

Grounded nationalisms

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In literature, nationalism was traditionally viewed negatively – as an unexpected offshoot of the French and American Revolutions, and perceived “as a temporary aberration bound to disappear once the Enlightenment project penetrated all spheres of social life” (p. 2). Nationalism was therefore viewed as “an infantile disease” (ibidem), “a thin ideology” (p.1), if “not an ideology at all” (ibidem), “conceptually inchoate” (ibidem) or “a historical anomaly” (p. 2). In this context, the rise of new social movements from the 1960s, referred to as new nationalism, was surprising to many observers. Nationalism appeared therefore not as “a juvenile disease that one can outgrow or cure” (p. 3) but as “the dominant form of modern subjectivity” (ibidem) and “a fully fledged ideology” (ibidem) – “a very rich and diverse set of ideas, principles and practices that are integral to the organisation of everyday life in modernity” (ibidem). Nationalism could not thus “be regarded as a conceptually inferior ideology as it provides comprehensive answers to key social and political questions just as any other political ideology does” (p. 3-4). Highly related to nation state and nationhood, nationalism is “also a social practice embedded in the everyday life

of modern societies” (p. 4) simply because “nation-centric understanding of social reality are so pervasive in the modern world” (ibidem).

The author claims that the “conventional depictions of the nineteenth century as the heyday of nationalism [...] are simply wrong” (p. 4), because in fact “nationalism as a worldwide sociological phenomenon only gains significance in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries” (ibidem). It is because only then “nationalism has become a mass phenomenon” (ibidem). “Since we now live in a world where the nation state is the only legitimate form of territorial rule [...], it is almost impossible to escape the nation-centric understanding of social reality” (p. 4). The nation is thus viewed as “the fundamental unit of human solidarity and political legitimacy” (ibidem).

The author argues that the concept of *new nationalism* stems from “the widely shared misperception that nationalism is a transient phenomenon bound to eventually evaporate” (p. 6), which makes “the analyst’s surprise that nationalism has not gone away” (ibidem). In this context, the author argues that the “new” nationalism is just “the particular variation of social processes that have been in place for the past 200 years” (p. 7). In contrast to pre-modern polities, nation states justify their very existence by popular, i.e. national, sovereignty. The strength of nationalism stems therefore from the organisational dominance of the nation state as the “form of polity that underpins the modern world” (ibidem). In this world, “nationhood is so normalised and naturalised that there is a near-universal expectation that [...] a man must have a nationality” (p. 7). It is thus “in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries that nationalism has become [...] grounded in the institutions of modern state” (ibidem). “It is only in the last century [...] that [...] most [...] individuals perceive their nations as being one of their primary sources of identity” (p. 8).

The book draws on the author’s previously published papers, which have been, however, substantially revised, expanded and updated so that the resultant book differs substantially from the original version. The principal aim of the reviewed book was to explain “why nationalism remains the most potent operative ideological discourse in the modern era” (p. 8). The author’s ambition was “to explore the social origins and the organisational, ideological and micro-interactional dynamics of nationalist ideologies” (ibidem). The fact is that “nationalism is an organisationally and

ideologically embedded process that has historically proven to be extremely successful in tapping into the micro-world of everyday life” (ibidem). Therefore, rather “than being a bizarre anomaly, nationalism stands at the basis of modern social order” (p. 8). In this context, the notion of *grounded nationalism* was developed in the book.

The book consists of Introduction, eleven chapters and Conclusion, which can be grouped in three parts: (1) a theoretical framework, (2) application of these ideas to the variety of historical and geographical contexts, and (3) the general patterns of nationalist ideas and practices in the global environment.

Chapter 1 (*Making Sense of Nationhood*) focuses on the concept of national identity. The author argues that “belief in the existence of national identities is [...] a contingent historical product of the specific organisational, ideological and micro-interactional processes that have moulded the world over the last three centuries” (p. 16). He explores the social context of this belief and reveals the historical context of the social origins and the expansion of this belief system.

Chapter 2 (*Grounded Nationalism and the Sociology of the Long Run*) provides a theoretical framework for the modernist *longue durée* approach. The author contests the hegemonic attempts to identify this type of analysis with ethno-symbolism, which, he claims, is fully compatible with the *longue durée* perspective.

Chapter 3 (*Empires and Nation States*) challenges the theoretical contrast between traditional empires and modern nation states by focusing on the organisational and ideological continuities between the two models of social order. The author argues that “although empires and nation states are different ideal types of polity, they are highly compatible and [...] prone to metamorphosing into each other” (p. 17).

Chapter 4 (*Nationalism and Imperialism*) concentrates on the ideological projects that underpin imperialism and nationalism. The author differentiates between the capstone and modernising imperialism and argues that it is only the latter that “attained sufficient organisational and ideological power to penetrate their societies” (p. 17) similarly to that of nation states. Moreover, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, imperialism was often used to strengthen nationalist projects.

Chapter 5 (*What Makes a Small Nation?*) shows that the notion of *small nation* has often more to do with the specific strategic and ideological goals of a nationalist movement than the size of the respective nation. Beginning with Miroslav Hroch's definition of small nations which "are those which were in subjection to a ruling nation for such a long period that the relation of subjection took on a structural character for both parties" (p. 111), the author problematises and deconstructs the ideal of "small nation" by arguing that "rather than being a simple descriptive category denoting the size of a particular nation, this idiom has historically played a potent ideological role" (p. 112).

Chapter 6 (*Nationalisms and Statehood in Ireland*) argues that Irish nationalism much more resembles other European nationalism than many analysts are likely to admit, and that this nationalism has become much more grounded over the past fifty years. The author argues that the "general obsession with Irish exceptionalism is most often linked to the island's political split between North and South" (p. 135). The result is that most studies on Irish nationhood understand nationalism in very narrow categories of an aspiration to national unification and Irish nationalism as an ideology in decline. The author challenges these assumptions.

Chapter 7 (*Nationalisms and Wars in the Balkans*) explores the relationship between organised violence, state formation and nationalism. The author argues that, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was the absence of protracted warfare and coherent nationalist doctrines in the Balkans that distinguishes the history of the region from the rest of Europe.

Chapter 8 (*Balkan Piedmont?*) concentrates on the case of Serbia by making a clear distinction between the role of popular nationalism within and outside the Serbian state. The author argues that the formation and expansion of Serbia was more a result of the internal elite politics within the Serbian state than with society-wide national aspirations. Rather than the "natural" aspirations "of all Serbs to live in a single state" (p. 188), these "national ambitions were not the primary cause of state expansion" (ibidem) but "the expansionist nationalism was a side effect of intense and protracted conflict at the organisational core of the Serbian state" (p. 188).

Chapter 9 (*From Sacrifice to Prestige*) explores the changing representations of the nation in nineteenth and twenty-first-century Serbia and Croatia. While “the dominant nineteenth-century visual representations of nationhood were centred on violent images” (p. 18), “the imaginary of twenty-first-century nationalism” (ibidem) focuses on “the nation’s international achievements” (ibidem) in culture *sensu largo*. The author argues that the changing representations reflects “a greater organisational and ideological penetration of nationalism in the present day” (p. 19).

Chapter 10 (*Globalisation and National Subjectivities*) looks at the impact of globalisation on nationalism. The author demonstrates “how globalisation and nationalism have [...] constituted each other” (p. 19) because “the expansion of globalisation is a precondition for the worldwide proliferation of national ideology” (ibidem).

Chapter 11 (*Grounded Nationalisms and the Privatisation of Security*) “tackles the relationships between grounded nationalism and capitalism” (p. 19). The author argues neo-liberal capitalism does not necessarily undermine the sovereignty of nation states and weaken national identification. He indicates that, contrary to pre-modern mercenaries, “who had no sense of loyalty to any nation” (ibidem), the private military and security contractors “were born and raised in nation-centric environments” (ibidem) and thus are “wedded to the grounded nationalist realities of modern life” (ibidem).

In concluding chapter (*Conclusion: The Omnipotence of Nationalism*), the author emphasises that “the periodic excesses of nationalists should not be conflated with the rise of nationalist ideology” (p. 20), simply because “nationalism should not be judged by its visibility but primarily by the scale of its organisational, ideological and micro-interactional ground-ness” (ibidem). The author argues that “nationalism has actually just started its proper sociological development [...] and has reached all social strata and much of the globe” (ibidem). As an ideological doctrine and social practice, it “is still developing, expanding and becoming more grounded in everyday life” (ibidem). Good or bad, it is here to stay.

To conclude, it is worth to note that the book is an important and impressive piece of literature that arranges and develops the prevailing knowledge about nationalism. Taking *grounded nationalism* as a central notion of the discourse, the author

challenges popular opinions grounded in scientific literature by presenting solid analysis based on observations of social facts and processes. While the interrelation between nationalism and the nation state is pivotal for the book, no explicit reference is made to the interrelations of the former term with those of nation, nationhood, nationality and the nation-creation processes, which, even though touched upon in the book, are not interrelated in the discourse. The very notion of nation state suggests that nation is understood merely in political sense while hardly any relations between the nation and ethnicity is discussed, which are essential for post-colonial “nation states”.

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