

Ozkirimli ch. 1

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Introduction

Thou knowest not how sweet is the *amor patriae*: if such would be expedient for the fatherland's protection or enlargement, it would seem neither burdensome and difficult nor a crime to thrust the axe into one's father's head, to crush one's brothers, to deliver from the womb of one's wife the premature child with the sword.

Coluccio Salutati (quoted in James 1996: 30)

No single political doctrine has played a more prominent role in shaping the face of the modern world than nationalism. Millions of people around the world have willingly laid down their lives for their 'fatherlands' and this almost ritualistic mass self-sacrifice continues unabated. Obviously, not everybody displays extremism on the level of Salutati. But as Elshtain remarks, that sort of extremism has been 'the norm in many of the great and horrible events of our century' (1991: 400).

Despite this pervasive influence, however, nationalism was not taken seriously by the social scientists until relatively recently. For much of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, it was seen as a passing phase, by liberals and Marxists alike, hence as 'intellectually unproblematic' (Halliday 1997a: 12). It was only in the 1920s and 1930s, with the pioneering works of historians like Carleton Hayes, Hans Kohn, Louis Snyder and E. H. Carr, that nationalism became a subject of sustained academic inquiry. Unlike their predecessors who were mainly interested in ethical issues, these historians took nationalism as a 'discrete subject of investigation' and made use of sociological factors in their accounts (Smith 1998: 17; Snyder 1997). The number and diversity of the studies of

nationalism increased in the following decades under the impact of the experience of decolonization and the 'proliferation' of new states in Asia and Africa. Subscribing to some version of the then ascendant 'nation-building' model, most of these studies saw nationalism as a concomitant of the modernization processes. The 1980s, on the other hand, mark a turning point in many respects. With the publication of John Armstrong's *Nations Before Nationalism* (1982), Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983), Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* (1983) and Anthony D. Smith's *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (1986), among others, the debate on nationalism completed its 'adolescence'. In this period, the theories grew more sophisticated and the 'lines of battle' became clearer. Nationalism, which had to wait until 1974 to have its first academic journal, finally had a stimulating, even polemical, literature.

There are, I think, two reasons for the belated development of a fully-fledged literature on nationalism. The first is the general indifference of social scientists to nationalism as a subject of investigation: nationalism was belittled by mainstream academic thinking until quite recently, and its full potential was not properly understood. Interestingly enough, this condescending attitude still prevails to a certain extent. One can observe its reflections in the studies of nationalism which take great pains to justify their 'right to exist': if we take a quick look at the articles and books written in the last few years, we can see that most of them begin by mentioning how important nationalism has become 'recently', that is after the collapse of communism, and by enumerating cases of ethnic conflict from this or that region of the world to support this argument. Even the examples cited are similar: Rwanda, Bosnia, Somalia, Eritrea and so on. This attitude is partly conditioned by the rigidity and conservatism of the established disciplines. A rigid conception of social science rules that political science should study the state or, say, democracy, party systems, equality, justice and power. International Relations should focus on the relations between states and analyse war or peace. Sociology should examine the society, for example the relations between individuals and various collectivities. According to orthodox conceptions which have dominated the established disciplines for many decades, nations and nationalism do not

constitute a problem to be investigated: their existence is taken for granted.

This picture, however, is not an accurate representation of reality. Nationalism plays an important role in the creation of many states. In other cases, states have embraced nationalism later, to justify their right to exist in a world of nation-states. If democracy means 'rule by the people', then the people are almost always conceived as a nation. Equality or justice is usually required for the members of the nation, and elites compete for power in order to rule the 'nation'. On the other hand, both war and peace take place among 'nations', or more properly for the 'nations'. Finally, the society of the sociologist is more often than not a 'nation' whose members share a particular culture and live within definite borders. The culture that s/he explores is a 'national' or ethnic culture. In short, there is no area in the social sciences which has not felt, directly or indirectly, the spell of nationalism. Under these circumstances, it is quite surprising to encounter such indifference *vis-à-vis* nationalism. To understand this, we should consider the second reason.

The second reason that deferred scholarly intrusions into national phenomena was the tendency to equate nationalism with its extreme manifestations, that is with separatist movements that threatened the stability of existing states or with aggressive right-wing politics. Such a view confines nationalism to the periphery, treating it as the property of others, not of 'us' (Billig 1995: 5; Calhoun 1997). As Billig contends, "our" nationalism is not presented as nationalism, which is dangerously irrational, surplus and alien'; it is presented as 'patriotism', which is good and beneficial (1995: 55). In fact, this view is accepted consciously or unconsciously by all sides, namely by both those who do not take nationalism seriously as a subject of academic inquiry, and those who study it. Nothing illustrates this better than the 'standard introductions' I have alluded to earlier, which mention only protracted ethnic conflicts or wars as examples of nationalism. The same conviction lies behind the depictions of nationalism as a 'tide-like' phenomenon, that is emerging under crisis situations, then suddenly disappearing once normal conditions are restored. One particular manifestation of this is the 'return of the repressed' perspective which impels many commentators to suggest that we are faced with a new wave of nationalism after the collapse of Soviet type com-

munism in 1989 (for example Ignatieff 1993: 2). Brubaker notes that there is a 'quasi-Freudian' flavour in these depictions:

Lacking the rationally regulative ego of self-regulating civil society, the communist regimes repressed the primordial national id through a harshly punitive communist superego. With the collapse of the communist superego, the repressed ethnonational id returns in full force, wreaking vengeance, uncontrolled by the regulative ego. (1998: 285–6)

Brubaker argues convincingly that the policies pursued by communist regimes were anything but 'anti-national': 'The regime repressed *nationalism*, of course; but at the same time, it went further than any other state before or since in institutionalising territorial *nationhood* and ethnic *nationality* as fundamental social categories' (*ibid.*: 286). More generally, 'the claim that nationalism is returning implies that it has been away' (Billig 1995: 47). As Billig observes, the wars waged by democratic states are not labelled nationalist by those who subscribe to this view. Ignatieff, for instance, 'hardly mentions the Vietnam or Falklands Wars, let alone the various US sorties into Korea, Panama or Grenada', all of which occur 'during nationalism's so-called quiescent period' (*ibid.*).

This book will diverge from these more conventional accounts which take 'our' nationalism for granted, and will instead endorse an analytical framework developed by a number of scholars in recent years (Balibar 1990; Billig 1995; Brubaker 1996, 1998; Calhoun 1993, 1995, 1997). At the heart of this approach lies the belief that nationalism is not a latent force that manifests itself only under extraordinary conditions, a kind of natural disaster which strikes spontaneously and unpredictably. Nationalism is a discourse that constantly shapes our consciousness and the way we constitute the meaning of the world. It determines our collective identity by producing and reproducing us as 'nationals' (Billig 1995: 6). It is a form of seeing and interpreting that conditions our daily speech, behaviours and attitudes.

Obviously, this is a very general definition, one that might be criticized on the grounds that it does not explain too much or that it overlooks the differences between various types of nationalism. However, I will argue that this 'umbrella definition' is more useful

than depictions based on a distinction between 'good' and 'bad' nationalisms or nationalism and patriotism. These definitions not only cause a 'terminological chaos' (Connor 1994: chapter 4), but also present us with the different versions of the same phenomenon as if they are separate phenomena – holding, for instance, that 'patriotism and nationalism represent two very different states of mind' (Billig 1995: 55). It is true that the Serbian militia in Kosovo or the ETA militants have different motives than ordinary French or American citizens, yet all these motives, despite their varying forms and intensity, belong to the same family. What unites them is the nationalist discourse: both the ETA militants who commit acts of terrorism and the French citizens who sing *La Marseillaise* in football stadiums use the nationalist discourse to explain, justify, and hence legitimize their actions. The motives and the actions might take different forms, but they are all of the same kind. The definition I have offered above spots this commonality and shows that seemingly disparate emotions, beliefs and actions are all manifestations of the same phenomenon. The problem of overgeneralization, on the other hand, might be resolved by using additional sub-definitions or typologies.

To recapitulate, then, the tendency to equate nationalism with its extreme manifestations was the second reason that delayed the development of a diversified literature, because nationalism was the problem of those in the periphery, not 'ours': when they settled their territorial disputes and completed their nation-building processes, they would likewise reach the stage of 'good', harmless nationalism. This detached stance was accompanied by a certain dose of Eurocentrism. In the words of Löfgren:

The old nations have images of operetta states and banana republics, and in these caricatures we see clearly the institutionalized patterns for what a proper nation is supposed to look like. Successfully accomplished national projects, such as that of the Swedish or the French, are quickly taken for granted. Unsuccessful examples, on the other hand, serve as examples of unrealistic ambitions or airy-fairy dreams, or merely comic attempts to imitate the old national giants. (1993: 166)

Needless to say, history did not unfold as expected by 'evolutionary determinists' who saw 'the rise of nations as part of the "move-

ment of history”, and a stage that was necessary... in the development of human history’ (Smith 1991b: 353). Not only did the existing problems remain unresolved, but new ones cropped up incessantly. Moreover, the ‘good’, ‘democratic’ nationalisms of the developed countries could not thwart the emergence of ethnic discontent or separatist movements within their borders, as was the case in Québec, Northern Ireland or the Basque country.

Today, we witness that both reasons that delayed the development of a fully-fledged literature on nationalism are gradually disappearing. Despite the continuing intransigence of established disciplines who insist in seeing nationalism as an ‘academic vogue’ like postmodernism, destined to pass away as soon as another ‘pastime’ is found, nationalism is now one of the most explored subjects in social sciences. Almost every week, new books join the library shelves allotted to the burgeoning literature on nationalism. As Smith rightly observes, ‘it has indeed become quite impossible to keep abreast of the tide of publications in the field’ (1998: xi). *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* is no longer the only academic journal in the field, and is accompanied by such journals as *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* and *Nations and Nationalism*.

As a result of these developments, specialization in the field has increased; new topics like identity, migration, diasporas, multiculturalism and genocide have been discovered; and nationalism has entered the curricula of many universities. A parallel interest can be observed in the media. Newspapers and television news are replete with the details of ethnic conflicts from various regions. Moreover, since the media plays an important role in shaping public opinion, people are on the whole more aware of the conflicts that involve their own countries.

On the other hand, it can also be asserted that the debate on nationalism has reached a more mature stage in recent years. Today, the questions and problems that bedevil the study of nationalism are well-known. The answers provided to these questions or the solution proposals are no longer uniform. In sum, we are faced with a much more diversified literature than 20 years ago: time, now, is ripe for a critical review of the theoretical debate on nationalism and for an assessment of the recent developments in the field.

Objectives

This book has three main objectives: first, to provide a systematic overview of some of the key theories of nationalism and to consider the main criticisms raised against them in a comparative perspective; secondly, to diagnose the deficiencies of the classical debate and to specify the theoretical problems we are still facing; and finally, to propose, in the light of these considerations and criticisms, an analytical framework that can be used in the study of nationalism. Before proceeding, however, certain points relating to the scope of the study should be clarified.

The first of these concerns my choice of period. Most of the theories/approaches reviewed in this study are formulated in the second half of the twentieth century, more specifically since the 1960s. In a way, this was inevitable: it is only in the last three or four decades that a fully-developed ‘theoretical’ debate on nationalism has emerged. Historians began to write the histories of particular nations or comparative studies of nationalism relatively early, but sociologists and political scientists remained silent on the subject until quite recently (Halliday 1997a, 1997b; Smith 1983). Ironically, however, there are not many studies reviewing the theories and approaches of this period in a systematic way – a notable exception being Smith’s recent book *Nationalism and Modernism* (1998). My decision to write this book is also motivated by this astonishing lacuna.

The second point that needs to be clarified relates to my focus on a particular literature, namely the Anglo-Saxon literature. The reason for this is quite simple: most of the studies on nationalism are produced in the Anglo-Saxon world. Books and articles written elsewhere are translated into English, usually, though not always, in a short period of time. Under these circumstances, it is very difficult to talk about a ‘meaningful’ choice. A student of nationalism who wants to study the theories of nationalism has no alternative but to focus almost exclusively on the Western, particularly the Anglo-Saxon, literature. This is even valid in the case of the studies which criticize the Eurocentric nature of the mainstream literature on nationalism. The works of the Subaltern Studies Group are a good case in point. Scholars like Partha Chatterjee and Ranajit Guha attempted to reinterpret the history of South Asia from the

vantage point of the subordinated (Eley and Suny 1996a), but, ironically enough, they have done this in the language of the colonizer, namely English. In short, whether we like it or not, and whether we call it 'cultural imperialism' or 'globalization', English has become a kind of *lingua franca* in most areas of social sciences.

One last point that needs clarification concerns the choice of theories and writers to be included in the study. The first thing to be said is that such a choice cannot be totally objective. Hence, even though I took great pains to include all major theories and approaches, I cannot assert that my selection is perfect or impartial. Many scholars who have made important contributions to our understanding of nationalism are left out because of time and space limitations. Among these, Anthony Giddens (1985), Michael Mann (1995, 1996), Charles Tilly (1975, 1990), Partha Chatterjee (1986, 1990), Liah Greenfeld (1992) are the first that come to mind. The works of some of these scholars will be discussed briefly in Chapter 2 where I will provide an historical overview of the debate and Chapter 6 where I will focus on recent approaches. Suffice it to say at this point that all key sides of the theoretical debate on nationalism will be represented in this book with usually more than one theorist.

Structure of the Book

As I stated earlier, one of the objectives of this book is to offer a critical and comparative review of the main theories of nationalism, focusing mostly on the post-1960s literature. This does not mean, however, that the debates of earlier periods are irrelevant. Contemporary theorists of nationalism are heavily influenced by the assumptions and convictions of their predecessors. With this in mind, I will begin my survey by situating the contemporary debate historically and theoretically. I will identify four stages in the study of nationalism:

- The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the idea of nationalism was born. Here, the contributions of thinkers like Kant, Herder, Fichte, Rousseau, Mill, Marx, Engels, Bauer and Renner, and historians like Michelet, Renan, von Treitschke and Lord Acton will be briefly discussed.

- 1918–45, when nationalism became a subject of academic inquiry. The works of Carleton Hayes, Hans Kohn and Louis Snyder will be considered in this context.
- 1945 to the late 1980s, when the sociologists and political scientists joined the debate and when, partly as a result of this, the debate became much more diversified. Here, the contributions of modernization theorists, for example Daniel Lerner, Karl W. Deutsch and early modernists will be discussed.
- From the late 1980s to the present, when attempts to transcend the classical debate (characteristic of the third stage) have been made.

In Chapter 2, I will also try to locate the main questions around which the debate on nationalism revolves.

The following four chapters will be devoted to the discussion of the main theoretical positions with regard to nationalism. In accordance with the chronological order and the general tendency in the field, I will start my discussion with the primordialist approach. After describing the different versions of primordialism, namely the 'naturalist', 'sociobiological' and 'culturalist' explanations, I will consider the main criticisms levelled against scholars who have subscribed to primordialism. This scheme of presentation will be largely preserved in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 4 will be reserved for the modernists. In contrast to conventional accounts which treat the modernists as a unitary category, I will divide them into three groups in terms of the key factors they have identified in their accounts of nationalism. Hence, neo-Marxists like Tom Nairn and Michael Hechter who have stressed the importance of economic factors will be discussed under the heading 'economic transformation'; scholars like John Breuilly, Paul Brass and Eric Hobsbawm who have emphasized the role of politics and power struggles between contending elites will be considered under the heading 'political transformation'; finally, scholars like Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson and Miroslav Hroch who have given priority to cultural factors will be reviewed under the heading 'cultural transformation'. Needless to say, these are not mutually exclusive categories. As Breuilly has said, 'classifications are simply sets of interrelated definitions. Empirically, they are not right or wrong; rather they are either helpful or unhelpful' (1993a: 9). I will argue that the classification I am introducing

here to present the modernist explanations is helpful, at least more helpful than accounts that treat the modernists as a monolithic category.

Chapter 5 will explore the ethno-symbolist position. I will first present the arguments of the two leading figures of this approach, John Armstrong and Anthony D. Smith, then consider the major criticisms raised against ethno-symbolist explanations.

Chapter 6 will be devoted to recent approaches. In this chapter, I will first try to substantiate the claim that we have entered a new stage in the debate on nationalism since the end of the 1980s. Briefly, I will argue that the Eurocentric, gender-blind character of the 'classical' debate on nationalism has been transcended by studies which have drawn our attention to such issues as the differential participation of women in nationalist projects, the daily reproduction of nationhood, the experience of nationalism in postcolonial societies, the specific contributions of the people on the national margins, that is the 'hybrids', to the construction of national identities and the like. Then I will discuss in some detail two well-received analyses of this type, namely Michael Billig's analysis of the daily reproduction of nationhood and Nira Yuval-Davis' study of the gendered dimension of nationalist projects.

In Chapter 7, I will first embark on a critical evaluation of the main theoretical positions. Then, in the light of these considerations, I will propose an analytical framework that might be used in the study of nationalism. This framework, based on a synthesis of ideas put forward by various scholars, will consist of five simple propositions:

- Proposition 1. There can be no 'general' theory of nationalism.
- Proposition 2. There is no 'one' nationalism; not only are there different types of nationalism, but different members of the national or ethnic collectivities promote different constructions of nationhood.
- Proposition 3. The common denominator of all these different movements, ideas, policies and projects is the nationalist discourse. In other words, what unites different nationalisms is the discourse and rhetoric of nationhood.
- Proposition 4. The nationalist discourse can only be effective if it is reproduced on a daily basis.

- Proposition 5. Any study of national identity should acknowledge differences of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class or place in the life-cycle that affect the construction and reconstruction of individual identities.

Further Reading

Despite the renewal of interest in the study of nations and nationalism, there have been very few attempts to provide a theoretical survey of the field. Two important exceptions are Smith (1983) [1971] and (1998). Smith's earlier book is the standard work of reference for the theories of the 1950s and 1960s, especially the model of 'nation-building'. His recent *Nationalism and Modernism*, on the other hand, constitutes a sequel to his first book and focuses on the theories and approaches of the last three decades. Though they do not provide a systematic overview of explanatory accounts of nationalism, the general studies by Calhoun (1997) and McCrone (1998) are very useful as guides in the field since they address many of the issues and debates around the subject.

The last ten years have also witnessed an outpouring of readers which contain articles or extracts from key texts on nationalism. Among these, the following are particularly helpful: Hutchinson and Smith (1994), Dahbour and Ishay (1995), Balakrishnan (1996b), Eley and Suny (1996b) and Woolf (1996).

Apart from these, the reader should also consult *The ASEN Bulletin*, issued by the Association of Ethnicity and Nationalism (based at the London School of Economics) for current publications.