

A Historical View about Concepts, Theories and Types of Nationalism



History of nationalism

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present some key aspects from the theory of nationalism studying. Nationalism in Europe has existed as civic nationalisms which is attributed to western countries and as cultural (ethnic) nationalisms dealing with East European countries. The model of ethnic nationalism is based on the legal practice of “ius sanguinis” (common blood) while, the model of civic nationalism is based on the other principle, that of “ius soli” (common territory). Another main difference between these theories is whether nations are ancient or modern. This brings to the main currents of nationalism study, which are: primordialism, perennialism, modernism, post-modernism and ethno-symbolism. Despite debates about the characteristics of nationalism, most scholars accept its historical importance.

Concerning the definition of nationalism there are different views. The term “nationalism” is generally used in two senses: to describe the attitude of a people, about its national identity; to present the actions of the nation, seeking the protection of the self-determination’s principle. One of the scholars of nationalism, Hugh Seton Watson, has given the opinion that despite numerous studies conducted to date, it is still difficult to give a precise definition of nation and nationalism¹. Despite debates about the characteristics of nationalism, most scholars accept its historical importance.

Modern nationalism is an ideology based on the premise that loyalty and devotion to the nation-state exceeds the individual or group interests². It is a political principle according to which “the political and national entity must comply”³. Nationalism is conditioned by the common existential interest of an individual to be part of a larger group and to include individuals belonging to the same group⁴. The term nationalism associated with political movements that seek to exercise state power and justifying such actions with national arguments. Nationalist argument is a political doctrine that is based on three assessments: Nation exists and has a unique character and distinct; national interests and values should take precedence over other interests and values; nation should be independent to achieve political sovereignty⁵. Nationalism means: “A national movement against the foreign occupation and oppression; national feeling; an ideology, which respects a nation called superior to other nations”⁶.

A group of researchers think that since 19th century, nationalism in Europe existed civic nationalisms attributed to western countries and cultural (ethnic) nationalisms dealing with East European countries. The two concepts of nationalism seek to equate the state, the nation and the

¹ Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nations & States: An Inquiry Into the Origins of Nations and politics of nationalism*, Boulder Press: 1977, p. 5.

² www.britannica.com/EB checked / topic / 405 644 / Nationalism

³ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1983, p. 1.

⁴ Elie Keduri, *Nationalism*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1993, p. 6.

⁵ John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985, p. 3.

⁶ *Fjalor i Shqipërisë së Sotme*, Botim i dytë i ripunuar i Akademisë së Shkencave të Shqipërisë, Tiranë: “Toena”, 2002, f. 824.

people. Ethnic nationalism emphasizes that the creation of political entities based on the existence of a community composed of members that have originated, the same language and culture that distinguish them from foreigners. While civic nationalism focuses on the existence of equality among citizens of the state who constitute a nation⁷.

According to the researcher Hans Kohn, Western nationalism has arisen earlier, is rational, progressive citizen, while the Eastern nationalism was born later, is cultural, mystical and authoritarian⁸. The essence of ethnic nationalism is the goal to redefine the political borders in accordance with the ethnic criteria. According to him, Western nationalism was developed based on the reality of the current political, disjointed feeling with historical past. Liah Greenfield thinks that the French borrowed the civic nation concept from the British people. They processed it in accordance with the peculiarities of France⁹. As a result of the French Revolution, the French created a concept for the nation, which equalizing notions people, sovereign nation and state, where the main criterion was the political one. The reason that French nationalists chose using the political nation concept in front of the cultural, linguistic and religious nation linked to the fact that France included territories and peoples that do not meet these criteria.

“Civic nationalism” is a form of nationalism, where the state takes political legitimacy from the active participation of citizens which represents “will of the people”¹⁰. This nationalism has its roots in the ideas of Jean Jacques Rousseau, where the nation conceived as a political unit equal number of citizens before the law, regardless of social position, origin, language and religion.

Ernest Renan viewed the emergence of nations as an urban development phenomenon conditioned by the fact that in Western countries “nation was a spirit or a spiritual principle”. In these countries thought that trait that characterizes a nation, was "something that stands above the tongue; it is the common desire "¹¹.

The model of “cultural or ethnic nationalism” was held in the Central and Eastern Europe. Eastern nationalism makes a clear distinction between nation and state. According to the ideology of ethnic nationalism, the nation was seen as a law of human nature, and the state as artificial creature.

Due to historical and political circumstances, Germany and a good part of Eastern Europe countries did not achieve unity in a single state until the middle of 19th century. Consequently, there arose the concept of ethnic or cultural nation that relied on criteria such as culture, language and common history. Creation of German nationalism was influenced by the writings of the philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder, which saw individuals in society, as part of the “volk”

⁷ Erik Hobsbawm, *Kombet dhe nacionalizmi që nga 1780. Programi, miti, realiteti*, Tiranë: “Toena” & Fondacioni “Soros”, 1996, f. 22.

⁸ Hans Kohn, "The Idea of Nationalism", in: John Hutchinson, Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism*, Oxford Readers: 1945, p. 23.

⁹ Liah Greenfield, *Nationalism, Five Roads to Modernity*, Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 166.

¹⁰ Nenad Miscevic, *Nationalism and Beyond: Introducing Moral Debate about Values*, Central European University Press, 2001, p. 10.

¹¹ Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?", in: Eley, Geoff and Suny, Ronald Grigor, *Becoming National, A Reader*, New York and Oxford, 1996, p. 41-55, 52-54; Herman Brauer, *The Philosophy of Ernest Renan*, PhD Thesis, reprinted from the bulletin of the University of Wisconsin, Philology and Literature Series, Vol. 2, No. 3, p. 205-379, Madison, Wisconsin, Oct. 1903.

or the German people. J. G. Herder required integration of state and society by defining cultural society equated with political determination. He thought that nation should have a greater value than the individual¹².

The model of ethnic nationalism was based on the legal practice of “*ius sanguinis*” (principle, according to which the nation was formed only by people who belonged to the same blood). While, the model of civic nationalism was based on the other principle, that of “*ius soli*” (according to this, the nation was formed on the concept of the people who born and live in the same territory, thus connecting common citizenship).

At the model of “cultural nationalism” belonging sense was based on language and culture, due to the lack of state. The representatives of cultural nationalism support the point of view that culture and civilization distinguishes a nation from others; nation is distinguished by habits and customs; people of a country have common historical fate, the same faith and citizenship. In the view of cultural nationalism, people need to connect with the people around them, because they have common qualities. On the other hand, the man needs for help, learning and collaboration with others. For these reasons, the individual joins with people who have common qualities. Precisely in this way the nation is born¹³.

The people of Eastern Europe and the Balkans are based on the principle of personality, which distinguishes between state and nation, and between citizenship and nationality. Balkan nationalism was influenced by the writings of the German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder. After the birth of the Balkan states, it appeared tendency of centralization, flattening and cultural assimilation of different population groups. The main tools to carry out this process were: public administration, schools, military, construction of roads, the spread of means of transport and postal services. However, after the birth of the national state, the main problem is the confrontation between ethnic nationalism, regional nationalism patriotism state. While in countries with mixed ethnic and religious population, cultural difference prevents tearing of different groups into one. Ethnic nationalism appears in the form of call “one nation, one state, a homeland”¹⁴.

Nationalist ideology is not the main reason of wars between nations, but misuse of the nationalist ideology by the governing political elite of the countries. This elite, recognizing the moral and spiritual strength of nationalism uses in view of its expansionist goals to other countries. Among different spread political and scientific circles is present the idea that civic nationalism is the most appropriate for bringing together nations and ethnic nationalism is regarded as the most primitive nation’s leads to wars. This argument is being used today by nationalisms that built earlier than others their national states. They continue to follow the same previous expansionist policy, although today it is covered with the word “peace and stability in the region”.

¹² Johann G. Herder, “Briefe zu Beförderung ser Humanität”, in: *Johann Gottfried Herder, Werke IX*, hg. V. Hans Dietrich Irmischer, Frankfurt am Main: 1991, f. 305.

¹³ *Të drejtat e Shqipnisë Ethnike*, Vëllimi i parë, Shkodër: Shtyshkronja “Zoja e Paperlyeme”, 1944, f. 12-14.

¹⁴ Kevin M. Doak, *History of Nationalism in Modern Japan*, Leiden and Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2007, p. 19.

Most of the Balkan nationalists, felt that progress and the process of creating national states in the Balkans stopped by presence of Ottoman Empire. Most of the Balkan elites embraced the ideology of ethnic nationalism, as it believes in the idea that the society in which they lived had the opportunity to become better. According to it, the best way to achieve this goal was the declaration of independence and the development of their national state. Balkan countries, the creation of national states got harder by the fact that linguistic and ethnic claims were closely related to the territorial and political ones.

The second problem relates to the issue raised by nationalist theory: A nation is a construct of human thought or a natural phenomenon? Is the nation that creates nationalism or nationalism makes the nation? The main difference between these theories is whether nations are ancient or modern. The main currents of nationalism study are: primordialism, perennialism, modernism, post-modernism and ethno-symbolism. The study of nationalism has been developed mainly by adhering to the line of thought of the two main schools: perennial and primordial school and that of modernism.

Primordialism, derived from the word “primordial”, the meaning of which is the beginning or the initial state. The primordial school’ representatives believe that the nation has existed since ancient times, before nationalism. The essence of this theory treats people that the initial state of creation of mankind. The nation is defined as a group of individuals who identify themselves with the origin, history and common culture.

"The primordial” scholars think that nations are “natural” part of the human condition like speech, sighting or smelling¹⁵. Primordial theory’s researchers support the view that the national state consists of an ethnic group or nationality that reaches international recognition as a sovereign and clear territorial borders. The representatives of modernist school say that the nation is a modern phenomenon and nationalism creates nations and not vice versa. According to them, the nation is a mass phenomenon that involves the entire population. The researcher Dominique Schnapper thinks ethnicities have always existed, the modern nations which arise later did not arise from nowhere, but following the previous feelings and institutions, which further refined the nation¹⁶.

Perennials as thinking current have got its roots in the philosophy of eternity. Perennial’s school representatives think that nationalism and nation are natural phenomena that take place in the everlasting way. John Armstrong thinks that the roots of the nation must be searched no later than the medieval period¹⁷. Another trend within this stream is periodic perennialism (national identities come and go, but the phenomenon is universal).

¹⁵ Umut Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000, p. 64; Anthony D. Smith, “Gastronomy or geology? The Role of Nationalism in the Reconstruction of Nations”, in: *Nations and Nationalism*, Volume 1, Issue 1, Cambridge: 1995, Cambridge University Press, p. 18.

¹⁶ Dominique Schnapper, *Bashkësia e qytetarëve. Mbi idenë moderne të kombit*, Tiranë: “Dituria”, 2008, f. 11.

¹⁷ Montserrat Guibernau, John Hutchinson, *Understanding nationalism*, Wiley – Blackwell: 2001, f. 18.

The modernist scholars, as Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm and Ernest Gellner think that the nation is a phenomenon that belongs to the modern period of human society. Furthermore, they evaluate the role and impact of internal factors in the process of nation building. According to the modernists' theory, nations rise above what people keep them as facts. Ernest Gellner thinks that some nations have a navel really ancient, others have devised specially by their nationalist propaganda, while others are free of navel fare¹⁸. According to Benedict Anderson, the nation is an idea imagined by people as members of a nation, even the smallest nation members never know, meet and hear most of their compatriots, but in the minds of each of them remains the image that they belong to the same community¹⁹.

Representatives of the modernist school have seen the ethnicity as a remnant of the traditional community in modern society. The nation is defined as "a group of people characterized by conscience and the will to live together". So, it does not need a common area to be subject to the limits. In general, modernist theory considers nationalism as an ideological structure, which was used to invent nations. One of the main representatives of modernists, Ernest Gellner, expressed the idea that "nationalism creates nations"²⁰. Researchers like Eric Hobsbawm and Ernest Gellner hold on the view that nationalism is a political principle, which is based on the idea that the political and national unit should match each other²¹.

A post-modernist or ethno-symbolism current is a combination of modernist school's views with those of the study of popular culture. Researchers postmodernism differ from current scholarly opinion for modernist focus more on the study of popular culture. Representatives of postmodernism as Walker Connor and John Hutchinson not explicitly oppose nationalism as the "inventor" of the nation²².

Ethno-symbolism thought current is a combination of all previous trends. Ethno-symbolists focus on social relations of first-nations, national cultures and modern forms. What distinguish ethno-symbolists views from primordial current views is based on the way of studying of nationalism. It is how they interpret the relationship between pre-modern ethnicities (in the past) and modern nations (in the present). Nations must disclose previous ethnic symbols, memories, myths, values and sacred traditions they have inherited from previous periods.

Among the ethno-symbolism scholars, stand out Anthony D. Smith and John Armstrong. The main criticism of Anthony Smith against modernists is that they "rest in shadow" of their "myth" of modern nation. They see modernity as the main factor of the formation of the nation²³. Ethno-symbolists reject the notion that nations are new political formations and escaped from

¹⁸ Ernest Gellner, *Nacionalizmi*, Tiranë: Botimet IDK, 1997, f. 118.

¹⁹ Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London Verso: 1983, p. 5-6; Philip Spencer, Howard Wollman, *Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*, Sage Publication: 2002, p. 37.

²⁰ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford: Blackwell Press, 1983, p. 54.

²¹ E. Hobsbawm, *Kombet dhe nacionalizmi...*, p. 9; E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 1.

²² Anthony D. Smith, "Gastronomy or geology? The Role of Nationalism in the Reconstruction of Nations", in: *Nations and Nationalism*, Volume 1, Issue 1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 18.

²³ Anthony D. Smith, "Nations and History", in: Montserrat Guibernau, John Hutchinson, *Understanding nationalism*, Wiley – Blackwell: 2001, f. 9-10.

earlier ethnic communities before modern times. Anthony D. Smith thinks that the formation of the nation must be understood that it is developed in a period of long time.

Liberal theorists have used some key criteria to determine the nation. First, there is a criterion of territorial adequacy. A nation must have a sufficient size to form a national unit; secondly, it is a cohabitation or common historical memory to have a state; thirdly, it is the existence of a cultural elite for the development of literature and the local administration; Fourth, it is the ability to undertake conquests or to resist invasions.

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