

THE NATION IN THE ERA OF GLOBALISATION

Abrudan Cristina

Universitatea din Oradea, Facultatea de Științe Economice, Str. Universității nr. 3-5, cabrudan@uoradea.ro, Tel. 0259-408276

This article tries to throw some light upon the idea of nation, nationalism and national identity in the present world context, where everyone seems to be obsessed with modernization and globalization. Nowadays cultures, traditions and societies are more and more interconnected and nations become multicultural – these are only two reasons why people are concerned with the recognition of their uniqueness, of their national identity.

Nation, nationalism, national identity, globalization.

The age of globalization is accepted by a large number of theorists as an age of nationalist resurgence in that of establishing nation-states as well as in the widespread reconstruction of the idea of national identity. The idea of nationalism and national identity appear as a surprise if we take into consideration the fact that some critics declared nationalism as a dead trend because of the following reasons: the globalization of the economy and the internationalization of the political institutions, the universalism of culture diffused by electronic media, education, modernization, and urbanization. But let's develop a little bit upon the concepts of nation, nationalism, and national identity.

It seems that there are a lot of definitions of the term 'nation'. One of the most important is the one given by Anthony D Smith in his book entitled *Nationalism* (1994). For Smith the nation is 'a named population sharing a historical territory, common memories, and myths of origin, a mass standardized public culture, a common economy and territorial mobility, and common legal rights and duties for all members...'

The concept of nation has been subject to a wide variety of meanings. There are three classic statements that one must take into consideration when trying to define the term 'nation'. They belong to Renan, Stalin, and Weber and they cover a wide spectrum. Ernest Renan sees the nation as a form of morality, a solitary sustained by a distinctive historical consciousness. On the contrary, Stalin defines the term as a mixture of objective and subjective elements. He says that nations come into existence only when several elements, such as economic life, history, and language have come together. Max Weber examines the nation as a community endowed with a sense of cultural mission. He claims that nations are too various to be defined in terms of one criterion. But of course, besides these three voices, others could be heard trying to define this concept. Another approach is that of Karl Deutsch, which offers a functional definition avoiding a single-factor characterization of the nation. He argues that the objective of nationalist organizations is to strengthen and extend the channels of communication which can ensure a popular compliance with national symbols and norms. From an anthropological perspective, Clifford Geertz describes the nation as a concept where the idea of ethnic and civic intermingles.

A nation could be understood as a group of people, a community bound together by culture, history, and common ancestry. The modern Italian nation was formed from Romans, Teutons, Greeks, Arabs and so on. The French nation was formed from Gauls, Romans, Britons, Teutons, and so forth. The same can be said about the British, the Germans, and the others who were formed into nations from people of diverse races and tribes. Thus, a nation is not a racial or tribal, but a historically constituted community of people, not a casual or ephemeral conglomeration, but a stable community of people.

In fact, I think, there are some common ideas and motifs of the nation, common to most theorist, and thereby establish an ideal type of the nation. Such an ideal type, derived from the three goals of national identity, unity and autonomy, would include:

- The growth of myths and memories of common ancestry and history of the cultural unit of population;
- The formation of a shared public culture based on an indigenous resource (language, religion, etc);

- The delimitation of a compact historic territory, or homeland;
- The unification of local economic units into a single socio-economic unit based on the single culture and homeland;
- The growth of common codes and institutions of a single legal order, with common rights and duties for all members.

These motifs, commonly found in the writings of theorists everywhere, help us to define the nation as a named cultural unit of population with a separate homeland, shared ancestry myths and memories, a public culture, common economy, and common legal rights and duties for all members. This is a modernist definition, in the sense that its very concepts such as public culture, common economy, and common legal rights derive their meaning from developments in and of the modern epoch. The first, or the 'Western' model, arose out of the 'Western' absolutist states whose rulers inadvertently helped to create the conditions for a peculiarly territorial concept of the nation. The second or 'Eastern' model emerged out of the situation of incorporated ethnic communities or ethnics, whose intelligentsias sought to, liberate them from the shackles of various empires. The Western model of the nation tended to emphasize the centrality of a national territory or homeland, a common system of laws and institutions, the legal equality of citizens in a political community, and the importance of a mass, civic culture binding the citizens together. The Eastern model, by contrast, was more preoccupied with ethnic descent and culture. Apart from genealogy, it emphasizes the popular or folk element, the role of vernacular mobilization, and the activation of the people through a revival of their native folk culture – their languages, customs, religions, and rituals, rediscovered by urban intellectuals such as philologists, historians, folklorists, ethnographers, and lexicographers. The contrast between these two concepts of the nation should not be overdrawn, as we find elements of both at various times in several nationalisms in both Eastern and Western Europe.

So, we may define a nation as a named human population sharing a historical territory, common memories, and myths of origins, a mass, standardized public culture, a common economy and territorial mobility, and common legal rights and duties for all the members of the community. This definition is just one of many that have been proffered for the concept of 'nation'. But, like most others, it reveals the highly complex and abstract nature of the concept, one which draws on dimensions of other types of cultural identity, and so permits it to become attached to many other types of collective identification – of class, gender, region, and religion. National identifications are fundamentally multidimensional. But though they are composed of analytically separable components – legal, territorial, ethnic, economic, and political – they are united by the nationalist ideology into a potent vision of human identity and community.

There are several characteristic features of a nation. One of these is a common language. This does not mean that different nations always and everywhere speak different languages, or that all who speak one language necessarily constitute one language. There is no nation which at one and the same time speaks several languages, but this does not mean that there cannot be two nations speaking the same language. English and Americans speak the same language but they do not constitute one nation. Another characteristic feature could be a common territory. But it is not all. A common territory does not create by itself a nation. This requires an internal economic bond to weld the various parts of the nation into a single whole. Thus, a common economic life is another characteristic feature of a nation. But this is not all. One must take into consideration the spiritual complexion of the people constituting a nation. Nations differ not only in their conditions of life, but also in spiritual complexion, which manifests itself in peculiarities of national culture. But also the psychological element has to be taken into consideration when talking about the characteristic features of a nation. Of course, by itself, the psychological element, or otherwise called the 'national character' is sometimes intangible for the observer, but in so far as it manifests itself in a distinctive culture common to the nation it is something tangible and cannot be ignored. The 'national character' does not have to be understood as a thing that is fixed once and for all, but something that is modified and changed according to the conditions of life. Thus, a nation has its beginning and end, has a history and it can be subject to change. An interesting idea is that none of the above mentioned characteristics taken separately is sufficient to define a nation and it is enough for single characteristics to be lacked and the nation ceases to be a nation. If some people are economically disunited, inhabit different territories and speak different languages but they possess a common 'national character' certainly we cannot say that they constitute a single nation. People with a common territory and economic life but with no common language and common 'national character' would not constitute a single nation. So, it is clear

that we have a nation only when all these characteristics are present together. As Bruce Franklin noticed in 1973 in his book entitled *The Nation*:

“A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture”.

What distinguishes national identities from other identities? What is implied by describing a particular community of people as a nation? What is involved in thinking of oneself as a member of a national community? There are at least five aspects that have to be taken into consideration if we try to answer to these questions. Among those who have seriously thought about this subject, the first point acknowledged very widely is that national communities are constituted by belief: nations exist when their members recognize one another as compatriots, and believe that they share characteristics of the relevant kind. The concept of national identity is both complex and highly abstract. Indeed the multiplicity of cultural identities, both now and in the past, is mirrored in the multiple dimensions of our conceptions of nationhood. Nationality is an identity that embodies historical continuity – is the second aspect that comes to one mind. Nations have a past and in most cases their origins are conveniently lost in the mists of time. In the course of this history, various significant historical events have occurred, and we can identify with the actual people who acted at those moments, appropriating their deeds as our own.

Another distinguishing aspect of national identity is that it is seen as an active identity. Nations are communities that do things together, take decisions, achieve results, etc – this is not literally so. But it means that the link between the past and the future is not merely a causal link. A nation becomes what it is by the decisions it takes. This active identity clearly marks out nations from other kinds of grouping, for instance churches or religious sects, whose identity is essentially a passive one.

The connection of a group of people to a particular geographical place represents the fourth aspect of a national identity. A nation must have a homeland where it can act as a group. It is this territorial element that has forged the connection between nations and states, while a state is precisely a body that claims legitimate authority over a geographical area.

Finally, the ‘national character’ is the fifth aspect. The people who share a national identity should have something in common, a set of characteristics – this is the ‘national character’. Communities constituted by shared belief and mutual commitment, extended in history, connected to a particular territory, and marked off from other communities by its distinct public culture represent the five elements together that form the idea of national identity. But theorists of nationality and nationalism give rise to a future question: is national identity a distinctively modern phenomenon, something specific to post-Renaissance or perhaps even to post-Enlightenment societies, or it is simply a continuation of tribal and other such loyalties which are coeval with the human species? This question divides the theorist into two categories: the first perspective sees national identity as a modern phenomenon allied to notions of democracy; and those who see it as a continuation of older loyalties, a cement that holds societies together, inspires mutual concern between members, etc.

Talking about contemporary nationalism, we have emphasize three major analytical points: first, contemporary nationalism can be or cannot be oriented towards the reconstruction of sovereign nation-state; secondly nations do not limit themselves to the modern nation-state as constituted in Europe after the French Revolution; thirdly, nowadays, nationalism is accepted as a reaction against globalization. Contemporary nationalism tends to be more cultural than political and thus more oriented to defend the culture which has already been institutionalized than to defense the state. In order to understand better the trend of the contemporary nationalism, I will quote Kosaku Yoshino analyzing the cultural nationalism in his book entitled *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan (1992)*:

“Cultural nationalism aims to regenerate the national community by creating, preserving, or strengthening a people’s cultural identity when it is felt to be lacking or threatened. The cultural nationalists regard the nation as a product of its unique history and culture, and as a collective solidarity endowed with unique attributes. In short, cultural nationalism is concerned with the distinctiveness of the cultural community as the essence of a nation.”

In the contemporary world situation, two phenomena seem to appear to be characteristic: first, the disintegration of pluri-national states that try to remain fully sovereign or to deny the plurality of their national constituents (as examples we can mention the case of the former Soviet Union, the former Yugoslavia, the former Czechoslovakia, and in the future it could be the case of Sri Lanka, India, Nigeria, and other countries. Secondly, the developments of nations which force their parent state to adapt and cede

sovereignty. However, in this historical period, the attributes that reinforce national identity vary they all suppose the sharing of history over time. Another very important aspect, in this sense could be language. As Manuel Castells notices in his book *The Power of Identity* (2003):

“I would make the hypothesis that language, and particularly a fully developed language, is a fundamental attribute of self-recognition, and of the establishment of an invisible national boundary less arbitrary than territoriality, and less exclusive than ethnicity.... Language provides the linkage between the private and the public sphere, and between the past and the present, regardless of a cultural community by the institutions of the state.”

In a world that seems to be obsessed with globalization and modernization, the power of global media and language as direct and incontestable expressions of culture, become the trench of cultural resistance, “*the last bastion of self-control, the refuge of identifiable meaning*” as the author mentioned above said. “*Thus, after all, nations do not seem to be imagined communities, constructed at the service of power apparatuses. Rather, they are produced through the labors of shared history, and then spoken in the images of communal languages whose first word is ‘we’, the second is ‘us’, and unfortunately, the third is ‘them’*” – Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (2003).

Bibliography:

1. Bhabha, H.K., 1990, *Nation and Narration*, Routledge, London and New York;
2. Castells M., 2003, *The Power of Identity*, Blackwell Publishing.
3. Franklin, B., 1973, *The Nation*, Oxford University Press;
4. Renan E., 1939, *What Is a Nation?*, Oxford University Press;
5. Smith, A.D., 1994, *Nationalism*, Oxford University Press;