



UDC: 316.356.4+323.1
<https://doi.org/10.22182/spt.18212018.11>
Manuscript received: 10.09.2018.
Accepted for publishing: 03.11.2018.
Review article

Serbian Political
Thought No. 2/2018,
Year X,
Vol. 18
pp. 173-196

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Theories of Nations and Nationalism: Old Approaches for the 21st Century

Abstract

Relying on Rogers Brubaker's belief that the study of nationalism has survived the erosion of nuanced and sophisticated works offered by the greatest minds in the field, this paper summarizes and reinterprets main Western theories of nations and nationalism. During the last five decades, several main theoretical approaches have emerged. The author argues the animosity between these approaches is only ostensible. Hence, a compatible perspective could emerge as a general framework for thinking about nations and nationalism in the 21st century. Such a framework would consist of modernism, interactionism and ethno-symbolism, all recognized in the literature as distinct views on the topic in question. Still applicable and compatible parts of the mentioned theories are extracted by thorough examination of their author's most potent claims in order to offer means for comprehending the complex phenomena in a fast and ever changing social environment of the 21st century.

Key words: Nations, nationalism, theory, modernism, interactionism, ethno-symbolism.

Introduction

When the European migrant crisis was at its peak in the autumn of 2015, some questions and claims that used to be considered outdated, irrelevant and retrograde struck the continent with the unprecedented strength in the 21st century. European public ceaselessly repeated the famous Angela Merkel's sentence about the death of multiculturalism.

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Muslim refugees and migrants started to be perceived as invaders by a part of the European public, not because of the sheer number of people who entered the “Old World”, but because of their different cultures, systems of beliefs and everyday life practices. In political environments, right-wing parties and governments advocated for the return of “culturalism” to reality, claiming that certain opposed ways of life cannot coexist within a political unit and the established European and national cultural patterns should be defended by all means. Cultural identity was again something believed to exist somewhere “out there”, meaning the realist ontology was reinforced both in everyday politics and in academic analyses.

In Eastern and Central European countries, the governments were the ones promoting “culturalism” and elsewhere were marginal or larger, but still, oppositional political parties doing the same. However, even such a difference was sufficient for many to revive the old dichotomies and stereotypes about Eastern backwardness, “ethnicism” and exclusiveness as opposed to Western progressiveness, civilness and inclusion (Subotic 2013: 20-21). As the new/old dichotomies are already permeating Western societies and the new/old nationalism arises, the need to understand what constitutes the nation occurred. What is “Magyariness” or “Frenchness”? It is a question to which many provide essentialist answers as if those were perennial and unchanging phenomena. In doing so, higher theoretical authorities are often called upon mostly through simplified and vulgar interpretations. On the one hand, the right side of the political spectrum tends to derive their understanding either from perennialism as an approach to nationalism, which explains that the nation is nothing new, but exists for millenniums or from the ethno-symbolic approach, which is more prone to emphasizing that the nation is largely a cultural phenomenon, besides that it is also a modern, political one (Özkirimli 2010; Smith 2003). On the other hand, the left side of the political spectrum diminishes the importance of the cultural, psychological and historical aspects within a nation, emphasizing the nation’s ‘artificiality’ and novelty, thus, claiming it is but a temporary obstacle towards a new, global reality. Theoretical authority, in this case, is often derived from the modernist school of thought in the theory of nationalism (Ibid.).

We argue both the essentialist claims and ostensible animosity between the aforementioned theoretical approaches could be overcome and a compatible perspective could emerge. Such a view would claim the two interrelated phenomena can be best understood only when still applicable and compatible parts of the main theories are cumulatively applied, or at least, when those parts are not neglected. We also rely

on Rogers Brubaker belief that the study of nationalism has survived the erosion of nuanced and sophisticated works offered by the greatest minds in the field (Brubaker 1998: 272). This occurred either through the selective appropriation of their writings or through the complete epistemic negligence of the entire field by “academic entrepreneurs” whose ad hoc studies serve their ephemeral career interests (Ibid.). Having that in mind, another aim is to summarize and reinterpret the main works in the field in order to remind that the knowledge about nations and nationalism should not be merely reinvented but also regathered from previous theoretically rich academic endeavors. Therefore, this work consists of four parts, where each is a piece of the larger theoretical jigsaw. The first one offers a short introduction into the history of scholarly interest for nations and nationalism. The second one deals with the applicability of modernism as an approach to the phenomena. The third chapter will argue interactionism is a substantial part of nations and nationalism studies. The fourth one analyses ethno-symbolism and claims its core is as essential as other approaches. Also, it is in this part that we will summarize our findings.

Theories of nations and nationalism: Many approaches

On the one hand, John Breuilly claims (and we agree) nationalism was not a subject of specific scientific interest until the 1918-1945 period, mentioning that, yes, Marx was an anti-nationalist and, yes, Weber was a great German nationalist and Durkheim, on the other hand, French republican patriot, but they also “equated nation with society and state and concerned themselves with the internal workings of society” (Breuilly 2008: xvi). The school of modernism particularly avoided pre-1918 classifications, as their view of nationalism as an artificial object strictly opposes that of Herder, for example, who claimed “a nation is as natural plant as a family, only with more branches” (Williams 2016: 131). On the other hand, as one of the field’s most quoted authors Benedict Anderson states, “unlike most other isms, nationalism has never produced its own grand thinkers: no Hobbeses, Tocquevilles, Marxes or Webers” (Anderson 2006: 5).

Having in mind the previous argumentation, we find the appropriate periodical classification is the one provided by Umut Özkirimli. He claims there are “4 stages in reflection on and the study of nationalism: The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the idea of nationalism was born’, with contributors like Kant, Rousseau, Herder, Fichte, Mill,

Lord Acton, Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg, Bauer, Stalin, historians like Michelet, von Treitschke, Renan, and early social theorists like Durkheim and Weber; 1918–1945, when nationalism became a subject of academic inquiry with the works of Carleton Hayes, Hans Kohn and Louis Snyder; 1945–1989, when the theoretical debate on nationalism became more intense and diversified, with the contributions of various disciplines; From 1989 to the present, when attempts to transcend the classical debate (characteristic of the third stage) have been made” (Özkirimli 2010: 13). Such a classification might be considered the most comprehensive one, for it covers and recognizes the necessity to take into account the 18th and 19th century efforts to, what turned out to be the case, clear the ground for the early 20th century foundations of the discipline. Moreover, it also detects that the 1945-1989 period was crucial for the discipline’s maturation - the time when some classical, and still predominant and most influential approaches were established.

Anthony Smith’s division and also the main Western categorization of approaches includes: primordialism and perennialism as one category, modernism and finally, ethno-symbolism (Smith 2003). There are additional inner sections in each of the approaches where (e.g.) economic, political and cultural modernism is detected, or primordialism I and II or perennialism I and II (Ibid.). Authors also tend to create a class of approaches where they assemble either those after the 80’s peak or the ones which are hard to embed into existing patterns naming them as “Other” approaches or “New” approaches (Özkirimli 2010: 13). One can also notice there is a repeating formula which inevitably involves certain authors within this group, such as Rogers Brubaker or Michael Billig (Ibid.).

Modernism, Ethno-Symbolism, Perennialism and Primordialism provide different answers to the questions repeatedly posed in theory. Smith summarizes these questions and dilemmas in his book *Nationalism and Modernism* where he also claims that certain issues prevail as the dominant ones within the theory of nationalism (Smith 2003: 8). For the first issue, *ethical and philosophical*, modernists claim the nation was never an end in itself but a tool, means for the efficient functioning of the industrial system. The view of primordialism is in line with that of ethno-symbolism which argues myths, symbols, values and memories “are not ‘simply’ instruments of leaders and elites of the day, not even of whole communities” but “they are potent signs and explanations, they have capacities for generating emotion in successive generation, they possess explosive power that goes far beyond ‘the rational’ uses which elites and social scientists deem appropriate” (Smith 2002: 32).

The second issue, *anthropological and political*, which “concerns the social definition of the nation” (Smith 2003: 8) offers more nuanced and complicated answers. The ethnocultural definitions of the nation are typical for primordialism/perennialism and ethno-symbolism which would all agree the nation is essentially “a community of (real or fictive) descent whose members are bound together from birth by kinship ties, common history and shared language” (Ibid.). Besides the predominant cultural, ethno-symbolism also perceives “common economy”, and “legal rights and duties” to be important features of the nation. (Smith 1991: 14). Modernists, on the other hand, define the ideal-type nation within the framework of institutions and system, solely. However, they would accept there is more than one manifestation of nationalism and accept classifications according to ideological criterium (liberal, conservative, socialist, far right nationalism), criterium of different phases of nationalism (integrative, secessionist, unificatory) etc. (Bakić 2006: 251-260).

Finally, *historical and sociological* issue is resolved by modernists in a way they treat nations and nationalism as phenomena with both a production and expiry date, meaning that “nations (...) are typical products of a certain stage of history (...) destined to pass away” (Smith 2003: 8). Perennialists and primordialists are on the other hand those who consider nations to be either eternal or at least thousands of years old constructs which are logical and natural manifestations of human group interests, identities and relations, regardless of the dominant system of socio-economic reproduction (e.g. agrarian or industrial societies) (Smith 2002; 2003). Finally, ethno-symbolists find modernist views of the nation’s time and systemic boundaries to be understatements while perennialist perspective of the nation’s durability through epochs and social orders disavow as pretentious. They recognize the homogeneity and systemic equality of modern nation-states could not rise *ex nihilo* and that those are based on the logic of communities of previous ages – *ethnies* (Smith 2002: 32).

However, some classifications include more paradigms, besides the three mainstream ones. Philippe Poutignat and Jocelyne Streiff-Fenart, add interactionism and postmodernism as separate approaches (Bakić 2006). As for postmodernism, we do not renounce the possibility to deconstruct national discourses or myths or present them as constructed. In fact, the idea that nations are ‘imagined’ or ‘invented’ has already been popularized by the authors of modernism, Eric Hobsbawm and Benedict Anderson. “Their respective formulations have provided the seedbed for more radical ‘postmodernist’ developments in which the

idea of national identity is treated as inherently problematic and broken down into its component narratives.” (Smith 2003: 6). Having in mind Hobsbawm is considered to be a Marxist historian with realist ontology, his work is highly critical of the nation, but never too critical that he requires some sort of reality deconstruction after a phenomenon is textually deconstructed, as postmodern authors such as Chantall Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau require (Bakić 2006: 247-248). Anderson, on the other hand never expresses ethical arguments on the nation as a concept in his works, of course, other than on the cases of the nation’s most malign manifestations in the 20th century (fascism and nazism) (Anderson 2006). Therefore in this work, the emphasis is on the roots or ‘seedbed’ of postmodernism in the field of nations and nationalism.

We can perceive interactionism in a similar manner, as a specific kind of modernism – instrumentalism – for the work of the founder of this approach, Frederik Barth, is closest to the theory of ethnic competition, but also because their argumentation does not negate the nation’s modern character (Smith 2002: 10). Nonetheless, findings of this theory go beyond the usual instrumentalism. Besides rational choices, they stipulate the use of symbolic, often irrational resources by groups or individuals to be the norm in political behaviour (Eriksen 2010: 53). Thus, we will use interactionism as a more abstract and more developed instrumentalist line of reasoning. Additionally, interactionists are considered to be primordialists, but only within the realm of social anthropology, as their founder, Frederik Barth “implicitly seems to say that despite the contact across boundaries and the change in cultural content of the groups, the ethnic categories as such are constants which may be called upon when the need arises, as in a competitive situation” (Ibid.: 63). It is not the primordialism as an approach to the broader phenomenon of nationalism, but rather a primordialism within anthropology. It aims to explain the ever-present potential of a human group to create and maintain distinctive ethnic features as opposed to another human group. This anthropological perennialism is a finding too important to be ignored.

Primordialism and perennialism on the other hand, will not be topics of particular interest in the rest of the work mainly for two reasons. First of all, they have been justifiably criticised by other authors for their negation of the dissimilarities between the nation and communities of previous ages, thus, for being blind for “peculiarities of different historical epochs” (Bakić 2006: 235). Such an omittance led Rogers Brubaker to a conclusion primordialism is “a long-dead horse” (Brubaker 1996). Secondly, we believe ethno-symbolism overcomes the deficiencies of

primordialism/perennialism and uses their most constructive contributions to the theory.

Finally, as Tom Nairn argues, “it is necessary to locate the phenomenon (nationalism, M.V.) in a larger explanatory framework, one that will make sense of the contradictions” (Nairn 1981: 332). We conclude that modernism, interactionism and ethno-symbolism with some additions from the “New approaches” provide the most comprehensive explanatory potential of nations and nationalism which is why those will be analyzed separately.

Nations and nationalism as modern phenomena

The three main approaches are not monolithic, meaning that each of them can be further divided into new sub-approaches. Özkirimli finds there are at least three “modernisms”, which all perceive the nation to be a young phenomenon in the history of the world but from varying standpoints and emphasizing different key factors such as: economic; political and socio-cultural transformations (Özkirimli 2010: 72). This author also highlights that if authors belong to the school which points out economic set of factors, it does not mean they automatically nullify the influence of other factors on nationalism, “they [just] attach a greater weight to one set of factors” (Ibid.) Tom Nairn and Michael Hechter are the finest examples of authors focusing primarily on economic factors. Nairn, who is often perceived as a neo-Marxist due to his attention on the process of decolonization which occurred in the 50s and 60s of the 20th century, uses key claims of dependency theory. Its findings explain there are core, peripheral and semi-peripheral states in the *world-system* (Wallerstein), and the fact that core states tend to exploit those on the edges, generates nationalism throughout the planet. Moreover, the resistance in the periphery stimulates nationalism in the core as well (Nairn 1981: 337-363). Hechter’s vision is similar to Nairn’s. However, he acknowledges numerous examples of the core-periphery (where ‘periphery’ is related to non-dominant groups) system functioning within the states, consequently creating ‘cultural division of labor’ and eagerness of some ‘cultural units’ to seek their independence (Hechter 1975: 39-40).

Eric Hobsbawm, John Breuilly and Paul R. Brass are perceived as authors who lay emphasis on the influence political transformations have had on the process of the nation creation (Özkirimli 2010: 83). Breuilly claims the vacuum left behind the weakening of the clerical

power in the secularization processes of modernity was filled in with a newly formed power which serves as a way of ruling – nationalism – and “nationalism is all about politics and politics is all about power” (Ibid.: 86). Similarly, Hobsbawm argues nationalism is the final result of a form of ‘social engineering’, therefore ‘invented’ for the purpose of containing the dangers of mass democracy for the social elites (Hobsbawm & Ranger 2013). Finally, Brass is regarded as ‘instrumentalist’. He claims there are no nations and nationalism as such but only political elites that use cultural identities as mere resources in pursue for their political aims, similarly to the manipulation of material means (Özkirimli 2010: 88-89).

Socio-cultural transformations as key set of factors in a nation’s creation are related to the two most quoted authors in the field beside Smith and Hobsbawm. Their claims about the systemic roots of nationalism which are highly related to the processes of industrialization (Gellner 2008) and the development of ‘print capitalism’ (Anderson 2010) provide the deepest insights within modernism about the nation’s roots and logic of its modern existence. Therefore, in the time of great changes such as the ones at the beginning of this millennium, we believe the arguments of the two thinkers should be reinterpreted in accordance with the new reality. Other modernists should not be neglected as well. However, findings of Nairn, Hechter, Hobsbawm, Brass, Breuilly etc. all deal with the outcomes of the great socio-cultural transformation of the world in modernity, but not with the transformation itself. Their interpretations tackle with what happens after “the world system”, the economic and political rules for the elites and the masses have been established. Transformation of the 21st century requires answers how have such rules and system emerged. This is exactly what we seek in Gellner’s and Anderson’s findings.

Gellner is probably the most praised author within the field of nations and nationalism. Brubaker believes “Gellner approached the study of nationalism from Olympian distance, situating the emergence and vicissitudes of nationalism in world-historical perspective (Brubaker 1998: 272). He introduced his ideas by explaining the emergence of three historical stages: the pre-agrarian, the agrarian and the industrial (Gellner 2008: 4-5). The first one did not require the state control and enforcement due to a simple division of labor. The second, agrarian, did require state control in a lot of cases, in various forms and the organization that could manage the division of labor went far beyond hunter-gatherer practices. Finally, the industrial age produced societies so large and internally complicated, where the absence of the state was

not an option (Ibid.: 5). Encouraged by the previous explanations, one could think the nation might be a logical ingredient for both agrarian and industrial age. Yet, Gellner provides the reasoning where “the state has certainly emerged without the help of the nation”, and the key ingredient for such an understanding is the differentiation between the culture in agrarian society and the one in industrial age (Ibid.: 6).

If both ages required centralization of power, it is not the case with culture. Gellner describes this case as follows. The culture was also centralized in agrarian societies. Nevertheless, it was a specific form of centralization where only the privileged ones were part of state-owned cultural practices. Other than the rulers, nobles, clerics and military, literally no one was allowed to penetrate the stratification walls. Even the language of the “high culture” was different in most cases from what an “ordinary folk” spoke, thus, constantly reinforcing the barriers within societies. The inequalities of the agrarian age were impressively high where only a few were acting homogeneously, and those were on the top of the pyramid, while the rest was a heterogeneous mass with non-coherent cultural practices. The potential question arises: how can such inequalities exist for so long? The answer Gellner provides is – stability. The agrarian age was not mobile, nor egalitarian, but it was stable: “Men can tolerate terrible inequalities if they are stable and halloved by custom.” (Ibid.: 24)

The roots of change were: the idea of a perpetual growth and the new division of labor (Ibid.: 22). Driven by the idea of a constant advancement and change and the unprecedented technological progress throughout the last few centuries, the society which emerged also gave birth to a division of labor so complex that an additional ingredient for the functioning of the totality was needed. It was found in a specific form of cultural-political congruence – nationalism. Gellner claims “the roots of nationalism in the distinctive structural requirements of industrial society are very deep indeed.” (Ibid.: 34)

These strong statements will need further elaboration in order to understand the Gellner’s connection between nationalism and division of labor. High productivity generates constant growth. The idea of perpetual growth requires constant changes and constant changes do not allow people to be under one occupational niche for their entire lives, thus, provoking them to change their jobs frequently. This constant change would not be possible had there not been for the infrastructure that allows people to move across the labor market without any serious disruptions or problems. The infrastructure that can support such system is too large to be owned by someone else than the state and such

pattern which enables people to be equipped for the new division of labor is what we call the system of education. The cultural material for the entire system in the West is borrowed from earlier epoch's "High Cultures", or elite cultures, while vernacular ones, in Gellner's view, are mostly neglected or forgotten. Being a privilege for the few in the agrarian society, the high culture pours down the pyramid vertically, creating a horizontal, equally spread, and at least provisionally, egalitarian society. Finally, "the immediate consequence of this new kind of mobility is a certain kind of egalitarianism. Modern society is not mobile because it is egalitarian; it is egalitarian because it is mobile" (Ibid.: 24).

Gellner's main idea is that the new homogeneous units are created because of the system requirements, not because of the cultural specifics of a nation. Nationalism, in his view, is definitely just a necessary requirement of the industrial society, a product of the subtle socio-economic system, not its creator. Gellner offers scarce, or little to none historical evidence of how industrialization, and consequently nationalism, occurred. One may think that his position must be the one which would argue that the entire process emerged due to the actions of an intelligent, ubiquitous and divine mind of historical progress. Nonetheless, the furthest Gellner goes in the *Nations and Nationalism*, regarding the forces that might have created the modern system, is to acknowledge that: "Industrial society did not arrive on the scene by divine fiat. It was itself the fruit of developments within one particular agrarian society, and these developments were not devoid of their own turbulence". (Ibid.: 39) He also gives an indication that "the particular agrarian society" is a Protestant one and does not immerse deeper into this specific topic (Ibid.: 40)

Gellner does not provide us with a deeper insight in what made a human mind prepared to accept the horizontal spread of a culture regardless of whether nationalism is used as a symbolic resource by the elites or not. It is here where we introduce the ideas of Benedict Anderson. Something had to spur the revolutionary change in individual's perception which generated nationalism. In Anderson's opinion, it was the moderation in human consciousness about the perception of time. "Simultaneity" of "modern" time is something profoundly different from "simultaneity" in other epochs. It is this particular, modern version of it that made nationalism possible. It made an individual aware that besides him or her, there are numerous individuals alike, who share the same cultural code at exactly the same time. "An American will never meet, or even know the names of more than handful of his 240

000 000-odd fellow Americans (in 1983, M.V.). He has no idea of what they are up to at any one time. But he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity” (Anderson 2006: 26). In order to elaborate his views on the emergence of nationalism, the author of *Imagined Communities* provided non-European examples, where that of Latin America from the 16th to 18th century stands out as the most compelling one. He asks: Why was there no a development of a single state in that part of the world, when one language under one imperial rule (Spanish) was spoken in the area which ultimately produced sixteen states? Anderson finds that it was due to the revolutionary and never seen before simultaneity, first generated by the products and the embodiments of capitalism – the novel and the newspaper (Ibid.: 25).

A reader of a novel is able to play the role of a ubiquitous being with the feeling of pride aroused by the fact he has things under control. When one reads a classic novel written in a third person, he sees the life of a protagonist, and of other characters from a wholly another perspective. “Only they (the readers, M.V.), like God, watch A telephoning C, B shopping, and D playing pool all *at once*. That all these acts are performed at the same calendrical time, but by actors who may be largely unaware of one another, shows the novelty of this imagined world conjured up by the author in his readers’ minds” (Ibid.: 26). However, a deeper, systematic change which suddenly promoted the new ways of cultural interaction through the written word was not possible without capitalism. The invention of the printing machine in the 15th century meant that the exclusivity of the written word was about to cease and the availability of it about to rule. Anderson shows data of proliferation of the written texts from the moment when the printing machine was invented. Arguably, up to 20, 000,000 books were out of the machines by 1500 and up to 200,000,000 already by 1600 (Ibid.: 37). The rules of the market prevailed and by the 18th century another invention related to print reinforced the new simultaneity – the newspaper. The main power of the novel and the newspaper lies in the fact that thousands or millions of people receive exactly the same information in exactly the same way and order at approximately the same time. Anderson quotes Hegel how “newspapers serve modern man as a substitute for morning prayers” and paradoxical is that “it is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull (...) yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions)” (Ibid.: 35).

In order to rule more efficiently, each of the 16 administrative units that Spain created in Latin America had their own newspapers through-

out the 16th, 17th and 18th century. Therefore, when there was news about a murder, it was “our” murder. When there was a shipwreck, it was “our” shipwreck. When a bishop made a statement or an advice, it was “our” bishop. As Anderson describes it “(...) what brought together, on the same page, *this* marriage with *that* ship, *this* price with *that* bishop, was the very structure of the colonial administration and market-system itself. In this way, the newspaper of Caracas quite naturally, and even apolitically, created an imagined community among a specific assemblage of fellow-readers, to whom *these* ships, *these* brides, bishops and prices belonged” (Ibid.: 62). The possibility to imagine was later reinforced by other inventions, out of which Anderson finds the map, census and museum to be the most important ones (Ibid.: 163-186). In the end, Anderson’s key argument about the development of nationalism can be summarised in his next sentence: “What, in a positive sense, made the new communities imaginable was a half-fruitious, but explosive, interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity.” (Ibid.: 43)

What is left of Gellner’s and Anderson’s modernism? The fact Gellner discovered “the sociological foundation of the world of nations” speaks volumes about his contribution. Moreover, detection of the crucial structures shaping the national world on macro-level, reveals which features of change, in the more and more globalized surrounding should we pay attention to. For example, if the change in the division of labor (in the industrial society) meant the tectonic changes in the organization of society, then we should not be mute to the voices which argue political power is shifting towards the supranational level, consequently leading to a new change in the division of labor. William I. Robinson is convinced that the only purpose of the existence of states is for global capital to maintain control over the masses. All of this happens because masses are becoming “obsolete labor force” and it is better guilt for such a state remains within nations than to blame some abstract global powers or shift of division of labor (Robinson 2014; see also Beck 1999; Hobsbawm 2007). Leslie Sklair (2001) describes in details how a new global economic and cultural unit emerges due to the new, global division of labor. He calls that unit “Transnational Capitalist Class” (TCC).

Anderson’s most important contribution is an explanation of the change in the mind of an individual, propelled by printing capitalism, which was so revolutionary that one accepted the structures of governance as if those are part of his individual identity. Nationalism was,

thus, a phenomenon that permeated human existence in its totality. If we perceive tendencies of the contemporary world, Anderson's arguments can also find a fertile soil for revitalization. A new informational infrastructure dominates human everyday – The Internet. Intuitive logic would argue that if the Internet is free and limitless, then a potential for the creation of a global nation is already here. However, current debates show that the Internet is a double-edged sword, since its manifestation may lead to an entirely different direction. People are not generally open to unknown and they use their freedom to interact with those who are similar and share the same views. That the Internet may also become a perfect space for group animosity to occur is maybe best exemplified in the rise of the new identity politics in the West.

“Ethnic groups and boundaries”: Interactionism

We find several potential problems with Gellner's claims. First, he locates the emergence of nationalism in “one European Protestant society”, but he never embarks on a journey to understand from what sort of material did it come out. Within the tradition of Bronislaw Malinowski, it perfectly fits to say that nationalism has its function in a wider architecture propelled by industrialization. However, Gellner never demonstrates that once established nation-states do not actually have to mess with ethnic politics anymore. He must have seen there was more than one state, even in Europe, that did not resolve the issue of interethnic violence. Gellner's omission might be described as “the architectonic illusion”, which is actually “the belief that the right ‘grand architecture’, the right territorial and institutional framework, can satisfy nationalist demands, quench nationalist passions and thereby resolve nationalist conflicts” (Brubaker 1998: 273). Numerous examples of failed state-building and peace-building projects which produced vast literature for itself, proves Brubaker's description of ‘illusion’ to be right (Richmond 2014).

Similar to Gellner, Anderson believes objective-material forces made it inevitable that human socio-political organization will end up in the nation-state. Therefore, his work also suffers from the underestimation of the earlier ages. It could be surely stated that previous epochs also had communities with an idea of sovereignty, embodied, for example in the freedom from a conqueror. That was also imagined and limited and stretched beyond local kinships and blood ties, all the way to the people whom one may had never met before. Horizontal comradeship

in a way proposed by Anderson, had to exist before the invention of the printing machine. Eric Hobsbawm provides us with an example borrowed from Ivo Banac, regarding the Serbian nationhood. “There is no reason to deny proto-national feelings to pre-nineteenth-century Serbs (...) because the memory of the old kingdom defeated by the Turks was preserved in song and heroic story, and (...) in the daily liturgy of the Serbian church which had canonized most of its kings” (Hobsbawm 2016: 75-76).

“The novelty” of the nation is unquestionable. However, it might be emphasized more than what findings from history and social anthropology can endure. We believe the insatiability of nationalist passions, which Gellner omits, and earlier “horizontal comradeship”, neglected by Anderson, all stem from the very logic of social identity which is at the core of the nationalist logic. We also claim such a logic can be borrowed from interactionism as a specific approach to nations and nationalism which should, again, not be forgotten when thinking about the phenomena in the time of great transition.

A classical 1969 study by Frederik Barth et al, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* attempts to answer why a certain ethnic group emerges separately from another for “the differences between cultures, and their historic boundaries and connections, have been given much attention; the constitution of ethnic groups, and the nature of the boundaries between them, have not been correspondingly investigated” (Barth 1969: 9). The peculiarity of interactionism is that its proponents seek for the universality in behavior of each human group. This is important because it offers some sort of a stable ground for the theory of nationalism, in a sense that the nation might not be a mere top-down cultural construct required by newly emerged structures, but also some sort of a human primordial need for organizational bonding in critical situations for one’s existence, or what one believes is critical. The nation is just the latest embodiment of this need, but certainly not the only. One of the key concepts this perspective uses extensively is “ethnicity”, and it is inevitably related to the concepts of the ethnic group, the ethnic identity and nationalism. This relation needs to be elaborated more in order to understand the nuanced differences which exist between them.

Interactionists claim ethnicity is what constitutes ethnic groups and their identities. It is not a quality, but relation. Ethnicity is not universally about the color of the skin, or of the eyes. It is also not about the language or religion. One ethnic group can differ from another in a sense of religion or even language, but it does not mean these two play the crucial role for other such groups which can be poly-lingual or

poly-religious. Therefore, interactionists claim “we cannot predict (...) which features will be emphasized and made organizationally relevant by the actors” (Ibid.: 14). If we take language as the main criteria, how would we explain the fact that Austrians are not the same as Germans, or Croats are not the same as Serbs, Bosniaks and Montenegrins? On the other hand, how would one be able to explain multi-religious Albanians, if religion is the key ingredient of an ethnic group? Ethnic groups are not created because of cultures, but certain cultural characteristics are made relevant by the people due to “various reasons”.

There is a need to explain what we mean by “various reasons”. Eriksen names a few: “Population growth, the establishment of new communication technologies facilitating trade, inclusion of new groups in a capitalist system of production and exchange, political change incorporating new groups in a single political system, and/or migration.” (Eriksen 2010: 26) Here we find interactionism the most valuable. It reminds us that the turbulence of the 21st century will inevitably cause the already encircled and bounded identities to interact and dichotomize or even new, never seen before and politically relevant identities, might be created and bounded through the new means of communications. No large political and social phenomena can be thoroughly addressed if the logic of identity boundaries is not followed. The internal workings of older cultural constructs will resurface, for identity is not a mere political resource. The need for belonging and identity is one of the basic human needs, besides at least those of survival, well-being and freedom (Galtung 1996: 197).

Eriksen distinguishes ethnic groups from nations. Nevertheless, he does not claim there is absolutely no link between the modern era nation-state constructions, and the earlier ones. They are all permeated with *otherness*. An ethnic group, a nation, and a civilization are inherently defined by the “outsiders”, and in a lot of cases, this can inevitably lead to political requirements and actions. If examples of ethnic groups not demanding the political autonomy within states are sufficient to explain that “otherness” is not a common denominator for ethnic groups and nations, then examples of those groups which require autonomy can prove the opposite. A crisis like war, migration, or a change of the entire international system (like in 1789) can trigger the creation of ethnicity, which could lead to further *dichotomization* of groups, possibly ending up in the creation of nations. By dichotomization we mean a “mutual demarcation process” through which “group membership and loyalties are confirmed and strengthened” by “stereotyping and the articulation of conflict or competition” between two groups (Erik-

sen 2010: 33). If one locates the place where these dichotomizations occur, he also discovers ethnic *boundaries*. That boundary can sometimes be filled in with the cultural content of religion, sometimes with a language, sometimes a race, etc. It is crucial to understand that what is used to *dichotomize* two societies, is not what objectively defines the existence of these separate groups of people. For example, Serbs and Croats can go through the process of building up mutual hatred by explaining their two religions are incompatible, because the other one is bad, hypocritical, violent etc. After that, some “obvious” cultural differences may be emphasized, like Serbian vicious “Easternness” or Croatian “Cold-bloodedness”. The ethnic boundaries are lines over which dichotomizations occur, while socially relevant cultural traits are signals which we can use to recognize where the boundaries are. What matters for interactionists is that organization precedes culture, and the latter can vary within the same groups of people (Barth 1969: 14).

What Barth does not cope with, is the question - how can we distinguish ethnicity from other phenomena? How can we distinguish social class or gender from ethnic groups? Both gender and class have their own boundaries with specific cultures. There is an interesting example provided by Abner Cohen, who writes about *Urban Ethnicities*. He believes that the elite in London’s City or Hausa traders in Nigerian city with Yoruba majority are ethnicities for themselves, for they are socialized and trained in the same way, use the same “manner of speech”, “style of joking”, “create “a web of enduring friendship and comradeship” etc. (Cohen 1974: xix). Cohen’s view is considered by Eriksen to be too extreme, for there is a distinction between class and the ethnic group, which significantly narrows the possibility of ethnicity to be relativized to such a degree. He finds that the metaphors of “bed, blood and cult” provided by Manning Nash in 1988 as “the lowest common denominators for all ethnic groups”, even though they are too strict and too objective in nature, are on the right path to recognize the distinct character of ethnic groups (Eriksen 2010: 41-42). Being careful about not using objective criteria excessively himself, but also without dismissing them as important, Eriksen adds that “ethnic groups or categories generally have notions of common ancestry justifying their unity” (Ibid.: 42).

There is one more potential flaw in Cohen’s argumentation. Neither class nor feminism legitimizes state or any similar political construct. Even though the intention of most authors in interactionism was to limit their research within much smaller communities than the state, the implications of their conclusions can go much further. Neumann rec-

ognizes the potential implications and even criticizes interactionists for limiting their research only to small ethnic groups, subcultures, villages and small communities, adding that the choice of units of analysis can be raised to a much higher level (which later he did in the book, by analysing European “Otherness”) (Nojman 2011: 25). Therefore, we find that if one recognizes obvious differences between ethnic groups, states and civilizations, this does not mean that each further discussion about their similarities is obsolete.

There is at least one critique directed at interactionism which we can find justified. It addresses the fact that Barth, Eriksen and others view cultural content as something too relative and easily replaceable. On the other hand, this does not mean they claim entire ethnic groups and nations to be replaceable, just their cultural parts. Their view that groups should be examined through time in order to comprehend which boundaries are durable and maintained, is considered to be the adoption of Fernand Braudel’s view of history, who argues that only slow evolving and more permanent structures are worth examining (Bakić 2006). However, interactionists emphasize that only organizations are durable, not cultures themselves. Eriksen tries to interpret and explain Barth’s idea of cultural relativity through the example of Serbs and Croats in Yugoslavia. For him, as a theoretician who watched the presentation of ethnic hatred at its worse in the 1990’s, this “ethnic hatred” was something *reinvented* after almost fifty years of peace. The period without a conflict was sufficient evidence to prove cultural relativity, as he argued: “Presumed cultural differences which had been irrelevant for two generations were suddenly ‘remembered’ and invoked as proof that it was impossible for the two groups to live side by side.” (Eriksen 2010: 46)

We recognize at least one problem with such a statement. Peace between the nations in Yugoslavia was everything but absolute. If nothing, the ethnic hatred was preserved among both Croatian and Serbian diaspora, with Croats being more active, even trying to smuggle weapons in 1972 in order to begin “the uprising” against the “oppressive communist regime”, after a failed national revolution in 1971. Besides overt signs that hatred was not “suddenly remembered” and “irrelevant”, the entire communist system was built upon a structure that enforced “a national key” system, which meant every single political, state, military and other position was allocated in a proportional ethnic manner. Even though the idea of Yugoslav identity existed, the ethnic or national boundaries were, ironically, emphasized by the system itself. Old cultures, customs and old hatred were being latently cultivated, but never forgotten or dismissed. The qualities of the two ethnic contents

decided in which manner will groups act. They were not cultural *tabula rasa*. The organizational existence (of any kind) of Serbs and Croats is definitely more durable than the culture, but the culture also seems to be more permanent than what interactionists would expect. "It is quite possible for ethnic solidarity to be overlaid by other types of allegiance for certain periods (...) but, where an *ethnie* is concerned, we should expect the periodic re-emergence of ethnic solidarity and institutional co-operation in sufficient force and depth to override these other kinds of loyalty, especially in the face of external enemies and dangers". (Smith 2002: 15)

Ethno-symbolism

The last part of our jigsaw addresses the omissions of both modernism and interactionism. If modernism equips us with the "grand" structural scheme during the time of social transformations, interactionism provides us with the evidence that nation-like or ethnic-like identities would undoubtedly emerge not only due to "the fatality of human linguistic diversity" but also due to the fatality of cultural and human diversity in general. However, these approaches lack the understanding of the internal structure and power of identity. It is here where we introduce ethno-symbolism.

Modernism faces one more major critique, besides the previously discussed theoretical one. Viewing nationalism as something that "had" to be created by certain objective forces, Gellner, Anderson and others simply deny the power of ethnic culture. This "negligence" is at the heart of Anthony Smith's critique, that was in fact first pointed out by Walker Connor who claims "scholars associated with theories of nationalism have tended either to ignore the question of ethnic diversity or to treat the matter of ethnic identity superficially as merely one of a number of minor impediments to effective state-integration." (Connor 1994: 28). In Connor's opinion, "the essence of nationalism is not tangible. It is psychological, a matter of attitude, rather than a fact" (Ibid.: 42). Anthony Smith adds that a nation needs myths and memories as much as old *ethnies* needed them. And if one wants to look at the "special qualities and durability of *ethnie*", he "has to look at the nature of their myths and symbols, their historical memories and central values" (Smith 2002: 15).

Anthony Smith criticizes Anderson's line of reasoning as well. In his opinion, *ethnicisms* are predecessors to nationalisms in the same way

that *ethnies* are predecessors of nations. “*Ethnicism* is more a collective movement whose activities and efforts are aimed at resisting perceived threats from outside and corrosion within, at renewing a community’s forms and traditions, and at reintegrating a community’s members and strata, which have become dangerously divided by conflicting pressures” (Smith 2002: 50). These “restorations” were either territorial ones (Smith finds this example in the restoration of Pozharsky and Minin or “Next Year in Jerusalem” saying among Jews), genealogical (finding dynastic lines of descent with some even more ancient dynasties) and cultural ones. They all served to homogenize people from the “foreign threat”. Smith finds that French and English identities were forged and firmly established against one another during the Hundred Years’ War and Greek city-states were also well aware of their identity based on the same language, religion, culture and practices which united them against the Persian Empire. (Ibid.: 51-67) Therefore, he believes, “imagined communities” always existed and we cannot assume that, “because of the generally poor state of communications in pre-modern eras, there was a low level of communal sentiments everywhere” (Ibid.: 70).

Smith is in general considered to be the most prominent representative of ethno-symbolism. As we discussed earlier, he argues there are indeed many things in common for old *ethnies* and nations. First of all, we need to go through Smith’s understanding of what *ethnie* is. Arguably, it can be best done by describing its dimensions, which are, according to Smith: a common name; a common myth of descent; a shared history; a distinctive shared culture; and association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity (Ibid.: 22-31). Smith’s dimensions of an *ethnie* can be fully applied to any nation or a group that strives to be called as such. Even if he also believes in “obvious” differences between Eastern, more ethnic, and Western, more civic nationalism, Smith still argues that even the civic ones share the qualities of an *ethnie*. For its members are attached to a territory and have some sense about it; there is a specific community and solidarity backed up by common laws and institutions; belonging is defined by the citizenship, and most importantly; all the previously stated present the common shared values and culture, or “civic religion” (Ibid.: 134-136).

Smith strongly supports modernist perception about the entirely new political society that emerged out of the French Revolution. However, he argues is modernists tend first to underestimate earlier epochs, and then to overestimate modern times in terms of communal qualities of the nation in opposition to *ethnie*. *Ethnie* has also been constantly in-

vented or reinvented. It has always been legitimized in the same way the nations are legitimized today, by a “constitutive political myth”, or “*mythomoteur*” (Ibid.: 58). Smith accepts nations are a novelty, because they have some features *ethnies* never had, and also that nationalism is a product of “a triple Western revolution”, which included “a division of labour (Gellner), a revolution in the control of administration (every single modernist) and a revolution in cultural co-ordination (Anderson)” (Ibid.: 131). However, what he does not accept is that nations could exist without the ethnic bonds that are persistent and durable. Bonds in a sense that people need collective immortality and solidarity as much as they needed it six hundred years ago and that those are not invented “yesterday”. On the other hand, he disagrees with the perennialists about the fact that nations existed all the time, only in different shapes. Smith believes cultures are prone to change and reinvention. But what he sees as perennial is exactly the fact that they have been reinvented all the time, which inevitably resembles interactionist argumentation. As a matter of fact, he claims that: “In no period of world history has ethnicity been altogether absent or *ethnie* played no social role.” (Ibid.: 210)

Smith finds some concepts proposed by perennialists, such as *Longue Dureé*, to be useful as well. It is a notion widely known as something which stems from the French Annales School and its most prominent author, Fernand Braudel. Perennialism, on the other hand, appropriates it for the study of nationalism. John Armstrong explains the internal logic of the nation can only be discovered if a phenomenon is perceived over a longer period of time. This is where the argumentation of interactionism is widened. When boundaries are either remembered, or regularly maintained, the old cultural contents will prevail due to the efforts of the new generations to reimagine and recreate sense out of the old, widely known material (Armstrong 1982: 286).

Besides the anthropological *Longue Dureé* of ethnic groups and nations, argued by interactionists, there is also some sort of the same phenomenon that has a more profound psychological background. Smith does not negate the idea *ethnies* and nations are constantly reinvented, even for instrumentalist purposes. However, the cultural material the re-inventors use is deeply embedded into the everyday. “Each generation, (...) constructs its own social maps and chooses its specific ethnic moralities, but it does not so within limited matrix formed by a strong social attachment to specific ‘myth-symbol complexes’, particular landscapes and unique ranges of epochs and personages, for these constitute the intrinsic ethnicity of particular *ethnie*. (...) The images they piece

together (each new generation, M.V.) and disseminate through the education system and media become the often unconscious assumptions of later generations in whose social consciousness they form a kind of rich sediment.” (Smith 2002: 207)

Another author tries to find the very material that makes people capable of constantly reinventing and maintaining nations. Michael Billig notices that at the time of his writing, there was “no readily term to describe the collection of ideological habits which reproduce established nations as nations”, so he presented the term *banal nationalism*, “to cover the ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced” adding that “daily, the nation is indicated, or flagged, in the loves of its ordinary citizens (Billig 1995: 6). Billig is convinced nationalism is banal, for it gains its strength in ordinary things, often unnoticed ones, which makes us believe that nationalism is natural. Those “things” can be so various that cannot even be detected. From the way of talking and thinking about the nation, over a flag on a building, sports, songs, all the way to the postal stamps, language standardizations etc. (Ibid.) Rogers Brubaker “deepens” Billig’s understanding, claiming the reproduction of nationalism is even more subtle than what the latter author proposes. Daily routines, like family lunches, business connections, church visits etc., which may have nothing to do with explicit ethnopolitical engagement, are crucial for the identity reproduction, which can end up (not necessarily) being political (Brubaker 2004).

Conclusion

As we previously argued, modernism, interactionism and ethno-symbolism are not incompatible. In fact, without the capitalist market (which unifies social classes into one community), *ethnies* cannot be transformed into nations. The importance of modernist key ingredients of the nation-building process are not diminished, if the essential significance of the cultural and symbolic material, with which the very process historically started, is also emphasized (Subotić 2007: 70). What ethno-symbolism offers is a distinct methodology that can be used to study the qualities of each nation separately. A nation’s myths (constitutive ones, of golden ages, of territories, of dark ages, rebirth, heroes etc.), name, symbols and their historical contexts are of a great importance when a nation interacts with another. Also, even when those myths are not socially relevant in one, two or three generations, there is

a great probability that the first significant interaction caused by migrations or wars, natural disaster etc., will produce myth-symbolic recurrence of the earlier generations. This is exactly the argument that can be further supported with a firm anthropological basis, which interactionism offers.

Interactionism reinforces the argumentation of ethno-symbolism in a sense it advocates almost primordial point of view, claiming ethnicity is a necessary consequence of group contact. It is just that we are not sure when and where will certain traits become socially relevant and, thus, produce ethnic groups, nations or even civilizations. Ethno-symbolism gives at least partial, yet, very convincing argument that when a group is once established, it is highly realistic its reaffirmation or reestablishment will be based on the previous cultural material. Thus, if one studies qualities of a group using the methodology offered by Anthony Smith, then one has a solid chance of predicting which features will become socially relevant. Additionally, Smith agrees symbols, myths, history etc, are used by elites as resources in order to achieve political goals. However, the fact interactionists (Eriksen) add that even the political goals of the entire ethnic groups can be irrational, even more strengthens Smith's argumentation that cultures often go beyond the rational uses. Interactionism provides a sovereign explanation about the group formation, but ethno-symbolism clarifies its re-emergence. At the same time, the former does not deny the findings of the latter and *vice versa*. When researching nations and nationalism in the 21st century, neglecting the findings of either of the three approaches would significantly diminish the explanatory potential of such an endeavour. Thus, we claim the theoretical construction consisted of parts of modernism, interactionism and ethno-symbolism is the broadest possible framework which can offer the coordinates for further investigation of the phenomena and yet, concise enough to provides us with its meaning.

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