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Political Modernization and the Nationalisation of Society[1]

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In contemporary Eastern Europe, the study of nationalism and national identity seems to be dominated by intellectual history and by the history of ideas. There is an inherent risk of approaching the topic from this point of view, which consists in portraying nationalism as a fiction, an imaginary world populated by constructed and invented beings such as Rumanians, Czechs or Pan-Africans, while tending to overlook the force and power of nationalism in structuring the political realities in which we life since empires have been replaced by nationalised states.

In what follows, I should like to introduce a complementary perspective from a social science point of view. The formation of nation-states and the rise of nationalism appear as products of a fundamental re-organising of the main modes of inclusion and exclusion, a re-ordering of the basic principles of membership and identity along national and ethnic lines. Thus, as soon as the nationalist outlook establishes itself as the guide for the juridical, political, economic and cultural praxis of the modern state, it becomes more than an ideology, more than a discursive construction of reality, as post-modern terminology has it, or an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991).

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1 The following text is taken from Wimmer, 2001 (forthcoming), *Nationalism, Ethnic Conflicts and the Modern State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

It is my contention that the national idea has become the central structuring principle according to which modern society organises processes of social inclusion and exclusion, not only in the sphere of culture and identity, but also at the legal, political, military, and social levels. In this manner they reinforce each other, making the nationalist representation of the world more and more plausible, as if this were the natural way to think and speak about society, politics, law, and so forth. Nationalist principles of thinking about the world have also permeated the social sciences and humanities and led to what one scholar has called 'methodological nationalism' (Herminio Martins 1974: 276f.; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2001). It shows its effects for example in the archaeology of contemporary Romania (cf. Niculescu, this volume).

In sociology, 'methodological nationalism' has produced a systematic blindness towards the paradox that political modernisation has led to the creation of community amidst society. In political science, it has allowed a mainstream theory to emerge, which sees the state as a neutral playing ground for different interest groups – thus excluding from the picture that the modern state itself has been 'captured' by the nationalist political project. In philosophy, theories of the social contract implicitly portray the original societies as nationally homogenous. Are we unable to analyse the fundamental principles of our own society because the lenses through which we see the world are coloured by these very principles – in the same way as looking through for example yellow glasses, you cannot distinguish yellow?

In what follows I should like to briefly outline my hypothesis in more detail by reviewing each dimension of the process of closure and by contrasting it with non-nationalist principles of social organization, more specifically with those characteristic of imperial polities. I will start with the legal aspects and then

pass over to political, military and social dimensions of closure along national lines.

Parallel to the emergence of the nationalist outlook, a process of legal closure along national lines evolved, mainly through the institution of citizenship, as Brubaker (1992) has shown in a groundbreaking study. While the legal system of empires was designed to define the unequal rights and duties of social estates, thus consolidating and reinforcing horizontal lines of distinction, modern states have replaced this hierarchical idea with that of equality before the law. Regardless of their social background, all members of society, poor or rich, noble or commoner, peasant or townsman, member of the central committee or not, should have the same legal rights and duties. The economic prerogatives of the nobility or the state and party elites were abolished; commerce, property (especially landed property) and the freedom to choose a profession, among others, became accessible to all citizens. The rights of political participation were extended and finally comprise man and women, people with property and without, town dwellers and countrymen.

However, this new mode of legal inclusion based on the concept of equality before the law evolved in parallel to a new, vertically structured form of exclusion, for the exercise of these economic and political rights became linked to citizenship. The legal distinction between estates was replaced by the distinction between citizens and aliens. At the same time, the concept of citizenship became gradually nationalised, with the result that citizenship and nation became one. It is worth recalling in this regard that in the early nineteenth century in Western Europe, all inhabitants of a territory, no matter what their language or ethnic origin, were considered to be members of the state. Citizenship became extinguished in case of permanent emigration. Only in the 1850s this strictly territorial

concept of citizenship was replaced by a linguistic and ethnic one, and citizenship and nationality became synonymous, both in France (Withol de Wenden 1992) and in Prussia (Franz 1992).

The full exercise of civil, economic and political rights was made dependent upon the acquisition of citizenship, while the latter was more and more defined in ethnic terms and more and more oriented towards the model of the *ius sanguinis* – with the universalism of human rights of the enlightenment period rapidly being converted into the particularism of nationally defined citizenship. Equal treatment before the law became a privilege reserved for nationals; the legal discrimination between members of social estates was replaced by institutionalised and legally enforced discrimination between citizens and aliens.

This legal closure went hand in hand with a political one. The rulers of colonial empires saw themselves as standing on top of a ladder that distinguished between lesser and more civilised peoples. This compelled them to help backward peoples in climbing the steps of evolution by implementing a benevolent policy of colonial incorporation. Christian kings, Muslim caliphs and sultans were by their noble birth predestined to execute God's will on earth and to ensure that commoners could live a decent and peaceful life. Communist cadres ruled over vast empires by virtue of their vanguard role in the revolutionary transformation of the world. Here too, a hierarchical order between avant-garde and the rest, between members of the party and the population at large, between the Central Committee and the masses of party members, was established. This order had, according to the political programme and the imperial practice of the Soviet world, no boundaries. It was potentially world embracing, similar to the reign of Caliphs and Kaisers, extending to all the countries and places where the revolutionary faith had spread. Where it had,

the peoples became colonized and integrated into the machinery of imperial rule.

Unlike these 'multi-cultural' empires, the modern state apparatus is organised on the basis of the national principle.[2] In modern nation-states, access to state power is reserved for those who represent the collective will of the *national* community (Modelski 1972: 9-108). The rule of French-speaking lords over German-speaking peasants is now regarded as scandalous (Kappeler 1992). Ibo peasants should no longer be governed by British administrators. A ruling class of 'ethnic others' like Mamelukes or Janissaries lost all legitimacy. Russian party elites are to be replaced by a government of Lithuanian extraction. Like should rule over like. After Wilson launched the idea of national self-determination (Moynihan 1993, ch. 2), it spread around the globe and provided the basis for every succeeding wave of nation state building, after the First World War in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, after the second especially in the Near East and in South Asia, in the sixties in Africa, and finally after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The claim to national self-determination became closely intertwined with the ideal of democracy in the political thought of early nationalist movements (Calhoun 1997, chap. 4; Hermet 1996). More precisely, the nation defined the group within which democracy was supposed to flourish. The enlightened philosophers never addressed the problem of how the boundaries between one democratic regime and another should be delineated or if there should be one single world-covering democratic state. Most of them assumed that existing state borders would remain, without, however, giving much thought

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2 In western Europe, this process was anticipated structurally by the horizontal inclusion based on religion that characterised pre-modern absolutist states since the peace of Westphalia (Schilling 1992; Calhoun 1997, chap. 4; compare also Hastings 1997).

to the problem. Others saw nations as 'natural' bedfellows for democracy. John Stuart Mill for example took it for granted that "free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities", because "the boundaries of governments should coincide in the main with the those of nationalities" (Mill 1958: 230 ff.).

Why should this be so self-evident? The egalitarianism of nationalist thought, replacing earlier hierarchical conceptions of society, bore a family resemblance with democratic ideals of equal participation in politics. In many historical constellations around the globe, political practice mixed claiming freedom from 'foreign' rule with fighting for popular sovereignty, because both contradicted the principles of imperial rule. Overthrowing the rule of kings and lords more often than not meant opposing peoples with other ethnic backgrounds, speaking other languages, 'belonging' to other cultures. Thanks to this double logic of opposition, democracy and nationalism became the twin principles of modern nation-states.

This has, however, been largely suppressed from historical memory because distinguishing bad, authoritarian, backward nationalism from good, liberal, progressive democracy has become common sense among Western scholars since the Second World War. It has impeded the discovery of the historic and systematic logic tying democracy to nationalism. Most theories and histories of democracy neglect this link because they look at the inner dynamics of evolving political structures and lose sight of what defined the boundaries of these structures (cf. Nodia 1992).

This leads me to the fourth movement towards the modern nation-state, namely the reorganisation of the mechanisms of solidarity at the level of the state and nation. In the course of industrialisation, the nationalist ideal of the solidary community

was contradicted by the growing discrepancies among social classes. The *laissez faire* principle that now governed the economy led to the impoverishment of the emerging working class. The political mobilisation of the proletariat was based on the ideal of a world revolution opposed to the model of the nation-state.

The integration of the labour movement into the national order of things was eventually achieved through the welfare state (Shalev 1983) that collectivised the risks of poverty, illness and old age by transferring them onto nation-state institutions (de Swan 1993). The welfare state was inspired by the idea of a national community of solidarity and could not have evolved independently of the ideological and institutional framework of the nation-state (Offe 1987).

This process of social closure along national boundaries was accompanied by what I call the nationalisation of the regime of mobility. After the introduction of freedom of movement for citizens within the national territory, and the implementation of the right of free choice of domicile, juridical and administrative mechanisms were put in place to allow state control over transnational migratory movements. While nationals obtained the right to leave the country and return there at any time without risking the loss of their civil rights, aliens were gradually deprived of that same right of free entry and exit. The extension of control over migration is closely connected with the establishment of welfare institutions, precisely because there is a gap between the citizenry and those who have the right to make claims under the welfare system (compare Bommes and Halfmann 1994), so that control over possible access to the national 'space of solidarity' becomes indispensable.

Thus, the process of domestic social integration and closure reaches its conclusion with the emergence of welfare institutions

and of state control over migration. Each step towards integration reinforces the political importance of ethnic or national membership. It brings forth new categories of people to be declared aliens and excluded from the realm of national solidarity. The emergence of national identities is closely associated with that of 'ethnic minorities' (Williams 1989). The establishment of consistent models of citizenship runs parallel with the exclusion of vagrants and aliens. The democratisation and nationalisation of government leads to the delegimatisation of 'foreign rule', and often to the expulsion of state elites belonging to ethnic groups other than the 'national majority'. With the nationalisation of the regime of mobility, the category of 'foreign worker' is created, and the legal status of immigrants is being eroded (Noiriel 1991).

Let me briefly situate this model in the field of current theories of nationalism (cf. Smith 1998). For Gellner and others, nations and ethnic groups are genuinely modern phenomena, the functional by-product of the rise of the territorial state and of industrial development. Others such as Anthony Smith regard them as being grounded in much older, pre-modern ethnic identities that limit the range of possible inventions and imaginations in modern times. For still others, they represent the perennial fundaments of human history. I tried to go one step beyond this debate on whether or not ethnicity and nationalism are modern phenomena in showing that modernity itself rests on a fundament of ethnic and nationalist principles.

Modern societies unfolded within the confines of the nation state and strengthened them with every step of development. While the principles of democracy, citizenship, and popular sovereignty allowed for the inclusion of large sections of the population previously confined to the status of subjects and subordinates, new forms of exclusion based on ethnic or national criteria developed. Since being a part of the sovereign

body, a member of society, and a citizen became synonymous with belonging to a particular ethnic community, the definition of this community became of primary political importance. Who belongs to the people that enjoys equal rights before the law and in whose name should the state be ruled, now that kings, caliphs and communist cadres have to be replaced by a government 'representing' the nation?

The answer was easier to find where absolutist states preceded national ones and created large spheres of cultural and ethnic homogeneity. Where the ethnic landscape has been more complex – usually the heritage of large empires based on some sort of indirect rule and communal self-government – the politicisation of ethnicity resulted in a series of nationalist wars aiming at a realisation of the ideal nation state where citizenry and nation coincide.
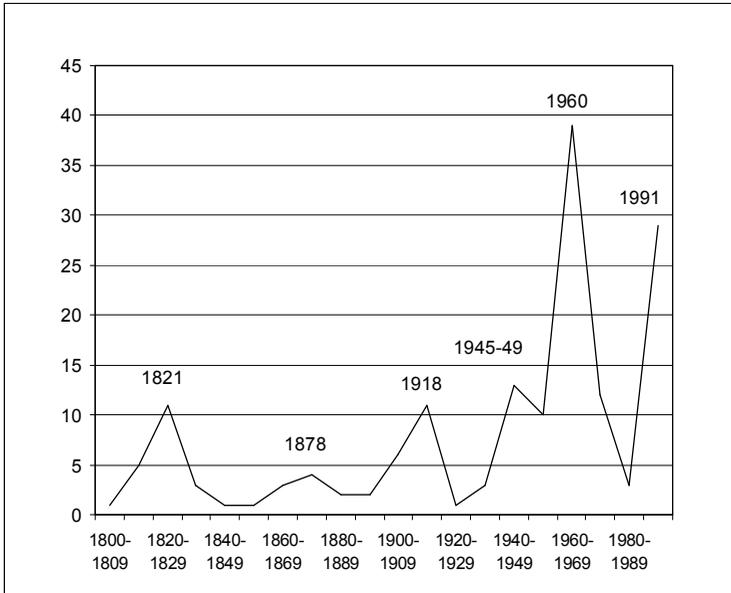
Forced assimilation or the physical expulsion of those who have suddenly become 'ethnic minorities' and are thus perceived as politically unreliable; the conquest of territories inhabited by 'one's own people'; encouraging the return migration of dispersed co-nationals living outside the national home – these are some of the techniques employed in all the waves of nation state formation that the modern world has seen so far. What we nowadays call ethnic cleansing or ethnocide, and observe with disgust in the ever 'troublesome Balkans' or in 'tribalistic Africa', have in fact been constants of the European history of nation building and state formation, from the expulsion of Gypsies under Henry VIII or of Muslims and Jews under Fernando and Isabella to Ptolemy's night in France or the 'people's exchange', as it was called euphemistically, after the treaty of Lausanne between Turkey and Greece.

Eventually, this conflict-ridden, warlike process leads to the fully developed nation state, as we know it from Western societies

after the second war. It is, indeed, a more inclusive, more accountable, more equitable and universalistic form of politics than humanity has known before – except for those who remain outside the doors of the newly constructed national home and for those who are not recognised as its legitimate owners despite occupying one of its rooms. Political modernity – democracy, constitutionalism, and citizenship – had its price, as has every form of social organisation based on strong membership rights. Inclusion into the national community of solidarity, justice, and democracy went along with exclusion of those not considered to be true members of the sovereign/citizenry/nation: those that became classified as foreigners, as ethnic or religious minorities, as guest-workers or stateless persons.

We can distinguish between six waves of nation state formation during the past 200 years. Most of the new states were not transformed absolutist states, but emerged out of the mosaic stones of imperial polities: religiously defined millets in the case of the Ottoman empire, language based regions and provinces in the case of Habsburg, administrative provinces in the case of the Spanish and British empire, etc. The first starts with the demise of the Spanish empire, the second goes from 1848 to 1880, with a number of foundations on non-imperial backgrounds (Germany, Italy, Japan) and some break aways from the Ottoman empire, a much larger third wave after the First War with the break up of the Ottoman and Habsburg empires, another wave after the Second War in decolonising the Middle East as well as South and Southeast Asia, a fifth during the sixties, when the colonial empires broke apart in Africa and Asia, and the sixth wave rolling over the realms of the Soviet and other communist empires during the nineties. On the following figure the six waves are clearly discernible.

Figure 1

Waves of nation state formations, 1800 to 2000[*]

Let me end my argument with some remarks, inevitably perhaps, on globalisation and the end of the nation state. In all disciplines and all countries around the world the song of the decline of the nation state and of nationalism is heard. My analysis has not referred to such actual trends so far. This is because I am indeed convinced that the current wave of nation state formation in Eastern Europe and other parts of the world mirrors earlier waves and follows a comparable logic of nationalising state and society.

In my view, the resurgence of ethno-nationalist politics in much of Eastern Europe is not tied to current trends of globalisation, contrary to most journalistic writing on the subject and contrary to what best-seller producing sociologists such as Ulrich Beck maintain (1997). They postulate a universal desire for cultural rootedness, accentuated under current conditions of rapid social change and 'globalisation' that uproot and disorient people especially in the hitherto protected domains of the former Eastern block. Thus, the drive for national self-assertion is seen as a reaction to globalisation and as a compensation for the loss of old securities.

Rather, I would like to attribute the new salience of ethnic and nationalist politics to the old story of switching the modes of inclusion and exclusion from hierarchical and universalistic to egalitarian and particularistic principles. The current politicisation of ethnicity and nationhood is the result of yet another wave of new nation state formation.

However, it is certainly true that the global context is a different one today. Nation state formation takes place in an global environment where the power of sovereign states is shared with international bodies such as GATT or the UN, where post-national models of political solidarity such as the Seattle-Movement have developed, and where everyday forms of lived solidarity that cross national boundaries, such as among

migrant families, have perhaps become more important than before.

For Eastern Europe, certainly, the delegitimation of nationalist politics in the global centres of power and wealth and the new importance given to minority rights has tempered the conflicts between "national majority" and "ethnic minorities" in states such as Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and so on. More importantly, the prospect of joining the European Union provided an enormous incentive to overcome exclusivist politics and follow the rules of minority protection such as outlined by the Council of Europe and other international bodies (cf. Ram 2000). Imagine what could have happened to Eastern Europe during the last decade without such a powerful mechanism of moderation. I am afraid that the drama of Yugoslavia would have been repeated time and again. Portraying ethno-nationalist politics in Eastern Europe and beyond as a repetition of a story already known does not imply to take the consequences less serious. Quite to the contrary, a look at the principles of the past may well help us to sharpen our ideas about some of the difficulties of the present.

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