

Nationalism: A Border–Making Ideal

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Abstract

In this research article, my purpose and goal will be to show nationalism as a border-constructing ideal. Various different types of nations and nationalities, divide humans in different nationality groups. Nationalism, as a term, refers to a doctrine or political movement that holds a nation, usually defined in terms of ethnicity or culture, has the right to constitute an independent or autonomous political community based on a shared history and common destiny. In the true sense, nationalism does not cover all humans but just a community in which people share common history, culture and so on. It is concerned mainly with the creation of a state and its maintenance and strengthening. It can be understood as a political program that sees creation and maintenance of a fully sovereign state owned by a given ethno-national group, people or nation, as a major duty of each member belonging to the group. This article incorporates the ideas and theoretical insights of various theorists/writers towards nationalism. I introduce nationalism, discuss, very briefly, the seven types of nationalism presented in contemporary literature, present an overview of ‘nation,’ ‘state’ and ‘nation-state,’ and draw the conclusion that nationalism is a boundary making ideal. I use qualitative technique in preparing this article prove my claim that nationalism makes wall and divides people in different groups.

Keywords: nationalism, boundary, nation, colonization, community

Introduction

As a consequence of the ‘Napoleonic invasion’ taken place in 1806, nationalism first arose in Germany; the shift was sudden, radical and sudden. What some people argue today is that after breaking the chain of dominant states and dominant classes within the state raising slogan of nationalism of one type or another, subjugated nations or groups become liberated. However, as soon as they are liberated, they rush to introduce oppression over their own national minorities in one way or another. Nationalism, in the sense of quest for a nationality is an attempt of return of the repressed. In the struggle

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or revolt of one form or another in various parts of the world such as in Rwanda, Liberia, India, Nepal and others, we find that quest for the nationality or movements for nationalism have occurred due to the oppression or colonization made by one group of people to other groups or by one country to another. This sort of domination, exploitation, oppression or colonization may take place within one country by one group to other groups and sometimes by one country to another country.

The repressed nations attempt to regain their lost identity to return the normal state attaining equal human right. Their purpose is to break chain of the colonizer or imperialist. The quest for nationalism by revolting against the oppression made by some religious groups, caste groups, and class groups can be seen in Nepal in different phases of history as in some other countries in the world. Neil Lazarus, expressing the project anti-imperialist nationalism--separation from imperialist power--states in *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World*: “Anti-imperialist nationalism, by contrast, tend either to be predicted upon the ‘project of consideration following an act of separation from [an imperialist power]’ ... the very power whose presence denied community.” (Lazarus, 1999, p. 74).

If one community colonizes to another community or various communities of the same country, it is internal colonization. Colonization made within their own country is as severe to the colonized or oppressed group as the colonization made by another country. It makes the oppressed group or colonized state or nation intolerable. As a result, the oppressed groups or nations start revolts for freedom and start struggles of one sort or another.

The nationalist ideology, like any ideology, C. Geertz, in *The Interpretation of Culture* says, is a “symbolic strategy” (Geertz, 1973, p. 230). For Geertz, ideology is “a response to strain,” “cultural as well as social and psychological strain” (p. 219). For instance, the nationalists build arguments for tradition only when its validations have been questioned.

Benedict Anderson argues that the development of the press gives the feeling of belonging to an imagined community (Anderson, 1991) by arousing the same thoughts at the same time among members of a national culture whose borders are marked out based on language. For example, all the Nepali language-speaking people fall in a single nationality group no matter where they reside; the language they speak constructs their nationality borders. The political significance of nationalism has been at the heart of modern political theory. Political theory has sought to place the state at the center of interpretations of the nature and proper form of the political good. In the context of

liberal democracy, national borders and the nation-state define the proper spatial limits of the political good. The manifestation of the political good is directly linked to the national citizenry.

D. Goldblatt and J. Perraton in *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture* say that the construction of nations, national identities and nation-states has always been contested and the conditions for the successful development of each never fully overlapped with that of the others (Goldblatt and Perraton, 1999). The fixed borders of the modern state have encompassed a diversity of ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups with mixed inclination and support. The rise of the modern nation-state and nationalist movements altered the scenery of political identity. The conditions involved in the creation of the modern state helped a lot generate a sense of nationhood.

The incidence of new communication systems, which facilitated interclass communication and the spread of cultural features of national histories, myths and rituals—a new imagined community—, helped arouse concept of nationhood. New media such as printing and the telegraph, independent publishers and a free market for printed material played a crucial role to promote cultural domain. The supposition is that the proper unit of culture is the ethno-nation; it considers that each member is supposed to take the ethno-national culture.

Types of Nationalism

Regarding the types of nationalism there is not uniformity among various writers.

Some of the prominent types of nationalism presented in contemporary literature are: (1) classical nationalism, (2) imperialist nationalism (3) anti-imperialist nationalism, (4) civic nationalism (5) cultural nationalism, (6) liberal nationalism and (7) Ethnic nationalism.

Classical nationalists are generally attentive about the kind of their culture and other people's attitude to their nation-state. Various elements of Universalist culture become victim to such nationalist wish. Another feature of classical nationalism, especially in everyday life, puts various demands on individuals. For instance, they prefer to buy domestically produced goods even if they are more expensive to the imported ones.

Imperialist nationalism has taken the form of project of unity based on conquest. This act tends to be an illegal and unfair enterprise in which powerful countries and powerful nationality groups conquest weaker ones. Then, they consume land, resources, and conquered population. The concept of “Greater China” is an instance of this type of nationalism. China conquered autonomous Tibet and subsumed land, resources, and

population of Tibet in China. The distinction between imperialist and anti-imperialist nationalism is related to social politics. The nationalist movements as such, in anti-imperialist nationalism, are directed not only against oppression but also against the political chain.

In civic nationalism, membership in the nation bases on the equal right of citizenship--irrespective of color, race, religion, and ethnicity and so on--of a community that supports to a shared set of political values and practices. Some nationalist theorists have called this model of nationalism a moderate patriotism. Rousseau appears as a great thinker in the development of both civic and ethnic nationalism. Agreeing Rousseau, for his description of civic nationalism, Hans Kohn states, "a nation that expressed itself through the general will, could for Rousseau not be a product of nature" (Kohn, 1944, p. 249).

Cultural nationalism talks about globalization of culture of particular local and national level in various new forms like pop culture. Different nationalisms have their own identities and objectives but all of them construct boundary/wall. With the rise of nation-states and nationalist projects, the spatial organization of culture was transformed. Nation-states took control of educational practices, linguistic policies, postal systems, and so on. However, with the technological innovations in the eighteenth century, new forms of cultural globalization became well defined.

Liberal nationalism is a form of nationalism with a cultural content. Yael Tamir in *Liberal Nationalism* states, ". . . most liberals are liberal nationalists" (Tamir, 1992, p. 139). This means that much of the liberal theorizing on justice has simply assumed the existence of a single national community within which liberal principles of justice are to apply (Tamir, 1992). As with all brands of nationalism, liberal nationalism commands the establishment of certain nationalized institutions for the purpose of promoting and securing a cultural identity in the name of self-determination. Liberal nationalism centers on universal ideas, especially freedom and justice. These also provide liberal nations with universal missions. The traditional liberals view that the individual is allowed to equal respect and concern is understood to be more parochial than it was once thought to suggest. It means to apply to individuals as fellow nationals, and not necessarily to all individuals as such. Kohn quotes Milton: "If men within themselves would be governed by reason, and not generally give up their understanding to a double tyranny, of custom from without, and blind affection within, they would discern better, what it is to favor and uphold the tyrant of a nation" (Kohn, 1944, pp. 170-1).

Ethnic nationalism refers to nationalism and nation defined in terms of ethnicity/culture. This type considers that the nationality group has a right to establish an independent or autonomous political community based on shared history and common destiny. A group of people aspiring to nationhood on this basis will be usually called “ethno-nation” in order to give emphasis to its ethno-cultural values. Basis of the determination of one’s membership in the community becomes the ethno-cultural nationalist. Membership of the people depends upon their origin and early socialization. They cannot choose to be a member of a community that they like. Fredrik Barth, in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: the Social Organization of Cultural Difference*, argues, “What make ethnic distinctions emerge in an area has much to do with the fact that each ethnic group can be “associated with a separate range of value standards” (Barth, 1969, p. 18). The cultural content of this social unit may change its boundaries, as defined by these value standards. It enforces in order to differentiate “we” from a “they.

Nation, State, and Nation-state: Critical Overview

A “nation” is a cultural group no matter it is united by common descent or not. Viewed from a broader perspective, a nation is like somewhat mixed both ethno-cultural and civic category. Walker Connor in *Ethno-Nationalism: The Quest for Understanding* says ethnicity represents, “a step in the process of nation-formation” (Connor, 1994, p. 102). Max Weber in *Economy and Society* offered an interpretation by pointing out that the concept of the ethnic group corresponds to that of the nation but that “the sentiment of ethnic solidarity does not by itself make a nation” (Weber, 1978, pp. 389-395). Connor tries to clarify this distinction by arguing, “While an ethnic group may . . . be other-defined, the nation must be self-defined” (Connor, 1994, p. 103), which means that it has developed a nationalist ideology.

Nationalist demands arise and prosper under particular conditions. Nationalists--Benedict Anderson, S. T. Coleridge--have viewed and defined “nation” in their own ways. Anderson, in his work *Imagined Communities*, defines a nation as an “imagined political community that is imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson, 1991, p. 7). Samuel T. Coleridge says that a nation is the unity of a people.

A “state” is an institution that enforces property rights. Where there are no property rights, no stable expectations about what is mine and what is not, there is no state. Where there are vague or uncertain property rights, the presence of a state is vague or uncertain. Where systems of property rights conflict, there is a battle over which

institution will be able to assert itself as the state in a particular area or over a particular group of people. The two most fundamental needs of any state are tax and soldiers. People agree them due to force or the direct threat of force of the state. A more efficient means of making them ready to agree is utilitarian-trades of services, including the enhanced protection of property rights or the grant of more property rights, for higher or more dependable flows of taxes and recruits. What separates a legitimate from an illegitimate state is the presence of beliefs in the minds of those within the scope of that state that they should obey and act with its orders for reasons of right and duty.

The nationalist leaders pursue to create a sense of nationality and a commitment to the nation. In “Towards a Global Culture?” *Global Cultures: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, A. D. Smith expresses that a “national community of fate” is well documented. The “nation-to-be” was not any large, social or cultural entity; rather, it was a “community of history and culture” (Smith, 1990, pp. 180-1), occupying a particular territory, and often laying claim to a distinctive tradition of common rights and duties for its members. Smith makes it clear that the relationships between these groups, and between these groups and states, has been checked and often a source of bitter conflict. In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, nationalism became a force, which supported state formation in certain places, for instance, in France and challenged or refashioned it elsewhere, for instance, in multiethnic states such as Spain or the United Kingdom.

Romantics regard the state as a mechanical and juridical construction. They believed the nation to be the work of nature, and therefore something sacred, eternal, organic, carrying a deeper justification than works of men. Kohn, in *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in Its Origins and Background* says, “In Rousseau’s thought, the nation and the nation-state were nothing ‘natural’ or ‘organic,’ but a produce of the will of individuals” (Kohn, 1944, p. 249).

Conclusion

The modern notion of nationalism is the feeling arising out of nationhood, belonging, or devotion to the interests or culture of one’s nation. Various scholars, researchers and artists have defined nation and nation-state in the past two centuries in insightful and conflicting way. To construct a theory of the nation and to evolve one of nationalisms is not the same thing.

Nations have an institutional dimension that is state-oriented. Hence, nations have the notion of “nation-state.” Nations, viewed from another perspective, are timeless phenomenon. Viewed from another perspective it can be understood as cultural and ethnic community. Another school of thought opines that nations have been aroused for a very long time, though they take different shapes in different points in history. A dispute is on what constitutes a nation and how these national borders should be drawn.

Postmodernists and Marxists also contribute ideas related to nation. The modernization school’s is the most established scholarly argument; these scholars see nations as entirely modern and constructed. Kathleen Kerr’s notion of nationalism and nation in *Literary Theory and Criticism* is worth quoting: “Models of nationhood primarily took two forms, one civic and one cultural or ethnic, both of which remain influential today. Civic nationalism, founded on the values of liberty and justice. . . . Cultural nationalism romanticizes ethnicity, the state assuming political legitimacy as a natural consequence of ties of consanguinity, as in Nazi Germany” (Kerr, 2006, p. 362). Community of common culture, origin and language, are focal bases for the construction of nationalist claims. In the classical view, an ethno-nation is a community of origin, culture, language, and custom. Philosophical discussions and definitions of nationalism are highly concerned to its ethno-cultural variations.

National sentiment is considered as being rational; it is considered rational for individuals to become nationalists. Identification of the individual or group within an ethno-national group has to do with inter-group cooperation. This type of cooperation is easier for those who are part of the same ethno-national group. Ethnic ties like common language, customs, and expectations in a multiethnic state help him/her a lot in finding his/her ways in new surroundings. After the establishment of the ties, he/she becomes part of a network. It is rational to go on cooperating and ethnic sentiments do secure the trust and the bond needed for smooth cooperation. While welcoming a newcomer in a multiethnic state we should not forget a possible extreme of ethno-national conflict. In such a crisis of trust, both the sides will tend to see the other as being inimical.

A nation had come into being directing its own destiny and feeling responsible for it. Kohn says that a nation sprang from a unique consciousness of the identity of divine, natural, and national law, based upon the dignity and liberty of every individual as God’s noblest creature, upon his individual conscience inspired by the inner light of God and reason alike (Kohn, 1944). In Jefferson’s words, “If a nation expects to be

ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be” (qtd. in Kohn, 1944, p. 313).

We can classify nationalism in two kinds as “good” and “bad.” In the “good” kind, the nationalists are merely striving to create, or maintain their own nation. The “bad” kind of nationalism believes on own’s “superior” nation or race against all others in a struggle for survival of the fittest. This kind of nationalism gave nationalism its bad name in Europe through the actions of men like Adolf Hitler and Slobodan Milosevic in the 20th century. It spread outside of Europe in the 19th century, when Europeans applied it in their attitudes towards peoples living in their colonies.

Related to this differentiation of nationalism is its two-sided characteristic: unifying and disintegrating force. Originally, the concept of nationalism was used only to unite, as used in France to bring together the entire nation to fight its enemies in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Afterwards, depending on the circumstances, it became either unifying, as in Italy and Germany, or disintegrating, as in the Russian nation-states.

As Anderson has notion of nation as an imagined community, the concept of nationality by creating borders, obstructs in the proper practice of justice in society. A nation, according to Anderson, is not like a concrete object but just an imagined idea which neither has a certain definition nor a certain shape. The people belonging to a certain nation identify themselves as members of the community and they consider them as nearer and dearer than non-members of their community. Therefore, one of the crucial objectives of nationalism is to present the sense of commonality among conational through common language, common culture, common history and the like which makes them feel closer to the people belonging to outside the boundary of the particular nation. Various different types of commonalities work to make the ties strong between the members of the nation. For instance, a people or nation or a community of people that follows the same religion may struggle for a separate nation based on religion making the people of the religious group unite considering them compatriots on religious ground. In this connection, it is usual to argue that conational can identify themselves as members of certain community. I endeavor to discuss how different types of nationalism make wall between different groups of people.

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