars, politicians, political parties, movements or organizations, and so on. Nevertheless, nationalism is a subject with room for disagreement. If we look at nationalism from the lenses of modernism then nationalism as politics can be considered a modern phenomenon. Otherwise considered from other approaches and theories nationalism is linked to a number of factors that characterize it, such as blood, kinship, culture, language and so on. But, nationalism should not be treated distinctively as a modern phenomenon without treating other aspects of it. Not leaving aside the importance of the state where institutions play their role, too. And in this modern era, while there are states that are in the driver's seat, it is impossible to avoid the fact that state and people should be on the same waves. Nationalism is the ideology that imposes that state and people are on the same waves. As such, combining with political values and appealing to every social group make nationalism the political movement of modern times.

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