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## Nationalism: A Theoretical Approach

### Nacjonalizm w ujęciu teoretycznym

#### • Abstract •

The origin of the first research on the definition of nationalism dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, the formation of the concept of nationalism was influenced by the Industrial Revolution, and then the concept continued to develop until today. The aim of the article is to explain the basic arguments of modernist nationalism theories and their shortcomings.

**Keywords:** primordialism; nationalism; uneven development; modernist nationalism

#### • Abstrakt •

Początki badań nad definicją nacjonalizmu sięgają XVIII wieku. Na kształtowanie się koncepcji nacjonalizmu miała więc wpływ rewolucja przemysłowa, następnie zaś koncepcja ta rozwijała się aż po czasy współczesne. Celem artykułu jest wyjaśnienie podstawowych tez nowoczesnych teorii nacjonalizmu i ich wad.

**Słowa kluczowe:** prymordializm; nacjonalizm; nierównomierny rozwój; nowoczesny nacjonalizm

### Introduction

Following the main idea of this paper, leading names in modernist nationalism include Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm (Hastings, 1997). Although, to understand modernist nationalism, it is first necessary to focus on the concepts of nation and nationalism. Kymlicka defined the word ‘nation’ as a community that shares a common language and a common destiny (Özkirimli, 2000). In turn, Stalin defined the nation as a community of people who share the same name, territory, language, and culture. Accordingly, he defined nationalism as sharing a common language, community, and economic life.

The modernist approach to nationalism focuses mainly on innovation in the political and economic context of nationalism throughout history. To understand modernist nationalism, emphasis must be placed on cultural, ideological, and constructivist approaches (Conversi, 2012).

The scholars who examine nationalism from the perspective of politics include Anthony Giddens and John Breuilly. It is worth mentioning that Breuilly also defines nationalism from a cultural perspective. According to Anthony Giddens, the formation of the modern state is based on the factors of specialization and territorialization (Meštrović, 1998). The famous British sociologist also argues that nationalism is influenced by citizenship and sovereignty. He mentions the link between them. This connection describes two tendencies in modern nationalism. One of them is ethnic nationalism. This kind of nationalism includes a democratic approach based on human beings and valuing them. The other one is aggressive nationalism. Aggressive nationalism, on the other hand, demonstrates the superiority of a country by exhibiting aggressive behavior against other countries (Giddens, 1994).

In economic terms, modernist nationalists argue that colonialism, injustice, competition, and inequality of capitalism, which all emerged in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the development of the concepts of nation and nationalism, accelerated with the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Perceiving the economy as an instrument to achieve national goals, economic modernists support the national economy, viewing globalization in the economy in a negative light.

Gellner is the representative of modernist nationalists in cultural terms. The British-Czech philosopher and social anthropologist works through the concepts of 'industrialism', 'high culture', and 'low culture' while defining modernist nationalism. Gellner thinks that there is a link between sociology and nationalism. In other words, according to the scholar, it is not enough to understand only high culture to define a nation, and only high culture does not affect the formation of a nation. According to him, nationalism is a phenomenon that individuals learn and develop over time. Nationalism becomes by spreading among people over time (Gellner, 2008). According to the theory developed by Ernest Gellner, the state is at the center. The people, on the other hand, are a community that will transfer the common history and other common values that make up the nation to the higher culture. Gellner's approach to nationalism is based on the coincidence of state and nation. In his definition of the state, Gellner adopted Max Weber's earlier definition of the 'state'. In other words, he believes that violence in the modern age should be reasoned as something that can only be used under state control and by the state. Gellner considers the state as "preserving order". The organizations that make up

the state are the general units that maintain order. The nation does not exist in every state. But the state is incomplete without the nation. It is precisely here that Gellner approaches state and nation as territory and defines them in cultural terms. To be a nation, it is necessary to have a culture. He understands one culture as something worth striving for within the state.

John Breuilly, on the other hand, defines nationalism as the political mobilization of societies striving for the state. Thus, nationalism is an inevitable element in the formation of a modern state. While defining nationalism, Breuilly argues that understanding cultural nationalism is not only a matter of analyzing it from a cultural perspective (Breuilly, 1993). Because the element of power in the modern world is the state, the people play a political role here. In general, according to Breuilly, nationalism in cultural terms is the common character of the people.

The representative of the ideology of modern nationalism was the historian Elie Kedourie. He expressed his thoughts on modern ideological nationalism in his 1961 book *Nationalism*. According to him, nationalism has the same power as religion. While analyzing nationalism, he mentions that it exists only in Europe (Kedourie, 1961). When he talks about nations, he argues that they emerged naturally.

The instrumentalist modernist approach is that of Paul Brass (Özkirimli, 2000). The birth of instrumentalism, nationalism, and its support for nationalism are explained in terms of the interests they aim to serve – in this case, universality of nation and national identity, wealth, power, and prestige. The elite can gain mass support in competition. Brass argues that there must be an objective cultural presence. He also states that there are distinctive features of each class that enable them to communicate.

In economic terms, nationalism has been criticized for making comments based only on the Industrial Revolution. Because there was nationalism before capitalism, the definition of nationalism is not only related to industrialization. Understanding nationalism is not only about economics. Criticism of the theory of nationalism from a cultural point of view is as follows: that in order to understand cultures, it is necessary not to reduce them to a single idea. Because there are many elements that make up a culture, each nation or state has a cultural understanding that is formed in different ways and influenced by different situations. Gellner's understanding of nationalism fails to understand and interpret nationalism, especially nationalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, Gellner's approach to cultural nationalism is also associated with technological determinism, as it does not emphasize the importance of societies in the study of ideas. One more weakness is that the emergence of nationalism is not only a sociological necessity. There are other situations that affect it. Since nationalism demands the interests of one's own nation, the majority finds

and creates its own nationalism since it speaks of its own interests here and wants others to come under the conformity of the culturally relevant values it possesses.

## **Identifying and explaining different versions of primordialism**

Primordialism is the idea that a nation has a certain ethnic group. It was first used in 1957. According to primordialism, nation and ethnic groups are the same. It depends on biological genes. There is a relationship between both. Primordialism is more of a political phenomenon. Nations are fixed. Primordialism is characterized by an orientation toward societies (Kataria, 2018). There is a commonality. This commonality includes language, religion, history, and culture shared by societies. Thus, a bond between nations can also be mentioned (Horowitz, 2002). According to Anthony Smith, working in the field of primordial, modern nations, and ethnicities, “ethnies” prepare the ground for the formation of a modern nation. The commonality here is history, legends, culture, and loyalty. However, as a necessity for the formation of an ethnic nation, Anthony Smith mentions stages. These stages are divided into three. The first is to unite people in a certain region through sociobiology. In other words, it is based on the discovery of traditions and customs, the cultural characteristics of a region. Another process is culturalist. Here, the common culture of societies is seen as a political heritage (Coakley, 2018). This political heritage is made up of traditions and customs. They are transferred from society to society. They are important. The last stage is nationalist. Perennialism, on the other hand, consists of two stages, the first of which is continuous perennialism. It assumes that the origins of nations as societies date back to the very distant past. Thus, it emphasizes the importance of the continuity of these nations in the cultural context, the continuity of their cultural identities, and their development over a long period of time. The theory of recurrent perennialism, on the other hand, characterizes the continuity of a nation in the sense that some nations may come and go throughout the historical scene. The concepts of “primordialism” and “perennialism” can be deployed as two mutually supportive concepts in explaining why nations exist. It is a fact that nations see the genes and cultures they have possessed throughout history as an indispensable element and foundation. Paul R. Brass, like Anthony Smith, has distinguished ethnic groups in relation to three features: objective aspects, subjective feelings, and appearance (Smith, 2013). The more similar these categories are to each other, the closer are the ethnic origins. But the more distant they are from each other, the more distant their ethnic origins are. Socially, the categories differ from each other (Konuralp, 2018).

## **Uneven development and internal colonialism: how they relate to the theory of nationalism**

Uneven development is an argument sometimes raised by Marxists. In general, uneven development is linked to the welfare of societies. It is related to the fact that social needs, such as the economy, education, etc., do not develop at the same rate. It is related to the uneven distribution of economic activity. Sometimes capitalism is also pointed to as a source. Among the first causes of uneven development are colonial activities. This situation occurs when a country exploits the wealth and resources of another country. So, it is linked to the national prosperity of societies (Orridge, 1981). When analyzed by economists throughout history, countries that were colonized in the past show a lower level of development compared to other countries. By 1950, although many countries had gained economic independence, they were still followed by irregular development.

Uneven development is directly related to the theory of nationalism. Because the theories of nationalism and capitalism defend the proportion of power and prosperity that can be achieved in a national sense against individuals, this is considered a fundamental goal as capitalism believes that societies can increase prosperity in economic terms. But here the race is on, and the product of it is uneven development.

Another situation that affects uneven development is war. When a war breaks out in a country, it gives priority to other needs, such as the greater importance given to weapons over education at that moment. Trotsky explains uneven development as both quantitatively and qualitatively unequal. Quantitatively uneven development is associated with economic growth and population growth, while qualitatively uneven development is characterized by geographical features.

The third cause of uneven development is population growth. The higher the birth rate in a country, the more difficult it is for women to participate in the labor market. The inability of women to work leads to changes in the employment rate, which in turn leads to uneven development (Özkırımlı, 2000).

The concept of internal colonialism refers to the exploitation of a minority group by the more powerful group in a state, both politically and economically. It can be said that it also arises as a result of ethnic separation of groups. It causes an uneven economy. Internal colonialism, generally known as the slavery system or the deprivation of some goods due to different ethnic origins of citizens in a country, is a modern-day form of capitalism. In 1963, Mexican sociologist Pablo González was one of the first to define the concept of internal colonialism. In 1975, Michael Hechter extended this definition. Hechter offered two alternatives to solve

the internal colonialism problem. One of them is nationalism, and the other is assimilation. Assimilation is the imposition of the ideas of those who are in the majority on those who are in the minority.

According to Hechter, the center is economically involved in colonial activities. Nationalism appears in internal colonialism because there is a racist distinction between the minority group and the group in power. These groups start to form movements or political phenomena that can appeal to members of their own groups. Since inequality between regions in a country is possible, there is direct link of the theory of nationalism and internal colonialism. The exploiters here are not foreign powers, but internal forces themselves. Colonial activities take place within the country, and although these activities expand within the country, they pursue an imperialist goal. Colonial activities depend on the dominant group and the dominant class (Hechter, 2020).

### **Structural phases of national movements according to Hroch**

Hroch associates the definition of a nation with Europe. He criticizes the definition of nationalism in terms of both the past and the future. He has also created new studies on the concepts of nation and nationalism and emphasized that historians, in their methodology, prefer to start with empirical research, and then move to broader conclusions. Accordingly, his understanding of nation is broader and more social and cultural in the context of classifying the definitions of nation, thus making improvements to this very concept. On the other hand, he stated that there are historical deficiencies when the history of each nation is examined. Hroch analyzed the definition of nation, approaching it from several perspectives. These angles are characterized as economic, political, and geographical commonalities on both subjective and objective approaches. 'Nation' can be defined at the outset as a large social group integrated by a combination of several kinds of objective relationships, and their subjective reflection in collective consciousness. The core concept in nation-building process is 'memory' of some common past; this memory represents a common destiny of the group. The other feature is social communication, that is, most of the community speaks the same language and has the same culture. The Czech historian tries to explain both the concept of nation and the concept of nationalism by focusing on modern society (Hroch, 2018). According to him, the model society occurs in two stages: the first stage is the conflict between the absolute monarchy and the bourgeoisie, and the second stage is the concept of capitalism that developed in this conflict, which the bourgeoisie won in the first stage. Capitalism

brings with it concepts such as workers' labor rights and the working class, and then it creates a rapidly evolving era of mass communication.

Hroch analyzes national movements in three structural phases: first, societies explore mutual historical differences. The second stage aims to secure mass support for a movement that starts as a national movement by reaching the public consciousness of a group, both socially and historically. In other words, activists try to 'awake' national consciousness by patriotic agitation (Horch, 1998). The last phase is that, after receiving the support of the masses, the group reaches the stage of becoming a nation.

## Conclusion

The article briefly presents many definitions of nationalism and the related philosophy of modernist nationalism. In addition, it was pointed out that nationalism is a multi-explicable concept, which makes understanding this term difficult.

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