

## DEFINING NATIONALISM IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

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### Introduction

There has been a wide recognition that the world is becoming 'smaller' and borderless. Innovations in advanced technological communications and instant global flows of news and information have created the illusion, and sometimes the reality, of a global community. Science and technology are hard and even impossible to confine within national boundaries. Thus, we are living in a so-called era of globalization.

For some, the existence of the globalization era undermines the significance of nationalism, because national identity is becoming indistinct. Others, however, argue that the existence of this era influence forms of nationalism. On the one hand, self and small groups identification have strengthened. The number of centrifugal movements by small groups such as ethnic groups, religious groups, ethno-language groups are increasing. For this argument, nationalism is clearly characterized by local, ethnic, or groups' consciousness, the character of which is namely ethno-nationalism. On the other hand, there has been a trend where people identify themselves as part of the world culture. For this line of argument, the identity steps over the boundaries of nation-states which then forming the so-called supra-nationalism. As part of the result, doubts have arisen about the strength even the

viability and the very concept of independent nationhood.<sup>1</sup>

The views above, partly indicate the complexity of the meaning of nationalism in the era of globalization. Eventually, it implies a preliminary warning for scholars attempting to define the term nationalism and also alerts students wanting to use the concept.

This article is designed to highlight how the term of nationalism is indeed theoretically a complex term. Various definitions are explored and the article is ended by proposing a conclusion containing some underline principles of nationalism.

### Theoretical Exploration

Ernest Gellner points out that nationalism is primarily a political principle consisting of two main congruent units, namely political and national units. Nationalism can be a sentiment or the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of principle, or the feeling of satisfaction aroused by its fulfilment. It can be also a movement which is actuated by such kind of sentiment. Furthermore, Gellner adds that the nationalist principle can be violated by several reasons such as lack of political control over boundaries of nations, the ruler's decision to favor minor groups over the major group, by which an intolerable sense between groups could emerge.<sup>2</sup>

In terms of its social roots, Gellner claims that these are located in industrial social organization. Innovation, occupational mobility, mass media, universal literacy, and standard of education and idiom, significantly influence the growth of society and the degree of affluence it achieves. Gellner sees the innovation of written words and the emergence of literacy as factors helping the development of nationalism in the agrarian society in European history.<sup>3</sup> This means, certainly, that Gellner suggests nationalism as a typically Western phenomenon.

However, in colonized societies, particularly those which are not ethnically European such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America, most frequently the rise and development of nationalism is a struggle to oppose the Western imperialism.<sup>4</sup> This should be borne in mind whenever the conception of nationalism introduced by Gellner is going to be utilized as a framework for analysis of nationalism in non-Western society.

Another scholar, Eugene Kamenka, develops his conception of nationalism more carefully. Although he asserts that the history of Europe since the French Revolution has been the history of the rise and development of political nationalism, he does realize that nationalism is an extremely complex and difficult phenomenon. Kamenka makes the criticism that it is not "the skills of the philosopher but the historians' sense of connection" which is needed to understand the meaning or the definition of nationalism. It needs to be done by examining the specific conditions under which nationalism arose and develop, the findings of which in turn help to differentiate the meaning of nationalism

from the sense of patriotism and nationalism in the sense of national consciousness.<sup>5</sup>

As does Gellner, Kamenka recognizes nationalism as initially a European phenomenon. To Kamenka, however, this does not mean that there is no historical pre-condition. He argues that tribalism is a universal phenomenon which historically provides a sense of group consciousness. The feeling to identify with certain groups, be it in-group or out-group, is integrated in tribalism. Subsequently, it arises as the tendency to distinguish one group from another.<sup>6</sup>

After exploring how the feeling of consciousness (from tribalism to nationalism) had been influenced by European history, Kamenka then pointed out that the French Revolution gave a new political significance to nationalism. This was because the fact that the revolution, supported by the common interests of the people, was aimed to abolish the monarchy and the huge estates which was the "old order of men and societies." In Kamenka's words:

Since kings were to cease and 'people' were to take their place, people had to be molded into some sort of unity, defined and limited in some sort of way. The concept of 'nation' thus came to the force as a fundamental political category.<sup>7</sup>

Kamenka then comes to the conclusion that nationalism is really a complex phenomenon containing varying degrees of generality and specificity. Nationalism "can be and has been democratic or authoritarian, forward

looking or backward-looking, socialist or reactionary".<sup>8</sup>

To John Plamenatz, "nationalism is the desire to preserve or enhance a people's national or cultural identity when that identity is threatened, or the desire to transform or even create it where it is felt to be inadequate or lacking". Although nationalism movements often take in various political forms, he believes that it is basically a cultural phenomenon. As a matter of fact, this is because nationalism helps to distinguish a people from other people. Plamenatz argues that nationalism tends to arise when people are aware of cultural diversity and change, and share some idea of progress which move them to compare their own achievements and capacities with those of others'. Thus, nationalism is a reaction of people who feels culturally at a disadvantage.<sup>9</sup>

On the basis of these arguments, Plamenatz classifies two forms of nationalism in terms of how they relate to outside cultural influences; Western nationalism and Eastern nationalism. The former is a type of nationalism for those who feel at a disadvantage, but they have a strong basic culture with an excellence standard of measures and tends to favor success. The latter, conversely, is both imitative and competitive. It arises within a society which has a growing fast of social mobility, trade and cosmopolitan culture. Their ancestral's culture is less adaptive to success. Therefore, Plamenatz notes that "this is the nationalism of people who feel the need to transform themselves, and in so doing to raise themselves; of people who come to be called 'backward', and who would not be nationalists of this kind unless they both recognized this backwardness and wanted to overcome it."<sup>10</sup>

Contrast to Plamenatz, Hugh Seton-Watson introduces the proposition that nationalism has two meanings. Firstly, it can be a doctrine about character, rights and duties of nations. Secondly, it is an organized political movement, designed to further the alleged aims. The term nationalism, furthermore, is often used to denote any form of collective selfishness or aggressiveness to which Seton-Watson disagrees. As a result, nationalism has become a pejorative term used in contrast to the respectable word patriotism.<sup>11</sup>

Another scholar, John Breuille, emphasizes nationalism more as a form of politics. He argues that being politics, nationalism is a question about power in the modern world and the central question is how to relate nationalism to the objective of obtaining and using state power. Therefore, it is important to seek why in the modern world nationalism has so often been central to that objective. Breuille writes, moreover, that the term nationalism is used to refer to political movement seeking or exercising state power and justifying such actions with nationalist arguments. In addition, as a political doctrine nationalist argument has three basic assertions: "a nation with an explicit and peculiar character, the interests and values of this nation take priority over all other interests and values, and the nation must be as an independent as possible."<sup>12</sup>

However, Anthony D. Smith holds a quite different point of view. To him, scholars mentioned previously tend to use a Eurocentric outlook to explain nationalism in non-Western countries. It is true, he argues, that as an ideological movement, nationalism firstly arose in the West and received its classic doctrinal

formulations in Western countries like France, England and Germany around 1800. This does not mean, however, Western explanation should be used for explaining nationalism in non-Western countries.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast, Smith proposes to explore the close links between nationalism and modernization. He argues that in the study of nationalism, the context of time, space and forms of nationalism are significant. This results to the intrinsic and profound relationships between types of nationalism and the process of modernization. Smith then claims that nationalism is plainly important, both as a social and political phenomenon, and as an object of sociological investigation. This does not mean, however, that nationalism is the most and the only important force at work in contemporary politics or society, particularly as a movement and ideology.<sup>14</sup>

The views mentioned previously might prove to what Benedict Anderson writes that "nationalism has never produced its grand thinkers." He asserts that there are three paradoxes often perplexing theorists of nationalism. First, between how the historians view the objectivity of modern nations and how the so-called nationalists regard the antiquity of nations subjectively. Second, between the formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept and the irremediable of its concrete manifestations. Three, between nationalism in terms of its political power and philosophical poverty and incoherency of nationalism.<sup>15</sup>

Anderson then argues that "nationality, or as one might prefer to put it in view of that word's multiple significations, nationness, as well as

nationalism, are cultural artifacts of a particular kind." In order to understand them properly, "we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy."<sup>16</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

It is very clear from the previous point of views that nationalism is really a complex conception. Thus, different meaning depends on the angles from which the authors develop their arguments. Nationalism can be defined as the feeling of belonging to a group in which a sense of territory is implicitly integrated. With reference to the history of nationalism since the French Revolution, the term nationalism has also corresponded to the ideology of nation. The characteristics of nationalism might be exclusive or inclusive, particularly in terms of the degree of belonging to certain people or groups of people.

In some basic principles, however, there are several similarities that can be summarized from the views proposed by theorists explored previously. These are the principle of unity, integration, equality and egalitarianism. Integration refers to the degree of sense of belonging that is possessed by a certain community. Unity is often symbolized by boundaries. In modern states, these are boundaries between nation states, needed to be recognized politically by other nation-states. The idea of unity and sense of belonging implicitly require an equality of community which is integrated under one political boundary. Equality is particularly

necessary when a community (nation) is under a disadvantage situation. The more equal one community the stronger the community able to oppose the threat from outside culture. Thus, for those who saying to live under a nation, they have to hold in high esteem an egalitarian spirit among themselves.

When a nation is able to achieve a high degree of unity, integration, and equality within its community, the nation can represent its peculiar and explicit character. It would able to hold its independency because its common values undermine segments of vested interests within the community. Within this type of nation, all the members of its community are recognized by each other. There is no more question who is included and who is not. There are no disadvantaged groups or at least none of the community feels insecure and live in a disadvantage situation. By and large, nationalism is about people, country, and nation in the history of a nation.<sup>17</sup>

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>W Bloom, *Personal Identity, National Identity and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>2</sup>Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>T.V. Sathyamurthy, *Nationalism in the Contemporary World: Political and Sociological Perspectives*, (London: Frances and Printer, 1983), pp. 46-65 and see also John Eddy and Deryck Schereuder (eds.), *The Rise of Colonial*

*Nationalism*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1988).

<sup>5</sup>Eugene Kamenka (ed.), *Nationalism, The Nature and Evolution of an Idea*, (Canberra: ANU Press, 1973), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup>John Plamenatz, "Two Types of Nationalism," in Eugene Kamenka (ed.), *Nationalism, The Nature and Evolution of an Idea* (Canberra: ANU Press, 1973), pp. 23-24, 27.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 33-4.

<sup>11</sup>Hugh Setton-Watson, *Nations and States* (London: Methuen, 1977), pp. 2-3.

<sup>12</sup>John Breuly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), pp. 1-4.

<sup>13</sup>Anthony D. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism*, (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983), p. xi.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 2-6.

<sup>15</sup>Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, revised edition, (London and New York: Verso, 1991), p. 5.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup>Noel McLachlan, *Waiting for the Revolution, A History of Australian Nationalism*, (Penguin Books, 1989), p. 11.

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