

## NATIONALISM AND INTERNATIONAL ORDER: A CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE

ERIKA HARRIS, School of Politics and Communication Studies, University of Liverpool, UK

HARRIS, E.: Nationalism and International Order: A Contemporary Perspective  
FILOZOFIA 64, 2009, No 9, p. 861

This essay offers a reflection on and a summary of the author's book on nationalism. The book is a critical assessment of well-established theories, or rather approaches to nationalism and argues that these are inadequate in addressing nationalism in contemporary settings. The premise is that studies of nationalism are too preoccupied with questions about the modernity *versus* ancientness of the nation, the construction of identity, its authenticity and the character of nationalism itself. The author argues that many of these questions, whilst relevant to our understanding of the history and politics of nationalism in the past, nevertheless fall short in explaining its role, politics and actions today when the states and nations are facing very different challenges. The new challenges reflect the increased relevance of politics beyond the state, trans-national ethnic networks, violence and general internationalisation of ethnic relations. The latter, in particular is the subject of this essay.

**Keywords:** Nationalism – Nation-state – Theories of nationalism – Ethnicity – National self-determination – International community

**Nationalism in the past and in the present.** The story of nationalism mirrors history and modern history mirrors the story of nationalism; since about the mid-nineteenth century no place in the world remained untouched by its impact. This article is a summary of my new book about nationalism (*Nationalism: Theories and Cases*, Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming autumn 2009)<sup>1</sup>, about its beginnings, but mainly about its very contemporary manifestations. The book explores similarities and differences in nationalist politics across a number of states and regions and political processes taking place within and beyond the states. Its aim is to critically assess how nationalism and its theories developed and what is their significance today.

Why to embark on such an ambitious project when from the start one is aware that its objectives may not be fully satisfied? Because nationalism affects people's life, sometimes dramatically and beyond their control, but mostly, in a less dramatic fashion, it affects politics and ordinary daily lives of all of us. Not because cultural identity is necessarily a human characteristic and certainly not because it leads to hostility to others, but because it matters enough to be politicised. **There is a logic in this politicisation of cultural identities in the world where access to political participation, to rights (and obliga-**

<sup>1</sup> This article sums up some arguments used in the soon to be published book Harris, Erika (2009 forthcoming), *Nationalism: Theories and Cases*. It draws mostly on the seventh chapter 'The nation in international relations' and the introduction.

tions), to cultural sustenance and human recognition comes with national labels. This is a result of historical success of the nation-state as the political framework within which political community is established and within which humanity is organised. The continuing proliferation of the nation-state does not however suggest its success in reconciling cultural and political differences among people; it suggests the success nationalism as its formative ideology. There are many scholarly definitions of nationalism, but the fundamental idea is well expressed by an ethnic Albanian when asked by a British journalist whether it will be better for when Kosovo is independent: 'of course, it will be better. It is always better to have your own country'<sup>2</sup>. Nationalism is a principle of political legitimacy which holds that 'the political and national unit should be congruent'<sup>3</sup>. Nationalism's defining doctrine is then national self-determination doctrine which asserts that any self-differentiating people has the right, should it so desire, to self-rule<sup>4</sup>. Both principles are astonishing in their simplicity because national unit is hardly ever clearly defined and self-rule is problematic in terms of achievement and sovereignty of political units that may already overlap with the desired self-rule. Many people have died because they defended or were denied these principles. But, the struggle for sovereign nation continues, despite the obvious problems associated with its definition, establishment and the maintenance of its unity.

My book is a result of my observations over the last decade or so that many academic debates about nationalism are somehow devoid of the impact their subject has on the everyday lives of people. Behind every contemporary conflict in the world, from disputes among national groups, to questions about immigration, to horrors of ethnic violence, lurks the banality of the 'ownership' of the territory and the state. Our modern political vocabulary is littered with concepts, such as peacekeepers, ethnically proportionate constitution, country of origin, third-country nationals (immigrants from a non-EU state) and so on, all in order to accommodate politics of traditional nation-state in contemporary world where its design no longer fulfils the challenges it is facing. Our theorising about nations and nationalism appears preoccupied with questions about when did nations come into existence, how real or constructed they are? The studies of nationalism are replete with binary concepts, such as the distinction between ethnic and civic nationalism and multiculturalism *versus* ethnic homogeneity (the latter practically impossible). But does all out theorising matter when lives of children in many parts of the world are in danger or when, for their safety they are escorted by soldiers with guns? Does it matter whether nationalism is civic when there are thousands of immigrants in fear of being deported back to countries where they left because they feared for their lives? How good is an ethnically proportionate constitution in a post-conflict zone, when it has to be policed by peacekeepers, as for example in Bosnia? Which approach to nationalism should we look to for peace and equity in the world lacking in both?

My intention here is to convey basic ideas in my book which ultimately questions

---

<sup>2</sup> Mustafa Blakqorri, ethnic Albanian quoted in *The Guardian*, 20 February 2007, Ian Traynor 'Hope and fear as Europe's poorest region awaits a birth of a new country', p. 23

<sup>3</sup> Gellner, E. (1983) *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Connor, W. (1972), 'Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying', p. 331.

not only traditional theories of nationalism, but the actual design of the nation-state. Let me first establish the parameters of the forthcoming discussion. If the basic aim of nationalism is to promote and protect the nation, the first claim of nationalism must be that the nation is culturally and historically distinctive and therefore possesses moral authority to exist as a separate territorial and political entity or at least partake in the governance of the common state. The nation is a community of commonality, but so are many other communities. The specificity of this larger social grouping is in the emotional investment that it can extract from its members and in the solidarity that it can inspire. This ability of the nation to mark one's identity in such a significant way rests on a combination of the objective commonalities, such as territory, language, history, economy, politics and culture and their subjective reflection in collective consciousness<sup>5</sup>. As there is no hierarchy of importance among these commonalities, there is no conclusive answer to what makes a nation. The controversy of nationalism is partially rooted in the fact that it legitimizes its own actions on behalf of a group which can be contested – it may not yet exist, its past and its future may be disputed by others. We are however assuming that 'the nation' has a sense of common historical experience (territory, language or some other commonality from which this experience derives) and the intention to maintain these commonalities in future and unify under the same political system. So, for the combination of the past, the sense of belonging and the 'consent' about the future, I turn to Ernest Renan (1823-1892) for one of the most comprehensive definitions of the nation:

'A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an individual form'.<sup>6</sup>

One of the major debates in the study of nationalism concerns the modernity versus ancientness of the nation. This debate alone confirms the deep divisions among scholars about the fundamental issue of the definition, but all seem to agree that the nation as we know it – to which national sovereignty is attached – is a relatively modern construction. The formation of nations was an historical process in which changing societies sought an answer to the relationships between ruled and rulers and in which people sought an answer to the break down of their traditional societies in which they lived in and the new ideas of Enlightenment that were emerging. The sovereign state, as a subject of international law which emerged from the Peace of Westphalia (1648) predates modern nations as political entities. This Westphalian state has been later, under the influence of the French Revolution, enhanced by the principle of popular sovereignty and by the doctrine of self-determination, both of which provided the moral principles for the political and territorial state, thus creating a nation-state. The presumed near union of the nation and the state remains at the heart of the controversy of nationalism, because there are no perfectly matched nations and states.

I argue that the idea that a group of people have in common a set of shared interests

---

<sup>5</sup> Hroch (1993), 'From national movement to the fully-formed nation', p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Renan [1882], 'What Is a Nation?' in Eley, G. and Suny, R. (1996), *Becoming National*, p. 52.

and should be allowed to express their wishes on how these interests are best promoted<sup>7</sup> and that that group should be culturally homogeneous and therefore united under ‘a government to themselves apart’ and that ‘free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities’<sup>8</sup>, expressed and continues to express what are clearly two dominating, but rather contradictory ideologies – democracy and nationalism. The book turns to each of these challenges separately. We are well aware of challenges associated with the legitimacy of the nation-state, democracy, political unity and nationalism, cultural diversity and self-determination and how they interact. The book deals with them in depth, but here I want to focus on a particularly new challenge to studies of nationalism: the international dimension. I argue that nations and nationalism whilst about states are not necessarily contained within them, not in our world. It is never advisable to take the phenomenon one seeks to analyse at its premise. The politics of nations and nationalisms have moved beyond the states and the state-centricity of nationalism which has pervaded the studies of nationalism is becoming detrimental to our understanding of nationalism in our time. I argue strongly that if approaches to nationalism are to cover the actual cases of national and ethnic mobilisation we need to look across the boundaries of states as much as within them.

I want to conclude this introduction by clarifying the crucial difference between the nation and the state. Nationalism refers to political sovereignty, or a degree of it within a given territory. Hence, nationalism is not limited to actions and policies of the nation in charge of the nation-state, but could be policies and actions of other national groups living in the territory of the state and challenging its legitimacy, or merely seeking a degree of autonomy which the dominant nation refuses to offer. I argue that the perceived congruence between the nation and the state produces the majority of conflicts in our world. These conflicts derive from the mobilisation of ethnic groups *vis-à-vis* each other or *vis-à-vis* the state and are identified in this book as ethnic politics. Ethnicity refers to a social bond based on the belonging to an ethnic group which defines itself or is defined by others as sharing common descent and culture. The nation is then a similar group, defining itself as sharing a common culture and history which are less deterministic than descent and which too possesses or claims to possess ‘its own homeland and the exercise of political rights therein’<sup>9</sup>. The difference between ethnic group and the nation is important, because first, ethnicity is strictly a cultural trait in which the binding issue is primarily a common ancestry and second, because ethnicity is not necessarily attached to any particular legal structure of the state (this assertion is illustrated in the book by cases of increased role of diasporas in contemporary world politics). Ethnicity may be construed as a fact of one’s cultural heritage, but the nation is accompanied by political and territorial discourse. Nevertheless, our world is marked by a frequent repositioning of borders, which immigration, globalisation, Europeanisation and the internationalisation of inter-state and inter-

---

<sup>7</sup> Halliday, F. ‘Nationalism’ in Baylis, J. and Smith, S. (2005), *The Globalization of World Politics*, p. 525.

<sup>8</sup> Mill, J.S. (1991), *On Liberty and other essays*, p. 427-8.

<sup>9</sup> Mann, M. ‘Explaining murderous ethnic cleansing: the macro-level’ in Guibernau, M. and Hutchinson, J. (2001), *Understanding Nationalism*, p. 209.

ethnic relations in which not only is the 'sacredness' of the nation reduced, but where there is a fluidity of spaces and affiliations. The state, on the other hand is a legal concept, it describes a definite territory and denotes the aggregation of political and administrative institutions. The state and the nation were always different entities, but successfully merged into a nation-state; today when this merger is increasingly more fragile, I argue that it is politically and analytically crucial to maintain the difference between them.

**Nationalism in the post Cold war era.** The following draws on the concluding chapters of my book and seeks to combine an overview of the new issues in the studies of nations and nationalism. My concern here is mainly with certain aspects to the post-Cold War era which are in direct tension with assumptions about nationalism:

1. The nation-state remains the legitimate unit of international relations, but the ever increasing political and economic integration have altered the meaning of sovereignty and re-defined the realm of state's competencies. Logically, this would suggest that the role of nationalism should be re-defined too. Yet, the majority of conflicts in the world today are still about national self-determination for ever smaller ethnic units and the redefinition is actually in the use of international community for the arbitration in the achievement of these aims (the case of Kosovo, is an example *par excellence*).

2. The conventional thesis argues that the end of the Cold War's ideological division of the world accounts for the rise of cultural identity at the centre of global politics which is demonstrated by the continuing fragmentation of states, and apparently, by the 'clash of civilisation'. Both theses - the end and the 'clash'<sup>10</sup> suffer from the same problem: they are replacing the old ideological monoliths with new ones. If we have experienced a major systemic change, the solutions to new situations need new conceptual tools in order to understand new patterns instead of contorting old ones into new reality. The new nation state is not the same nation-state to which sovereignty and comprehensive national identity were attached; the new nation-state has a reduced ability to homogenise its population which has many different affiliations and more opportunity to actively pursue them, it has less control over its boundaries and its economy. This internal lack of control is matched by the external pressure of international institutions on one hand and the unpredictability of political alliances.

3. Membership in international organisations, particularly NATO and the EU has become the official indicator of democratic credentials of a state. The incorporation into these institutions, hence, the partial relinquishment of sovereignty has become a matter of national interest and for newly democratising states, a matter of national prestige. We are observing a national self-determination discourse - previously a sole property of nationalism - used for the purpose of international integration. This revisionist national rhetoric which argues that only 'a sovereign nation can give up a part of its sovereignty in a sovereign way and transfer it to a transnational community'<sup>11</sup> was particularly visible in post-Communist Europe. Vladimír Mečiar, the architect of Slovak independence (1 January

---

<sup>10</sup> Fukuyama, F. (1989), 'The End of History?' and Huntington, S. (1993), 'The Clash of Civilizations?', respectively.

<sup>11</sup> Hribar, T.(1987) 'The Slovenes and European Transnationality' p. 33.

1993), told his nation that 'the establishment of the state means that all its citizens can directly participate in European and world integration'<sup>12</sup>.

4. Globalisation, technological advance in communication and transportation have made geography less relevant and the world to appear smaller; the political integration is blurring the boundaries between national and international to such an extent that the assessment of one requires the assessment of the other and *vice-versa*. On the other hand, the flattening of political and geographic boundaries seems to produce fear of homogenisation which results in new cultural boundaries being erected across the physical boundaries of nation-states. There is a considerable increase in the relevance of cultural identity which at times overlaps with political identities, but often it does not.

*The consequences of national self-determination doctrine for the international order*

Since the horrors of the Second World War and the establishment of the United Nations, the principle of national self-determination is enshrined in the Article 1.2 of the United Nations Charter which declares as one of its purposes and principles to 'develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples'. The same Article 1.1 commits the UN to 'maintain peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to peace'<sup>13</sup>. But, the national self-determination doctrine is not a peaceful doctrine because the secession it seeks may threaten peace and the sovereignty of states which are internationally recognised units of the system on which peace and security should rest. It is clear that the national self-determination doctrine is a universal principle, but its applicability, in spite of a strong moral dimension, poses too many legal and institutional challenges and therefore can not be assumed to be universal.

Two points need emphasizing first. There is no definition of 'the people' in international law. Whilst there are various international tribunals where individuals who commit crimes against 'a people' can be tried, and whilst the international community is willing to enforce humanitarian law (selectively and problematically), the subject of international law is the state. At the beginning of the Cold War, the right to national self-determination was interpreted as the decolonisation from European colonial rule, and the right of ethnic groups not to be subjected to racist domination (as in South Africa), or occupation (as in Palestine)<sup>14</sup>.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia (less controversially, Czechoslovakia) was followed by a frenzy of independence declarations by a number of ethno-national groups. This took the international community by surprise; not only is there little clarity about what constitutes the just self-determination claim, but in the new unpredictable post Cold War order, each claim threatened regional stability. With hindsight, the independence of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, the Baltic States, and even a number of post-Soviet republics turned out relatively problem-less. On the other hand, the recogni-

---

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Leško, M. (1998), 'Príbeh sebadiskvalifikácie favorita' p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice, published by the Department of Public Information, United Nations, New York, 1994, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> reeman, M. (1999), 'The right to self-determination in international Politics: six theories in search of a policy', p. 356.

tion of Slovenia and Croatia, followed by Bosnia-Herzegovina initiated a major conflict in the Balkans. Some of these self-determination claims are still not resolved and remain internationally volatile. The independent status of Kosovo is still not accepted by Serbia and not by the majority of UN members<sup>15</sup>. The stability of Bosnia, 13 years after the US sponsored Dayton peace agreements which ended the war, remains fragile and extremely costly in terms of international support<sup>16</sup>. There is evidence that Bosnian Serb enclave Republika Srpska exploits the weaknesses of the new Bosnian constitution and continues to pursue secession. The conflict between Georgia and its separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia has been augmented by the provocative unilateral recognition of their independence claims by Russia, thus disregarding Georgian territorial integrity by her Western allies. This is not the first case of power politics being played out between important international actors at the cost of smaller self-determining ethno-national groups.

The international community does not offer much clarity regarding secession; sometimes it supports secession without considering the long-term regional consequences and sometimes it prefers established states and treats nearly all self-determination claims with suspicion and caution, often exacerbating the conflict. For example, the recognition of Bosnia-Herzegovina was followed by an arms embargo, thus leaving Bosnia defenceless<sup>17</sup> and Serbian position as the regional power intact. The continued negotiation with the Serbian leadership in an attempt to save the Yugoslav state and prevent wider conflict was not the 'finest' hour of the international community's efforts for peace and security<sup>18</sup>.

Putting cynical geo-politics aside, there is a good reason for caution with national self-determination claims. Historical evidence shows that most secessions do not follow the peaceful Czechoslovak or the Baltic model (and even there the majority-minority relationships deteriorated and threatened to destabilise the new states) and that most independence declarations provoke conflicts and refugee crisis, some with very long-term consequences. The territorial integrity of sovereign states and principles of national self-determination are the fundamentals of the international system, but paradoxically, the reconciliation between is not easily achieved.

In my book I discuss at length Freeman's six theories of national self-determination<sup>19</sup>, only to conclude that the doctrine's principal aim to obtain access to state power and the state's tendency to appropriate this power in the interest of the self-determining group will always leave 'residual' ethnic groups feel inadequately protected or represented. Consequently, the claims to national self-determination could be made by many disadvantaged groups and the process would be endless. Clearly, the solution to this prob-

---

<sup>15</sup> Borger, Julian 'Kosovo state is inevitable', *The Guardian*, 18 October 2008, p. 28. Only 51 out of 192 countries have recognised Kosovo as of that date.

<sup>16</sup> Paddy Ashdown and Richard Holbrooke 'A Bosnian powder keg', *The Guardian*, 22 October 2008, p. 28.

<sup>17</sup> Ramet, S. (1994), "The Yugoslav Crisis and the West: Avoiding 'Vietnam' and Blundering into Abyssinia".

<sup>18</sup> Simms, B. (2002), *The Unfinest Hour Britain and the Destruction of Bosnia*.

<sup>19</sup> Freeman, M. (1999), 'The right to self-determination in international Politics: six theories in search of a policy'

lem should be sought in concessions by states and not in secession.

David Miller (1995) is among notable scholars who link self-determination to social justice and believe that nations bound together by their long history and shared obligations are suited to representative governments. However, there is a problem in conflating nations with states (as Miller tends to do) for all reasons mentioned thus far and in my book discussed at length in the chapter dealing with the rights of minorities and various forms of constitutional arrangements necessary to protect them. The balance between the territorial integrity of states and the aspirations of aggrieved nations – both the main subjects of politics of nationalism – is notoriously difficult to achieve. The example of Northern Ireland is used all too readily to demonstrate the possibilities, but it could be used equally readily to show that solutions are not easy to come by. It has taken twenty-five years of to resolve the Irish problem; twenty-five years of negotiation and commitment from the UK, USA and Irish governments and that in conditions of relative democracy, prosperity and moreover, without having to change boundaries. Hence, the Irish example, whilst encouraging, has a limited application. **We must concede: i) nationalism, in the form of its defining self-determination principle is problematic for both peace and sovereignty and ii) the national self-determination of one group must be sometimes set against the international order.**

**Internationality of nationalism.** The reader may be by now wondering why I am so concerned with national self-determination doctrine. In my book I argue that theories of nationalism may have never fully captured the international dimension of state-formation, but by now the state-centricism of these theories is even more damaging to the understanding of its manifestations in or time. **So far I have argued that not all national self-determination struggles can be successful because they endanger international order. Let me now turn the argument on its head and argue that some are successful because of it.**

Each systemic change brings an explosion of new states based on the principle of national self-determination. The end of the WWI and the consequent break-up of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires were followed by the establishment of a number of new states in Europe, the Middle East and Asia (for example: Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Iraq, Iran, Turkey). The outbreak of the Second World War was followed by new declarations of independence (Slovakia and Croatia under Hitler's tutelage) and more shifting of borders, mostly in an attempt to recover lost territories or gain new ones (Hungary annexed parts of Slovakia, Germany annexed Austria and occupied many other European countries, Italy ventured into Abyssinia, Japan annexed Manchuria and occupied Dutch and British colonies in Asia). After WWII, territories were being 'returned' and states reconstituted to within their original borders (Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia) and new states declared independence (Israel and India), whilst the Baltic states were subsumed into the Soviet Union. The end of WWII also signalled the beginning of the end of colonisation which lasted well into the mid-1980s. The map of the world was redrawn with a number of newly de-colonised states appearing in Africa and Asia. The last major systemic change, the fall of the Berlin Wall resulted in the disintegration of communist federations, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia and some 28 successor states emerged on their territories, the last being Kosovo (February 2008).



Nation-states (or self-determining regions), in spite of many nationalist claims, are not a result of national movements only, but a result of international politics; the structure of international order is national, but becoming a nation-state is an international affair.

The first appearance of Slovakia as a nation with a corresponding territory was within the newly established Czechoslovakia in 1918 as one of the successor states of the disintegrated Austro-Hungarian Empire. Is it because Slovaks were one of those successful national groups whose national elites succeeded in their efforts? If so, why not as a fully independent nation-state? This is not to belittle the Czech and Slovak national movements, but to acknowledge that Czechoslovakia was a result of a number of international factors among which the emancipation of Czechs and Slovaks was probably the least influential. More influential was the international endorsement of the Wilsonian self-determination principle through which the Great Powers sought the solution to the post-empire Eastern and Central Europe. Further factors included the diplomatic efforts by Czechoslovakia's founding president Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and Slovak émigré organisations in the USA, who feared that the close proximity of Germany and the substantial three million German minority would endanger the sustainability of Czech independent existence and believed that Slovakia, linguistically the closest, would link the Czech lands to other Slavs.

The new post- 1918 map of Europe made little sense in terms of the national self-determination doctrine which was purportedly behind the establishment of these new states, because most of them were multinational and contained a number of nations with only fledgling national movements, whilst the boundaries of the new Poland with a long history of intense national struggle were not settled until 1922. The existence of many states owes, in part, to the international constellation of powers at the time. The same applied for the successor states of the Ottoman Empire. To this day, nationalism in many of those territories is fuelled by resentment towards the international agreements among 'superpowers'<sup>20</sup> of that time. It took a collapse of the Soviet Union and a new post- 1989 world order for a rebirth of states, whose growth was stunted by superpower agreements in 1918 or 1945. Time after time history shows that the attainment of nationhood depends on more than the strengths of its national movement, the intensity of patriotic fervour or even the level of industrialisation (as Gellner argued); it depends on politics and the constellation of power in the international system.

In assessing the validity of classical approaches to nationalism, whether in the ethno-symbolically inspired theories of a historical mission of ethnic group to become a nation or in the more cynical modernist 'nationalism makes nations not other way round' theories<sup>21</sup>, I concluded that all fail when it comes to accounting for systemic changes and their affects on 'the people' who are more often than not receivers of the drama of history rather than its bearers.

---

<sup>20</sup> O' Leary, B. (1998), 'Ernest Gellner's diagnosis of nationalism: a critical overview, or, what is living and what is dead in Ernest Gellner's philosophy of nationalism?', p. 61.

<sup>21</sup> The two schools of thought are best represented by Smith, A. and Gellner, E. respectively. See the literature section at the end.

Let me take another, more contemporary example: Kosovo (approx. 2 million population, 88% of the population are ethnic Albanians). Its unilateral declaration of independence followed a long process of the international community's efforts to find a solution to this last piece of the Balkan puzzle. Kosovo, following the brutal suppression by Serb forces (1999) and attempts to ethnically cleanse the territory they regard as their historical and emotional homeland no longer accepts its position within Serbia. Serbia and the Serbian 7% minority concentrated in the North of Kosovo on the other hand refuse to grant Kosovo independence. The General Assembly of the UN declared the independence of Kosovo illegal (9 October 2008)<sup>22</sup>, but Martti Ahtisaari, the Nobel peace prize winner for his mediation in Kosovo, when challenged on this fact, argued that the 'Kosovo state is inevitable'<sup>23</sup>. He argued that it is less important how many countries do not recognise Kosovo than the economic clout of countries that do recognise it (65% of the wealth of the world) and explained that moreover, Serbia will have to relent if it wants to pursue European integration.

The point here is not to argue the right or wrong of Kosovo independence, but to stress a number of very difficult questions that Kosovo has come to represent in studies of nationalism and international relations. If Serbia has lost the right to govern Kosovo because of its aggression towards it, then many territories round the globe would have a similar right to secede. If regional security is at the heart of the issue, then Serbia which is no longer a Milošević's Serbia, even if slow and half-hearted in its democratising efforts, should perhaps have its claims considered. Is Kosovo a *sui generis* case, due to the wars in the 1990s or a dangerous precedence<sup>24</sup>? Many states in Europe who refuse to recognise Kosovo, such as Slovakia, Spain and Cyprus, have their own minority problems and obviously fear so. It must strike one as ironic though that whilst thousands of people died in Bosnia in order to first preserve what was left of multiethnic Yugoslavia, and whilst we are constructing complicated constitutional arrangements in order to protect minorities round the world, Kosovo does not follow this overall trend towards multiethnic solution. We do not know whether the success of Kosovo in achieving its independent status will reinvigorate other dormant national movements, or whether it will complicate even further the very fragile situation in Bosnia – probably not and the Balkans will continue to muddle through with the help of the EU. In any case, Kosovo demonstrated that in our highly internationalised world, the concept of sovereignty is not sacred which may be good and appropriate. On the other hand, it confirmed the interdependence between nationalism, ethnicity and the territory which is a contradiction, particularly when brought about by international efforts.

**New nationalism for a new nation-state.** National identities have been constructed

---

<sup>22</sup> 'Serbia overjoyed, Kosovo calm, after the UN Vote', Balkan Insight.com, at <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/analysis/13868>, accessed 25 October 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Borger, Julian 'Kosovo state is inevitable', *The Guardian*, 18 October 2008, p. 28. (51 out of 192 countries have recognised Kosovo as of the date of this article).

<sup>24</sup> Traynor, Ian, 'Spain exposes EU split as US leads recognition', *The Guardian*, 19 February 2008, p. 15.

and engraved in our political consciousness within the contours of the classical nation-state<sup>25</sup>. But, national identity is broader, it incorporates a number of elements in order to blend linguistic differences, historical disagreements and varied 'ways of life' contained within a modern nation. My point is that national identity is in most cases a composite of the immediate, 'thick' ethnic identity and somewhat 'thinner' identity underpinned by a sense of a common political existence within the state, which ideally, should rely on trust and motivation to sustain it. Both national and ethnic identities rest on commonality, but national identity implies a political centre, whilst ethnic identity can exist without one. However, for this non-political ethnic identity to survive, it needs to rest on some universal principles of tolerance, civil liberty, equal rights, thus on some forms of political arrangements which should be reflected in national identity. The problem is that the nation-state does not have a good historical record on reconciliation between cultural identities and tends to prefer one over the other.

This national conundrum of culture and political unity has exercised the attention of scholars for some time, but is increasingly more acute in the increasingly more multicultural world. This is where the distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism entered the studies of nationalism in a thus far not very successful attempt to accommodate and resolve the troublesome issue of the overwhelmingly ethnic character of the nation-state. Jürgen Habermas proposes a sophisticated and normatively very appealing notion of 'constitutional patriotism' which in contrast to civic nationalism removes the cultural element of the commitment to the common state and replaces it with commitment to procedures and principles outlined in constitutional terms<sup>26</sup>. Thus, 'culture, history and geography' which all tend to point towards the ethnic origins of the nation-state and produce minorities with all the ensuing consequences, in Habermas's nation-state the points of references would be 'political, moral and juridical'<sup>27</sup>. This is not the place to discuss the pro's and con's of constitutional patriotism, bar mentioning that national constitutions tend to be a result of historical processes and experiences of 'the nation', hence the built-in ethnic overtone of the territorial nation-state and the lesser likelihood of constitutional patriotism.

All theories of nations, from Smith's ethnic to Habermas's constitution – even if the latter much less so – suffer from the inability to reflect the precarious position of the contemporary state: 'under the pressure from beyond and within, but with substantially reduced ability to influence either'<sup>28</sup>. The pressures from beyond the state come in the form of globalisation, here understood as rapidly expanding trade, investments, financial flows, travel and other forms of worldwide communication<sup>29</sup>. Connected to globalisation are other processes: the ever increasing economic interdependence in which financial markets

---

<sup>25</sup> Lord and Harris (2006), *Democracy in the New Europe*, p. 185.

<sup>26</sup> Habermas, J. (1992), 'Citizenship and National Identity: Some Reflections on the Future of Europe', p. 7. For the overview of his work see Laborde, C. (2002), 'From Constitutional to Civic Patriotism', p. 592-595.

<sup>27</sup> Idem, p. 593.

<sup>28</sup> Lord, C. and Harris, E. (2006), *Democracy in the New Europe*, p. 184.

<sup>29</sup> Tønnesson, S. (2004), 'Globalising national states', p. 179.

have fast exceeded state control, social interaction, non-state actors' intervention into political and security spheres, overuse of global resources and pollution, the ever increasing concerns for societal security and human rights and the increased legitimacy of regional and other organisations as well as the increased polarisation of the world into poor and rich countries. The pressures from within and below the state come from an ever increasing diversity, the various forms of autonomy seeking self-rule and trans-border activities, but with a reduced ability to homogenise the population whilst facing the general demise in citizens' commitment to participation and increased expectations for welfare.

**This is a 'new' nation-state, a multicultural state, participating in international relations and seeking more and more global interdependence in order to fulfil the expectations placed upon it.** My contribution to this body of work represented in my book has been to argue that we may have to question the whole design of the nation-state and that studies of nationalism have to allude to a number of issues that can not be encompassed within any one theory or approach to nationalism<sup>30</sup>.

The question is why are we assuming that this 'new' nation-state should be the subject of the same identity and theorising as the classical nation-state? It stands to reason as Mary Kaldor<sup>31</sup> argues, that the external influences on the nation-state and the changes in its functions have changed the character of nationalism. We are experiencing the rise of ethnically stimulated violence, locally and internationally. I concur with her that this is a result of the lack of clarity about the international order which is in transition from the classical 19<sup>th</sup> century nation-state order to something yet unknown. Whilst the answer can be sought in cosmopolitanism and its near example of European integration, the latter two need certain political and cultural pre-conditions which are not present everywhere whilst the opposition to the unknown comes in the vehement defence of the existing and embedded ethno-territorial understanding of the world.

**'New' nationalists, similarly to previous ones believe in territorially based sovereignty and they want to either control the state or create one they can control, in the name of the nation, or increasingly in the name of religion<sup>32</sup>. The ideology of resistance to the existing order (often against democratic order) and strategy rooted in the invocation of a mythical past has not changed much, but the methods and violence are very modern. This is the characteristic of 'new' nationalism: the ancientness combined with all the benefits of modernity which is then rejected.** Even more concerning is the rise of Islamic militancy among young men round the world which may be a result of conditions of cultural and moral displacement and economic insecurity in which they find themselves. Criminal, nationalist and religious groupings prey on them at every turn in their disappointing life

---

<sup>30</sup> I conclude my book with seven suggestions which I believe could provide better foundations for new theorising about nationalism. They allude to: the tension between the democratic claims of nationalism and its exclusivist policies, the ambiguity of nationalism which thrives on contradictions (it is at all times simultaneously modern and pre-modern, civic and ethnic, democratic and exclusivist, and so on), the durability of ethnic affiliation and its modern trans-national manifestations (i.e. global terrorism), the design of the nation-state and the international dimension of ethnic conflicts.

<sup>31</sup> Kaldor (2004), 'Nationalism and Globalisation', p. 161-177.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p. 167-70.

offering a sense of perceived belonging and a false dignity. Their fatalistic violence, rooted in resentment is associated with a perception that ethnic (and religious) identity must remain uncontaminated and therefore defended at any cost.

The new aspect of the new ethnic and religious violence is its international character. The features of new nationalisms are: the international mobilisation of ethnic kin, the recruitment and training of combatants on a trans-national scale with the use of modern technology, TV channels and the use of languages as it fits the relevant audience, complex international finance, the involvement of organized crime and the use of a civilian population in the manifestation of power. There is nothing parochial about the external presentation of these movements, not in organisation and not in strategies. The nation and ethnic identity have assumed a world-wide audience which is invited to hear the political aims, but not invited to argue or disagree with them. A narrow and exclusivist identity is reasserting itself in a very post-modern way. We are a long-way away from nationalisms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These new nationalisms, the conditions in which they arise, the solutions that may alleviate them are of a different nature and consequences are well beyond nation-states.

In juxtaposition to these movements is the increased relevance of cosmopolitanism in a contemporary world searching for 'peace among nations'. Cosmopolitan thought, following Immanuel Kant seeks to subordinate politics to morality, it stresses the contingency of borders and dignity of a person. The modern day Kantians such as Habermas and Held<sup>33</sup> are looking to update the moral Kantian principles and work out how they could be institutionalised on international levels. On offer is the form of legal cosmopolitanism concerned with human rights universally or within the European Union (Habermas), or a more political model of cosmopolitanism in the form of 'cosmopolitan democracy' (Held) as the best answer to the multi-layered governance characteristic of globalisation. In both cases the fundamental question underlying the cosmopolitan endeavour is whether the territorial sovereign nation-state can remain the only moral community 'when the opportunities for, and the incidence of, transnational harm continue to rise alongside increasing interdependence'<sup>34</sup>. The answer is probably – no.

However, the nation-state is not going anywhere for some time yet. Can we imagine the world, moreover, can we manage it, without the nation-state? The European Union is pioneering a vision of the world in which democracy within the state is backed up by democracy beyond the state (not very successfully thus far) and in which supra-national institutions underwrite the legal, political, social and cultural rights of all European citizens<sup>35</sup>. This new unprecedented and perhaps poorly defined political community should transcend the nationalism of its member states and move our imagination beyond the national. The idea is slow in harnessing our affection when compared to the old nation-state.

---

<sup>33</sup> Habermas, J. (2001), 'A Constitution for Europe?'; (1999) 'The European Nation–State and the Pressures of Globalization' and ( 1992), 'Citizenship and National Identity: Some Reflections on the Future of Europe'. Held, D. (1995), *Democracy and the Global Order: from the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance*; Held, D. and McGrew, A. (ed.) (2003), *The Global Transformations Reader*.

<sup>34</sup> Linklater, A. (1998), 'Cosmopolitan Citizenship', p. 32.

<sup>35</sup> Idem, p. 32.

The classical nation-state emerged in different conditions in order to answer challenges of its time. I have argued in my book and in this summary of it that in spite of our non-diminishing faith in the nation-state it can not continue in its classical nineteenth century form either because it is failing to answer challenges of our time. The continued proliferation of nation-states, does not suggest its success; it suggests the success of nationalism<sup>36</sup>. The rising incidents of ethnic violence, global terrorism and other forms of intolerance and xenophobia suggest not only suggest the success of nationalism, but also our failure to approach identity and political solidarity in a more suitable way for the contemporary world.

#### LITERATURE

- [1] Bauman, Z. (1992), 'Soil blood and identity', *Sociological Review*, 40:2, 675-701.
- [2] Brubaker, R. and Cooper, F. (2000), 'Beyond 'identity'', *Theory and Society* 29, 1-47.
- [3] Connor, W. (1972), 'Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying', *World Politics*, XXIV:3, 319-355.
- [4] Connor, W. (1993), 'Beyond reason: the nature of the ethnonational bond', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 16:3, 373-389.
- [5] Guibernau, M. and Hutchinson, J. (ed.), *Understanding Nationalism*, Cambridge: Polity.
- [6] Eley, G. and Suny, R. (1996), *Becoming National*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [7] Freeman, M. (1999), 'The right to self-determination in international Politics: six theories in search of a policy', *Review of International Studies*, 25, 355-370.
- [8] Fukuyama, Francis (1989), 'The End of History?', *National Interest*, Summer 1989, 3-18.
- [9] Gellner, E. (1964), *Thought and Change*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson.
- [11] Gellner, E. (1994 [1983]), *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- [12] Habermas, J. (2001), 'A Constitution for Europe?', *New Left Review* 11, 5-26.
- [13] Habermas, J. (1992), 'Citizenship and National Identity: Some Reflections on the Future of Europe', *Praxis International*, 12:1, 1-19.
- [14] Halliday, Fred (2005), 'Nationalism' in Baylis, J. and Smith, S. *The Globalization of World Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.521-538.
- [15] Held, D. (1995), *Democracy and the Global Order: from the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- [16] Held, D. and McGrew, A. (ed) (2003), *The Global Transformations Reader*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- [17] Hribar, T. (1987), 'The Slovenes and European Transnationality' in the special issue 'Prispevki za Slovenski Nacionalni program' in *Nova Revija* VI:57, 33-36.
- [18] Hroch, M. (1993), 'From National Movement to the Fully-Formed Nation', *New Left Review* 198, p. 3-20.
- [19] Huntington, S. (1993), 'The Clash of Civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs* 72:3, 22-49.
- [20] Kaldor, M. (2004), 'Nationalism and Globalisation', *Nations and Nationalism*, 10:1-2, 161-177.
- [21] Laborde, C. (2002), 'From Constitutional to Civic Patriotism', *British Journal of Political Studies*, 32, 591-612.
- [22] Leško, Marián (1998), 'Príbeh sebadiskvalifikácie favorita' in Bútora, M. and Šebej, F. ed. (1998), *Slovensko v šedej zone*, Bratislava: IVO, p. 15-80.
- [23] Linklater, A. (1998), 'Cosmopolitan Citizenship', *Citizenship Studies* 2:1, 23-42.
- [24] Lord, C. and Harris, E. (2006), *Democracy in the New Europe*, Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

---

<sup>36</sup> Bauman (1992), 'Soil blood and identity', p. 690.

- [25] Mann, Michael (1995), 'A Political Theory of Nationalism and Its Excesses', in Periwal, S. (ed.), *Notions of Nationalism*, Budapest: Central European University Press, pp. 44-64.
- [26] Mann, M. (1999), 'The Dark Side of Democracy: The Modern Tradition of Ethnic and Political Cleansing', *New Left Review* 235, 18-45.
- [27] Mill, J.S. (1991), *On Liberty*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [28] Miller, D. (1995), *On Nationality*, Oxford: Clarendon Press. O' Leary, Brendan (1998), 'Ernest Gellner's diagnosis of nationalism: a critical overview, or, what is living and what is dead in Ernest Gellner's philosophy of nationalism?' in Hall, J. *The State of the Nation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [29] Ramet, S. (1994), 'The Yugoslav Crisis and the West: Avoiding 'Vietnam' and Blundering into Abyssinia'" in *East European Politics and Societies*, 8:1, 189-219.
- [30] Simms, B. (2002), *Unfinest Hour Britain and the Destruction of Bosnia*, London: Penguin Books.
- [31] Smith, A.D. (1983) ( 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), *Theories of nationalism*, London: Duckworth, and New York: Holmes and Meier.
- [32] Smith, A. D. (1986), *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- [33] Smith, A. D. (1998), *Nationalism and Modernism*, London: Routledge.
- [34] Smith, A. D. (1991), *National Identity*, London: Penguin Books.
- [35] Tønnesson, S. (2004), 'Globalising national states' in *Nations and Nationalism*, 10:1-2, 179-194.

---

Štúdiá vznikla v spolupráci s Fakultou sociálnych štúdií na Katedre sociálnej práce, VŠ Sládkovičovo.

---

Erika Harris, PhD. BA.  
School of Politics and Communication Studies  
University of Liverpool  
Liverpool L69 7ZT  
UK  
e-mail: E.Harris@liverpool.ac.uk