Nationalism in the interwar period

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Abstract

Nationalism continues to be one of the most controversial political currents of the 20th century. After more than two hundred years since its emergence as a political movement, the nationalist ideology exerts a powerful attraction in countries with liberal and democratic traditions, as well as in the post-communist ones, less familiar with the parliamentary exercise.

There were numerous attempts to define the nationalism starting with the 20th century. It is even said that the number is proportional to the number of definitions that have dealt with this subject. We deal more with different influences and less with a systematically developed, ideological doctrine. Therefore, I think it is more correct to speak of nationalism in different historical contexts.

Key Words: *nationalism, political current, ideology, evolution.*

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Nationalism continues to be one of the most controversial political currents / movements of the 20th century. After more than two hundred years since its emergence as a political movement, the nationalist ideology exerts a powerful attraction in countries with liberal democratic traditions as well as in the post-communist area, less common with the exercise of the parliamentary.We need to distinguish nationalism as an ideology, political movement and cultural idea, although related, these issues will require a specific analysis in order to reveal that there is a unitary phenomenon called nationalism.

Then you have to deal with different types of nationalism and historical contexts in which they appear, to discover which structure of the specific speech it is. There were numerous attempts to define nationalism starting with the 20th century. It is even said that the number is proportional to the number of definitions that have dealt with this subject (Sugar, 1981: 67). We deal more with different influences and less with a systematically developed, ideological doctrine. Therefore, I think it is more correct to speak of nationalism in different historical contexts.

For some commentators, the national idea still appears in ancient times and is related to ethnic groups, expressing a certain instinctual biological form of association of individuals (Kellas, 1998: 34). It dates from the pre-modern era, before the advent of nation-states. Anthony Smith sees modern nations *"simply extending and strengthening the way in which members of ethnic groups to associate and communicate"* (Smith, 1986: 215). Other theorists link the emergence of nationalism to the Enlightenment, which is also the source of liberalism and Marxism. Of course, the idea was especially common in folk culture, and then became a political campaign and, finally, a movement of the masses (Hrosch, 1985: 152).

Hobsbawm refers to three major phases in the evolution of nationalism: a) 1830-1880, the period of liberal nationalism - liberal bourgeoisie; b) 1880-1918, the period of transformation

into a conservative movement; c) 1918-1950, when recording the peak nationalism (Hobsbawm, 1997). There are then a number of other theories that support the role of modernizing the nation in the nineteenth century. Rapid industrialization and development of the state apparatus made it necessary to find an ideology that had to integrate the individual into the new society. These theories have in mind rather the role of sociological and economic factors in the formation of nations, and less ideological and cultural aspects.

Ernst Gellner believes that *"nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent. (...) In short, nationalism is a theory of political legitimacy"*.

These definitions, and many others, seem to suggest ambiguity of the "object" of the nationalist doctrine, since it amalgamates feelings, mood, and loyalties based on ownership, political legitimacy and legal principles. Then you might ask the following question: Is the nation an objective phenomenon or just an image builder? As there is an existing phenomenon of the beginning, what makes it so "natural"? The etymology of the word derives from the Latin nation and nation born, being born and belonging by birth. That natural birth is associated with the memberships of a "natural" to a family, to a group. The idea of belonging plays a role in establishing a widely shared sense: people associate based on natural connections. Political connotation of the concept of nation is seen relatively late, in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, and is a creation of modernity. So arise and related concepts: national self-determination, national interest, national will, national consensus, etc.

National self-determination implies sovereignty and independence in their relations with other countries and its ability *"to make laws and to exercise jurisdiction in a given territory"* (Vincent, 2010: 239). ***National interest*** is linked to the development of the state and its spheres of interest. It is sometimes used as substitute for reasons of state, meaning that there is a reality that belongs exclusively to the state. More problematic is the ideological

content of the concept, as almost all political forces speak for the national interest, and it would be of absolute essential, historical meaning that transcends generations. But is there a reality beyond the individuals, their interests and their rights? Obviously, a genuine liberal spirit will consider the national interest an abstraction, a useful fiction or just a populist propaganda. From a more academic point of view, we need to specify in what way each time using concepts and if they cover a certain reality. **_National will,_** as the expression of a specific spirit or national political principle incarnated by the people. And here is the same problem as in the national interest must specifically determine its contents. **_National consensus_** is also a problematic concept because it implies a spirit, will, common interest, which would act in one direction, ignoring the contradictory opinions of individuals. Summarizing, the nation is a group of people linked by common descent through a culture, language, and common ground, and nationalism is an ideology that uses elements of belonging and collective identity to legitimize a political strategy.

There are a number of typologies in the literature on nationalism, each addressing the phenomenon depending on the perspective considered relevant. Kellas uses three concepts: ethnic nationalism, social, and official. Peter Alter distinguishes between the full and the reformist nationalism, Calton Hayes considers five types of nationalism: Jacobin, liberal, traditionalist, economic protectionism, and fully totalitarian (Vincent, 2009: 320). As we see, in the European context, contrast awards range from general (and imprecise) of the National Western and Eastern, to more technical characterizations talk of civic nationalism / ethnic and one liberal / traditional (Smith, 1994: 53-56). Therefore, I will now refer to those types of nationalism, the assumptions involved, and constitute the most significant cases to analyze this phenomenon.

Liberal Nationalism (Risorgimento), whose roots can be found in the Enlightenment, is associated mainly with the name of Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) and his ideal

"internationalist humanist". Proeminent campaigner for the unification of Italy, he was the inspiration of a movement response, "Young Italy", which will culminate with an international one, "Young Europe". His ideal of a united Europe was made up of 11 independent nations and strong enough to cope with the Habsburg Empire, and had a democratic constitutional regime. Each nation should be independent (to have the right of self-determination) under a constitutional democratic system of government that guarantees the rights and freedoms of individuals. For Mazzini, supreme vocation means devotion to the nation (expression of divine order) which implicitly assumes ministry of "humanity" (divine harmony), individuals exercising their freedom and performing their mission in an ideal perfection of common humanity. This kind of nationalism, romantically called collectivist, was compatible with liberal universalism and cosmopolitanism. This is what the literature considered a moderate nationalism, legitimate, corresponding to moderate liberalism.

   Traditional Nationalism (conservative), inspired by the cultural themes of Romanticism emerged as a reaction to the French Revolution and organist rationalism that threatened the continuity and evolution. Edmund Burke and Joseph de Maistre saw the expression of a higher order in the nation, an organic community, as opposed to a "simple case of citizens with equal rights." The German romantic options (from Schlegel and Novalis), influenced by the ideas of Herder and Fichte, the nation was the phrase "purity of language, mythology and popular culture." They wanted a return to the ancient common traditions, which had played a key role in the birth of nations. Common culture, a spirit or soul will only speak the language, myths, customs and laws that were fundamental elements in building nations. Perceived at the time as a form of protest against French cultural hegemony (Fichte with Address to the German Nation and Meinecke's idea of Kulturation) in the German states, nationalism traditionalist, romantic inspiration, is considered the

essence of nationalism per se. Not incidentally the XIXth century is a strong knowledge of popular culture, of interest to old habits and traditions. It was an attempt to assert the authentic culture personified in people demanding the right to national self-assertion. It could achieve such a state aesthetic ideal and harmony among nations, up to restoration by Catholicism, the medieval Republica Christiana (Novalis). The force of this type of cultural discourse is significant. It provides some legitimacy to the national ideal of self-determination and, in addition, meets the need for intellectual lineage identity creation. Not incidentally it was often associated with the ideals of cosmopolitan Europe.

   Civic nationalism is associated with liberal nationalism that seeks to combine the principle of national self-determination with the individual's self-determination. Particle "civic" seems to offer a certain legitimacy (and superiority) as suggesting that beyond what we mean by nationality, in the traditional sense, there is a political community. Or, it involves a set of laws and political institutions that binds the community around an authority other than the historical and cultural. For Anthony Smith, the model of "civic" nation is a predominantly territorial conception. Nations have well defined territories to be "historical" and "sacred" (Smith, 1989: 9). Another element is the idea of the homeland, *"a community of laws and institutions and a single political will"*, (Smith, 1994:10) which expresses some common political goals and interests. The political community is the substance of legal equality and civil rights and economic. The ultimate expression of this community is a set of common values and cultural traditions, a set of aspirations, feelings and ideas that binds people in a historic area. Therefore, the historical territory, a community and political and legal equality, plus a civic culture are, as Anthony Smith said, *"standard elements of Western concepts of the nation"* (Smith, 1994: 11). This kind of nationalism developed especially in countries which had a relatively stable area (England, France) and the problem was a common ideology to meet the need for national unity. In eastern Europe, where territorial

disputes are current today, there has developed a native nationalism claiming a homeland, a lost first wrongfully held.

Ethnic nationalism In contrast, Smith continues, ethnic nationalism prioritizes the community idea of birth and native culture. Regardless of where you live, you're organically bound to the community where you were born, common ancestry is the essential feature of the nation's "super-family" (Smith, 1994: 12). So, an ethnic community is the main feature of this nationalism. Instead of institutions and common law acts, this is the "will of the people" and therefore has an important role in mobilizing popular "moral and rhetorical" (Smith, 1994: 12). The idea of equality is replaced by vernacular cultural model, the traditions and customs that created the concept of "imagined communities" nation. Hence the fascination with historical myths, folk ballads about anonymous heroes who sacrificed themselves for the sake of the homeland. The ideological arsenal is impressive and it makes the most need to assert on behalf of a glorious past that this cannot compare to. Beyond the differences in content between the two types of nationalism, there is an element shared in common identity (cultural), collecting the core nationalist ideology.

Western / Eastern Nationalism Without a doubt, the most influential typological distinction is by Hans Kohn. He distinguishes between Western nationalism, rational, and the eastern one, organic and mystic. The concept of "rational" nation, specifically England, France and America, is associated with those groups of individuals living in a common territory under the same law and governance. Ideology is the product which becomes dominant in the middle class in these countries since the XVIIIth century, expressing the ideal of civic policies that combine individual liberty and rational cosmopolitanism. Manifested as practical objectives and constitutional motion, it was considered a political nationalism. He was born of an effort to *"build a nation and the political reality of fighting this"* without much consideration for the sentimental past (Smith, 1967: 329-331).

In contrast, in Central and Eastern Europe, where there can be a strong middle class, nationalism was the creation of groups of intellectuals who had no access to power, hence the temptation to authoritarianism. Intellectual nationalists created the historical myths and dreams for the future, an ideal country strongly related only tangentially to the past and present that had once become a political reality (Smith, 1967: 330). Therefore, it was regarded as a cultural nationalism, as a response to modernity and culture intellectual elites that gave "rational" to the West. Economic and social backwardness of these countries have to manifest in a regressive culture in a glass building meant of a substitute (cultural) around historical myths, in response to this precautions. This explains the fact that the nation was conceived as an organic unity with a *"mystic soul and a mission that only they could decipher"* (Kohn, 1955: 34). Perhaps an explanation of the national "mysticism" is that these countries have not known the experience of the Renaissance and Reformation, individualism, rationalism and secularism specific. This made them remain confined for long in the abstract universalism of the Middle Ages. Hence the nationalist rhetoric was marked by strong accents of essentialism, claiming that individuals are only the expressions of collective court.

Distinctions between different types of nationalism are certainly useful tools, what appears more problematic is the fact that in many cases, the "habits" of thinking creates focused discussion in a direction that neglects important aspects. They gave clear conceptual distinctions that are at the limit of contrasting types. Different types of speech form a certain range, but it does not tell us much about the assumptions involved in the construction of these theoretical arguments. To label a particular nationalist discourse as "rational" or "reasonable" compared with another more "organic", more "radical" or "primitive" requires reference to some standard rules. These rules require, in turn, report to a set of general assumptions which give an account of contextual frameworks that have made some

valuable judgments. Analysis of general assumptions involved in the construction and reconstruction of nationalist discourse involves treating it as a type of legal argument. From this angle, the classical typological distinctions loose importance. In all its forms, nationalism expresses the same imperative: the assertion of collective identity. Whatever form which expresses an ideal civic or historical mysticism, requires value for the sense of community, and hence a politics of the common good, to the tendency to affirm the individual and his plan of life. National values may be important, but there are many other values for which the individual may, without absolute constraint of hierarchy imposed by nationalist rhetoric. National values are standards against which to undertake any nationalist policy, and they become a political asset (priority) compared with other attachments and individual commitments.

Nationalism is a state of mind, feeling or sentiment of a group that lives in a well-defined geographical area, speaking a common language, has a culture that expresses the aspirations of the nation, and is attached to common traditions and in some cases a common religion.

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