

Ideological and banal rather than normative nationalism

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Siniša Malešević: *Nation-states and nationalisms: organization, ideology and solidarity.*

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Two main meanings of the term *nationalism* exist in the literature. While in Western Europe and the Anglo-Saxon world it is typically a descriptive term, in East-Central and Eastern Europe it has strong normative, pejorative connotations, locating the term close to national egoism, if not outright chauvinism. This conceptual context, necessary for the East-Central European readership, was referred to here to note that the book by Siniša Malešević operates within the West European semantic field.

Similarly, two main concepts of the *nation-state* can be identified. Firstly, mainly in East-Central and Eastern Europe, the term refers to the national state which is the political organisation of an ethnic nation. Secondly, mostly in Western Europe and the Americas, the term refers to the nation built within a given state and being identified with it. The reviewed book refers to the latter concept of the nation-state.

The book is composed of seven main chapters. In Chapter One, the salience of nationalism is discussed. It includes bureaucratisation, ideologisation, and solidarity. In Chapter Two, group solidarities before the nation-state are revealed. This embraces the historical transformation from nomadic to sedentary solidarities and the territorial loyalties outside the nation in the case of the city-state, and the world of empires. Chapter Three provides a discussion of the birth and expansion of nationalism. This covers the questions of the dawn of the nation-state, the nation-state as social organisation, the magic of nationalism, and the micro-universe of nationhood. In Chapter Four, the author analyses national ideologies and violence. This includes the questions of whether or not nation-

alism is inevitably violent and what makes nationalisms violent. In Chapter Five, the omnipotence of triviality is presented. It embraces the questions of hot vs banal nationalisms, and the organisation and ideologisation of the mundane. Chapter Six provides a reflection beyond national identity. Within this context, a few questions are discussed, i.e. what is wrong with 'national identity' as well as the transformation from social organisations and ideology to solidarity. In Chapter Seven, the author discusses the future of nationalisms, including globalisation and the nation-state, religious revival and nationalisms, as well as nation-states and nationalisms as organisation, ideology and solidarity. In this context, conclusions are lacking in the reviewed book.

The narration provided in the book includes an extensive historical context. Within this context, the author seems to question the idea, widely accepted in social sciences, of human beings as social creatures. Early nomadic humans on African savannas were less social than apes and, especially, monkeys and it was only sedentary peoples that appeared gregarious.

The state is a late form of the organisation of human collectivities and the nation-state is the newest form of statehood. The author examines the historical predecessors of nation-states – from hunting and gathering bands, through chiefdoms, conglomerate kingdoms and city-states to modernising empires – and explores the historical rise of the modern nation-state. Two revolutions – French and American – gave rise to the idea of the nation-state, based on the ideology of liberty, equality and brotherhood that underlay group solidarity and popular sovereignty. The national ideology and, especially, bureaucratic organisation were, however, essential. The reading of the book accurately indicates the nonsense of the naive assumptions of the traditional Polish political geography (Otok 2003) that the state is an organisation of sedentary people functioning in the interest of its inhabitants at large. In this context, the book appears a must read for those geographers who do not understand that the state is an organisation rather than a territory.

The author indicates that the state is the organisation that socialises individuals to the national ideology by its effective bureaucratic apparatus, the nation is thus a result of the activity of the nation-state. He investigates the ways in which nationalist ideologies were able to envelop the microcosm of family, kin, residential and friendship networks. He ignores, however, the cases of the nations that emerged as a result of opposition to a

state (e.g. Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Czechs, Slovaks, Basques, Catalans and others), with the exception of the briefly mentioned case of Croatia.

In the book, the state paradoxically appears as another *Gesellschaft* rather than *Gemeinschaft* simply because members of a (large) nation are related by neither a common kinship nor even common culture but merely a common ideology and effective bureaucracy. In the 19th century, the state, by the ideology of nationalism and effective bureaucratic apparatus, imposed on peoples in its territory a conviction that they are a nation – one and common. In the 20th century, an analogical process was achieved in Africa – to the surprise of the Europeans who believed ‘they’ are yet not nations at all. In this context, the concept of the entering the nation by subsequent social classes (Chalasiński 1968) and regional communities (Rykiel 2006) are badly lacking.

The author indicates that national group solidarity used to be implemented by micro-structural ties. Individuals have therefore rarely died for the mother country but more often for family, the attitudes of Serbian soldiers in Bosnia being a good example of this phenomenon. The internalisation of the national ties is related with their mythologisation. The author reveals – to the surprise and delight of the reader – that the firm belief of the latter in the value of the sacrifice for an abstract community is not obvious.

Further on, the author argues that violence is neither an inherent feature of humans nor the obvious results of nationalism. This is evidenced by the fact that 90% of soldiers intentionally failed to hit the enemy during wars because killing a human being, especially the first one, in a fight has usually been experienced as a personal tragedy. This fact may be accurately illustrated by the fraternisation of the British and German soldiers on the Western Front during the Christmas of 1914, a case omitted by this book. Mass killing, murders and genocide were only possible when wars were industrialised and especially after technical possibilities were reached to kill anonymously: by carpet bombing, artillery or rocket firing, nuclear bombs and using drones.

The author differentiates between ideological and banal (everyday) nationalism, arguing that it is the latter that is stronger and more effective because it is internalised. This conclusion is confirmed by a comparison of Danish and North Korean nationalisms, where the latter is reminiscent of a dog that barks loudly rather than bites.

The author argues that ‘national identity’ is a conceptual chimera and ‘identity’ itself appears as largely metaphoric and hazy, and thus futile, a concept which should be

left for the generally neglected processual idioms, i.e. ideology, solidarity and social organisations. He seems to overlook the fact, however, that nationhood is not a question of membership in a social group but rather one of degree of participation in a national culture (Kłoskowska 1996). This is not to say that individuals are better or worse members of a nation but simply that they can be emotionally related to more than one nation and its culture (Rykiel 2006).

While discussing the future of nationalism the author considers globalisation and religious revival as possible alternatives for the nation-state. In doing this, he emphasises that the former process can have hardly any alternative since the nation-state is the dominant form of social organisation, and nationalism has established itself as a principal source of state legitimacy worldwide. It is the case even though both nationalisms and nation-states emerged accidentally and fairly late on the historical stage. For 99.99% of their existence on the Earth, human beings have lived in entities that were not nation-states, i.e. bands, clans, tribal confederacies, chiefdoms, city-states, composite kingdoms and empires. Nevertheless, nation-states are deeply rooted in the structures of past eras with their important organisational underpinnings because of which the social organisation is perceived by millions of individuals as the most natural form of group solidarity.

Unlike any pre-modern polity, the nation-state generates its legitimacy from the key pillars of nationalist discourse, i.e. the ideas of popular sovereignty, territorial autonomy and a substantial degree of cultural homogeneity. Although nation-states are coercive bureaucratic organisations, they are not simply giant brainwashing machines with nationalism as a sophisticated lie; rather they are considered by their own citizens as the most legitimate form of rule.

Generally, the book provides an in-depth analysis of the processes involved in the emergence, formation, expansion and transformation of nation-states. The author indicates that the nation-state possesses hardly any alternative now as it remains the only legitimate mode of territorial rule. This is, however, not inconsistent with the opinion, not expressed in the book, about a waning role of the state in the context of the growing role of transnational corporations, international organisations and even individuals. The book is an excellent, theoretically sophisticated yet eminently readable piece of literature, stimulating reflection and causing surprise with the non-obviousness of the reader's own deeply internalised convictions. This analysis will certainly appeal to scholars and students of so-

ciology and political science and hopefully also of geography. I wish it included Polish political geographers, who remain very traditionally minded on the whole.

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