

## **RETHINKING NATIONALISM: THE HAZY CONCEPT IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

It is rather difficult to pin down the meaning when one considers the veritable plethora of problems that the concept of nationalism presents. The foremost difficulty is the lack of a common understanding among scholars and academics about the problems that emanate from the definitions of nationalism. In order to rethink and analyse the hazy concept of nationalism, the evolution of the concept of nationalism from being a natural phase in the evolution of human society to the argument of it being a constructed complex mythology, as held by Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, Anthony D. Smith, Eric J. Hobsbawm, and James Mayall, will be the general focus of this article. This article will however concentrate on analysing the rationalisation of the “mythical construct” argument by examining the most important three precepts – ethnicity, culture and language – posited and then reach to a conclusion by manifesting how these have served and are continuing to serve as ethical and moral problems for international relations.

Key Words: Nationalism, Nation, Ethnicity, Community, Culture, Self-determination.

### **MİLLİYETÇİLİĞİ YENİDEN DÜŞÜNMEK: ULUSLARARASI İLİŞKİLERDE BELİRSİZ KAVRAM**

#### **ÖZET**

Milliyetçiliğin ortaya koyduğu gereğinden daha fazla sorunları göz önünde bulundurarak milliyetçilik kavramının anlamını açıklayabilmek oldukça zordur. En başta gelen zorluklardan birisi ise, milliyetçiliğin tanımından kaynaklanan sorunlar hakkında bilim adamları ve akademisyenler arasında ortak bir anlayışa varılamamasıdır. ‘Bulanık’ milliyetçilik kavramını analiz edebilmek ve tekrar gözden geçirebilmek için milliyetçilik kavramının evrimini insan topluluğunun evriminin doğal bir aşaması olmasından, yapılandırılmış karmaşık bir “söylen-bilim” (complex mythology) olması tezine – ki Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, Anthony D. Smith, Eric J. Hobsbawm ve James Mayall böyle düşünmekte – bu makalenin genel odak noktası olacaktır. Bu makale “söylencesel yapı” (mythical construct) tezinin savunmasını ortaya konan en önemli üç temel prensiple – etniklik, kültür ve dil – sınamaya çalışarak rasyonelleşmeyi analiz edecektir. Daha sonra ise bu ortaya konmuş ve konacak olan temel prensiplerin nasıl oluyor da uluslararası ilişkilerde hala sorun olmaya devam ettiğinin açıkça belirtilmesiyle sonuca ulaşılabilecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Milliyetçilik, Ulus, Etniklik, Cemaat, Kültür, Self-determinasyon.

*“Nationalism is today one of the most powerful forces in the world, and that the national state has been for a century at least, and continues to be, the cornerstone of international politics. Nationalism provides the sole legitimation of states the world over, including the many polyethnic and federal ones. It is also the most widespread and popular ideology and movement, and it comes as no surprise that many of the world’s most intractable conflicts [...] are either ethno-national conflicts or possess a strong nationalist component.”*

– Anthony D. Smith, 1995: 2

### **Introduction**

Nationalism is a major force behind the break-up of states and empires, the creation of new states and the “construction” of national loyalties to states. Nationalism is also one of the most powerful forces of today’s world and often cited as a source of wars, ethnic conflict, persecution of minorities and belligerence. While the nationalism of the nineteenth century was perhaps viewed as a positive *liberal* phenomenon that brought many people together in a nation-state, the experiences of the twentieth century discredited these liberal insights into ‘civic’ and ‘inclusive’ components of nationalism. The idea of nationalism in the twentieth century is associated with negative *realist* phenomenon that divided many people from each other through a strong sense of ‘them’ and ‘us’ beneath the idea of a nation-state and this is often metamorphosed into ‘ethnic’ and ‘exclusive’ components of nationalism.

The idea of the nation as a political unit is the essence of nationalism. Therefore, nationalism first emerged as a result of the search for a new political identity among the apolitical groups of people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as an offshoot of increasing capitalism. Concomitantly, nationalism itself was perceived by the precursors of capitalism as a derivative idea of the functional necessities of transition from agrarian to industrial society that later significantly paved the way to the decolonisation in Africa and Asia. In the meantime, nationalism also implies the development of citizenship and that citizens’ loyalty to the nation should be the first virtue of a citizen. However, as globalisation has intensified in the last two decade, nationalism has began to gain domestic and international implications as citizens’ loyalty to the national state domestically should, in general, transcend loyalty to more particular identifications, ethnic, cultural, traditional, economic or political, while citizens of one’s nation internationally have, in general, higher moral claims than members of other nations (O’Leary, 1997: 220).

In order to rethink and analyse the hazy concept of nationalism, the evolution of the concept of nationalism from being a natural phase in the evolution of human society to the argument of it being a constructed complex mythology, as held by Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, Anthony D. Smith, Eric J. Hobsbawm, and James Mayall, will be the general focus of this paper. Ernest Gellner's most influential statements on nationalism, published in his book called *Thought and Change*, included the best-known theoretical justifications and explanations based on the separation of the quite spurious 'national' and 'natural' specifications from the genuine, time and context bound roots (Gellner, 1964: 151). In the same way, Benedict Anderson's definition of a nation in his seminal work called *Imagined Communities* as an "imagined political community" became the most influential reference book for the most scholars who examined the 'imaginings' that defined nations as naturally envisioned "mythical construct" (Anderson, 1991: 6). Additionally, James Mayall accurately observes that in the analysis of international politics, nationalism is placed in the "convenient black box" into which we file away whatever cannot be explained (Mayall, 1990: 5). He also suggests that this creates a major problem, which is the tendency for international relations to simply not to deal with nationalism. Within the haziness of the definition of nationalism by well-known intellectuals, this article will be an attempt to put emphasis on the rationalisation of the concept of nationalism, which attempts to justify the "mythical construct" argument by examining the most important three precepts – ethnicity, culture and language posited and then reach conclusion by manifesting how these were and are continuing to serve as ethical and moral problems for international relations. More specifically, this article will have the following structure:

*Firstly*, the genesis of the problem of nationalism will be explored through liberalist and realist theoretical viewpoints. *Secondly*, nationalism as a "social construct" will be analysed on two main levels; that of its nature in the sense of nation being a "historical community" or an "imagined community", and on the level of membership in the sense that whether being a member of a nation is "voluntary" or "involuntary" choices. *Thirdly*, some precepts of nationalism like ethnicity, culture and language will be elaborated more in detail in relation to nation and nationalism. *Fourthly*, ethical and moral questions of nationalism will be analysed with special emphasis on some case studies in relation to national self-determination and immigrant societies. *Fifthly*, four main problems of explaining the concept of nationalism will be summarised in relation to the definitions provided in the previous sections: "mythical construct", territorial fuzziness, comparative ethnic nationalist sentiments

and state versus nationalist terrorism. *Lastly*, the paper will conclude that, so far, theorists have failed to construct a general theory of nationalism despite it is highly prevalent and central to an understanding of the modern world.

### **The Genesis of the Problem of Nationalism**

The genesis of nationalism has been traced back and tied to the period of revolutionary social movements that were characterised by popular masses' ideological mobilisations in the United States of America (USA) and France in the late eighteenth century (Smith, 1998: 1). Joel Krieger also states that, "nationalism owed its origins to a secularisation of political thought generated by the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, to the egalitarian implications of liberalism, and to the conceptions of republicanism and citizenship popularised by the upheavals of the American and French revolutions" (Krieger, 1993: 614). The mass ideological mobilisations, which engendered these revolutions, served to disrupt the established power hierarchies and systems, signalling a new form of political movement implicit in the fundamental shift of power from the ruling elite to the mobilised masses. As a result of this, as Anthony D. Smith argues in his essay *The Nation: Invented, Imagined, Reconstructed*, "the ruling elite sought ways to control the consequences of rapid social change by channelling the aspirations and activities of the masses into collective ritual routines and repetitive behaviour governed by accepted rules" (Smith, 1991: 355). Thus, nations could emerge as a result of revolutions through the division of labour, control of administration and cultural co-ordination in which the ruling elite facilitates and turns the mass ideological movements into national identities with a national right to self-government and independence. If one assumes these revolutionary changes to be correct, then manifestations of that effort is what we know today as nationalism. However, the immediate question here is how would the emergence of nations be possible in the aftermath of revolutionary and ideological movements?

The fundamental problem of delineating just what "nationalism" is actually deriving from the difficulty in determining what the "nation" is. Is the nation really a mythical social construct, which could be defined as an "imagined political community", and if so what are the implications of this for nationalism? Then, we face the ethical and moral questions in association with nationalism, which are extraordinarily problematic and seemingly endless: What does justice mean where nationalism is concerned? What, if anything, can be done about the resurgence of nationalism? Does every social group that claims to be a nation,

automatically have a right to national self-determination? In addition to these questions, the question of whether a reasonable definition of nationalism, both in theory and in practice, is possible or not that would help us to begin understanding why some theorists and scholars treat nationalism as, for example, a plague also needs to be addressed. Nevertheless, Walzer asserts that we need not slide down the slippery slope that nationalism presents (Walzer, 1994: 187), but when confronting the glut of problems surrounding this important and potentially dangerous phenomenon, it seems difficult to imagine how it could be avoided. Despite the fact that the concept of nationalism suffers from not being at all a “neat fixed concept” (Shafer, 1955: 7), it still remains to be a dominant ideology in the field of international relations.

In order to pin down the complexity of nationalism as a concept, Smith argues that *ethnies* as “imagined political community” have in some cases disappeared and in others formed national identities and preceded nations (Smith, 1986: 17). On the other hand, Gellner argues that it does not matter whether the past of nations is fictitious or not, or nations may have their pasts as *ethnies*; because national identities and nations may have been (re)created to serve the needs of cultural homogenisation of which nationalism is the integral component (Gellner, 1996: 369). There is no causal explanation for the phenomenon of nationalism. In some parts of the world, nationalism arose in conjunction with liberal constitutionalism and democratic government; in others, it was in reaction to imperial conquest, and in some communities it has been present for centuries despite a lack of its political institutionalisation (Mayall, 1990: 2). On the other hand, as a result of the existence of many different kinds of nationalism, it is not clear how far it springs from or is constrained by a particular kind of international environment.

Nevertheless, even though interactions with many different ideological configurations evidently influence the traits of political configuration of nationalisms, ideological characteristics in general lead to some nationalisms – civic nationalism – to liberalist theory as national formations being liberal, pacific and democratic that has so often focused on ridding biological, deterministic or axiological notions of ethnicity and to others – ethno-nationalism – to realist theory as national formations being violent, xenophobic and authoritarian that has so often surfaced to fuel past and present ethnic conflicts. All nationalist ideologies feature both ‘civic’ components (nationalism is territorially based and anyone in a liberal democratic state is subject to the same laws and eligible through citizenship to adopt

the common values and identity; an ‘inclusive’ nationalism) and ‘ethnic’ components (genealogical descent, vernacular culture and a distinction between ‘them’ and ‘us’ through a historical national differentiation based on a particular set of national myths and symbols; an ‘exclusive’ nationalism). These two ideal types of nationalism reflect the complexity of contemporary identities and the limited sovereignty of the modern state (Newman, 2000: 25).

According to the liberalist theory, although ethnicity still lies at the heart of the concept of nation in relation to the preservation of national culture and language with the normative requirements of liberalism, it is a considerably more refined concept of ethnicity that avoids the entrapments of common ancestry, race, *Volksgeist*, religion and national values. The normative requirements of liberalism are related to cultural homogeneity and monist attributes as they postulate one nation, one culture, one language, but is nevertheless clearly more accommodating in ethnicities’ facilitation of political freedom, citizens’ participation in the shaping of the nation and tolerant to foreigners’ existence. On the other hand, according to the realist theory, the national community is culturally homogenous and unwaveringly defined by classical ethnical features such as common ancestry, race, language, religion, and ethical values. The very essence of this realist approach is the power relationships that are manifested through the manipulation of ideas and identities. This emphasis on a confrontational relationships among ‘them’ and ‘us’ and its influence on identity not only mirrors the framework of ethnic and national relationships as ‘them’ versus ‘us’ relationships mediated by power, but also promotes the radicalisation of this distinction as outright rejection or even hatred of all things foreign – a distinction between friend and foe (Máiz, 2003: 261).

In contrast to ideological and cultural pluralism and co-existence of multiple identities existing in the liberal viewpoint, ethno-nationalism of realist perspective pursues ‘one nation, one state’ or ethno-cultural homogeneity approach. However, although Gellner’s conceptualisation of nationalism is based on a doctrine of ‘one culture, one state’, it is by no means clear whether nationalism in Gellner spells a choice between assimilation on the one hand and genocide and forced expulsion or emigration on the other (Gellner, 1964: 151). Even so, ethno-nationalism does not only refer to secession of a separate, independent and sovereign state based on distinct race, religion, language and national history, but also means suppression of cultural plurality and assimilation of minorities by force and genocide within a nation-state. In the same vein, according to the ethno-nationalist understanding, the

secessionist demand of national autonomy “begins with a striving for cultural autonomy or toleration, which, when the movement makes headway, takes on political significance and finally develops into the demand for political sovereignty” (Wirth, 1936: 729-30).

It is aptly stated by Breuilly that, “[t]o focus upon culture, ideology, class or modernisation is to neglect the fundamental point that nationalism is, above and beyond all else, about politics and politics is about power. The central task is to relate nationalism to the objectives of obtaining and using state power” (Breuilly, 1993: 1). In close association with the realist argument, nationalism claims national self-sufficiency and limits the operation of free markets that liberals ardently defend: nationalists rarely believe in the unrestrained movement of labour, though they may embrace the free movement of capital (Barry and Goodin, 1992: 279-88). Liberals accuse realist conviction of nationalism as a doomed legacy of outmoded irrationalism, superstition, misconduct and savagery. However, according to O’Leary, Gellner disturbs both liberal and conservative rationalists by claiming that “[n]ationalism relegates religion to secondary, and even inessential, principle of a stable and legitimate political order and thus challenges traditionalist conservatism. Nationalism also suggests that law, reason, utility, material prosperity and social justice are secondary principles in establishing a stable and legitimate political order, therefore provoking persistent condemnation from rationalist liberals and socialists for some two hundred years” (O’Leary, 1997: 192).

### **Nationalism as a “Social Construct”**

The argument that nationalism amounts to nothing more than a mere social construct, a myth, has been posited – as noted earlier – by scholars such as Gellner, Anderson, Hobsbawm, and Mayall. The foregoing considerations imply that nations are not static, but continually under social and political construction. More than half a century ago in 1936, Louis Wirth explained in *The American Journal of Sociology* that nationalism “refers to the social movements, attitudes, and ideologies which characterise the behaviour of nationalities engaged in the struggle to achieve, maintain, or enhance their position in the world” (Wirth, 1936: 723). The nation itself is thus no longer an *a priori* fact, objectively crystallised in history, but the contingent product of a process of social and political construction that, driven by nationalism, can take place in certain institutional and social contexts with particular ideological orientations and political objectives (Máiz, 2003: 252). Nationalist ideologies

must therefore be considered as a historical process that are continually reinterpreted mythico-symbolically and through social and political action.

The preconditions of nationalism include widespread or universal literacy and a society committed to economic growth through modernisation and industrial development. According to Gellner's understanding of nationalism, it serves a functional role: nationalism is essential for modernisation, precisely because it breaks down traditionalist or religious restraints on economic growth and political obstacles that prevent the liberation of productive economic, political and cultural developments (Gellner, 1983: 140-41). Gellner sees nationalism in terms of the logic of industry, and holds that "an industrial society depends on a common culture" (Gellner, 1983: 10). It could be argued from this definition that the successful transition from agrarian to industrial society depended on the creation of a collateral ideology – the function of which would be to establish the social structure and mental attitude necessary to realise and even perpetuate industrialisation. Bringing nationalism in a tribal or an agrarian society would not make any sense since these societies are stateless due to the lack of a coherent common culture between elites and peasant masses to form a national culture essential for realising a nation-state. In the industrial society, by contrast, national culture is an essential ingredient of nationalism, which is necessary for educating persons in a culture that mostly frees them from familial and corporate ties, and a *sine qua non* of social cohesion. In order to understand the human progress from the pre-agrarian (tribal) society to industrial society, Gellner added a modified Durkheimian account of normative orientations through the ages: "Whereas tribal societies worship themselves indirectly (as spirits), agrarian societies worship their rulers directly or indirectly (in monotheistic religions), while in industrial societies the participants directly worship themselves (nationalism)" (O'Leary, 1997: 199).

Gellner's understanding of nationalism might be the starting point of Anderson's conceptualisations concerning the tenets of nationalism. He, according to Krieger, argued that "nationalism's putative exclusivism, its emphasis on unique cultures, literatures, histories and languages ... made it an ideal instrument for building the vertical cross class alliances that such threatened elites most urgently want" (Krieger, 1993: 615). However, a successful transition into a nation also requires a profound level of internalisation of nationalism's core precepts by the popularly mobilised masses. In order to achieve a successful level of internalisation, which is necessary to legitimise nationalism as a dominant ideology, getting

its intended target population to agree on certain commonalities is required. The commonalities of ethnic characteristics in a given population through common descent and mission and by virtue of common cultural heritage, including race, language, religion, education, politics, economics and psychology, and historical career that aspire to sovereignty over a territory or seek to maintain or enlarge their political and cultural influence in the face of opposition do not constitute the irrevocable definition of a nationality, but merely the root material of these ongoing processes. These commonalities, including ethnicity, culture, language, religion, and death (as in defence of one's country), are precisely the platforms and root materials on which the ideology is predicated and has been argued, developed and sometimes blatantly *invented* through their institutionalisation by nationalist intellectuals and movements.

The social constructivist understanding indicate that institutions generate a sense for a community once its actors consistently adopt a particular role conception and modify their behaviours according to each other's roles, behaviours, and expectations. Then, it is quite plausible to see how the ideology of nationalism has been linked to the epoch of industrial development as an instrument of social construction and political organisation. The term nationalism, as an ideological concept, explains and legitimises particular identities, practices, and rules that associated with the identity construction (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1992: 31). Therefore, institutionalisation of national identity, practices and rules occur through various forms of political socialisation (e.g. religious-cultural habits), but at the same time it tends to make identity constructions relatively resistant to change (e.g. industrial 'melting-pot' society). Anthony D. Smith's argument "that the nation becomes a construct of the modern imagination and an historical invention on the part of particular categories or classes of modern society" (Smith, 1991: 353), posits at this point not only a certain rationality, but also turn out to be a major subject of disagreement between intellectuals. In this situation, the analyst of nationalism must be careful before rejecting the idea that the realist concept of the nation is an indisputable natural, historical and ethno-centric entity rather than the result of a social process of national construction.

### **Implications of the Debate on the Nation for International Relations**

The argument of Smith about whether the nation is a "*historical community*" or an "*imagined community*" has caused to one of the most intriguing debates on nationalism in international relations. Anderson suggests that the nation is an imagined community and, thus,

national identities are easily created (Anderson, 1991: 3). This is the subjectivist explanation, which sees nationalism as based on feelings and commitment to a *belief* that there is a common heritage even though this may not be so. In fact, nations are the phenomena of the masses, but consist of imaginary collection of myths, traditions, values and symbols. Yael Tamir also shares this view by arguing that, “[n]ations, then, are social entities that are not the product of the mere fact that a group shares a particular set of objective factors, such as language, geography, race or religion; they are a creation of human will and imagination” (Tamir, 1996: 87).

Therefore, Tamir asserts that nations should not be seen as historical communities (merely based on a common ancestry and heritage), but as communities who share a pseudo-history, a “set of practical myths constructed to serve practical concerns, undertakings or engagements” (Tamir, 1996: 93). David George pointed out that the concept of nation, which might be the construct of either an “imagined community” or a “historical community”, leads to another “voluntarist” or “involuntarist” debate (George, 1996: 23). According to the involuntarist approach, any entity that fits into a given set of characteristics or features would be classified as a nation. This first approach is more in line with the “historical community” argument. However, this attempt might fail, because involuntarist approach would automatically group together many who do not consider themselves a nation, such as groups within immigrant societies. On the other hand, the voluntarist approach identifies a nation as an entity, which has a particular set of features, so that a group of people could *identify* themselves as a nation. However, if the defining feature here is the existence of a group of people that *considers themselves* a nation, then the set of objective features seems not to matter. This is likely to be particularly problematic in the field of international relations when trying to determine whether a given group of people is a nation or not. This second approach is more in line with the “imagined community” argument. Involuntarists would likely question empirically whether a given group of people fit into the given set of features that must be present in order to claim nationhood. On the other hand, voluntarists would simply want to determine whether a group of people *consider themselves* a nation or not. This will undoubtedly lead to a series of disputes about the legitimacy of claims to nationhood for the reason that nationhood is about belonging to a particular group and not being the “other”.

The problem for scholars of international relations is that, unlike theories about many other phenomena in world politics, there is no middle road in between the imagined

community and the historical community debate: Either the imagined community theorists or the historical community theorists are right. These two arguments are diametrically opposed and, therefore, it is difficult to explain nationalism as a phenomenon lying somewhere in between the two. If Anderson is right and nations are really no more than imagined communities based on myths, then it ought to be recognised as such by both scholars of international relations and by all those who consider themselves as belonging to a nation. This is not to say that the nation is any less significant or that it should not be taken seriously. The concept of nation should not only be recognised as an historical entity, which is based on common heritage as nations usually claim, but also as a group (historical or not) based on a *belief* that they share a common heritage. Recognition of nationalism along these lines would contribute understanding the concept of nationalism and nationalist sentiments better. In order to justify the claims about the corroboration of an imagined community, the analysis of a number of precepts, among which ethnicity, culture, and language, will somewhat prepare the foundations for loosening the gridlock regarding the concept of nationalism.

### **Some Precepts of Nationalism: Ethnicity, Culture and Language**

As a part of the historical community approach, ethno-nationalism has long functioned as a point through which nationalists have attempted to justify nationalism and nationalist sentiments. The principle of ethno-nationalism is based on ethnicity and common cultural attributes as factors for the foundation of nationhood. Adolf Hitler of Nazi Germany took this interpretation to extreme when he attempted to create a unique German “master race” as a part of his dogmatic fascist and racist belief in which the German Jews were categorised not to be eligible to it and thus they consequently faced with persecution. Such a dogmatic fascist and racist belief is only plausible when orthodox definition of nationalism is conceived through the extreme realism of epistemology as nation is internally a part of the homogeneous and ethnocentric nation-state and externally a part of the heterogeneous and ethnically, racially and religiously differentiated international society. However, although nationalism may become affected by fascism or racism, it should not be equated with them. It is more suitable to equate nationalistic movements, which are essential in the maintenance of national characteristics and the peculiarities of a nation’s cultural integrity, with the only ethically legitimate form of patriotism. In other words, patriotic movements are not only “based on profit, on fantasy and on megalomania,” but also based on cultural needs, national unity and freedom, “which aims to secure and maintain a people’s right to its own territory and its own human resources” (Wirth, 1936: 730). This positive side of the nationalism is quite closely

connected with the unity of the nation; the idea that an ethnic state should refer to the borders of a nation-state. Such arguments are refuted by the supporters of liberalist theory on the basis of the existence of multi-ethnic, multi-racial and multi-religious nations and of peaceful international relations between liberal democratic nations.

The “ethno” argument, however, proves fundamentally flawed if one analyses it from the perspective of Darwin’s theory of biological evolution or even if one were to base such arguments on scriptures. Both of these approaches argue that humanity has a common origin either in the form of pre-Neanderthal man, in the case of the former, or Adam and Eve, in the case of the latter. In both arguments, it could be logically claimed that everyone shares the same ethnic origin and, accordingly, share equal eligibility for inclusion in any nation founded on ethnic principles. The “ethno” argument then is a self-undermining one, as “imagined community” supporters and voluntarists believe. Nevertheless, according to Hobsbawm, “any genetic approach to ethnicity is plainly irrelevant since the crucial base of an ethnic group as a form of social organisation is cultural rather than biological” (Hobsbawm, 1990: 63). As a matter of fact, the concept of nationalism and nationalist sentiments have been remarkably successful in the establishment of a national identity as it being the people’s primary affiliation in much of the world. To be more precise, ethnicity – among other historical variables – continues to serve as one of the fundamental precepts of the ideology of nationalism, as evidenced in the 1990s with the advent of “ethnic cleansing” in Rwanda and in the former Yugoslavia. These events are the manifestation of ‘social Darwinism’ for the reason that it used to support politically and socially destructive realist policies which armed the strong, the brutal, and the unscrupulous against the liberalist, humane and the weak, the able and ruthless against the less gifted and the less fortunate (Berlin, 1969: 45). Nationalist sentiments were a prime reflection of the level to which the argument of ethnicity has been internalised. The different belief systems and varying heritages of any ethnic group, which form the important part of ethno-nationalism, may be understood better through the following cultural and language slant.

Ernst B. Haas describes culture as “a system of ideas and signs and association and ways of behaving and communicating” (Haas, 1993: 522). He differentiates between two possible types of culture. One of them is a *folk culture*, which “[...] lacks a language capable of expressing abstract and potentially universal ideas”, and the other one is an *elite culture*, which uses a “[...] language sophisticated enough to articulate and communicate abstract

ideas about law, cosmology, origins, futures and science” (Haas, 1993: 523). This elite culture gives much credence to the argument of nationalism as being mythical and instrumental to social construction. So, an educated and intellectual elite culture turns to ethno-nationalism and tries to reconstruct their community as an ethnic nation. Moreover, the logic of ruling elite is to preserve their status and position or to control the direction of social change by fostering and utilising nationalism. Since it is only the elite culture that is capable of abstracting and communicating these ideas, then any universally accepted and internalised ideas or commonalities agreed upon must have been emanated from within that elite culture. It clearly could not come from the folk culture, which lacks the language capability of expressing abstract and universal ideas. Herein lays a fundamental flaw pertaining to the culture/language argument between the folk and the elite culture, because the masses could often be mobilised if they identify themselves with the folk culture. Gellner’s understanding of both the folk and the elite culture – the totality of socio-cultural roles – are the source of political legitimacy for constructing social ‘structure’ and, for this reason, commonality of linguistic and cultural communication is not much essential for the *preservation* of social order than the *constructive change* of social roles (Gellner, 1964: 155-57). This seems to be the functionalist classification of people by ‘culture’ and also means the functionalist classification by ‘nationality’.

Furthermore, the language axis may have lost all its credibility as an argument that it is one of the important elements of nationalism with the emergence of multi-lingual individuals and even societies. Hence, any claims to differing heritages and ethnicity or to differing folk culture and language cannot be argued without seriously considering the profound material injections by the elite culture out of which it was born. However, in order to legitimize the commonality (or difference) of heritage, culture, language, certain values and beliefs – such as birthright, citizenship, religion, norms and practices – they have to be inculcated in the mobilised masses. This is possible by exploiting the sentimental nature of man by the elite culture. Smith stated that “in eras of rapid social mobilisation people have over-riding need to feel that they belong to a community, hierarchy or belief system” (Smith, 1991: 356). The feeling of ‘belongingness’ could be facilitated by the relevant educational system, which operates “in some medium, some language (both in the literal and the extended sense),” (Gellner, 1964: 160) to generate a rapid social mobilisation through inculcating the cultural identifications that would spread so many people. The process of inculcation is made possible and facilitated by movement towards a vernacular, which is catalysed by the invention of the

printing press. The spoken word could assume a degree of consistency (i.e. through writing) by increasing people's literacy skills, as well as history shall engage in its revelations, thereby manipulating the formations of the foundations of peoples beliefs.

Ernst B. Haas offers an explanation of how inculcation is possible by a theory of rationalisation. According to his theory, there exists two types of rationality: a *substantive rationality* where "collectivities are made coherent [...] by subjecting choice to a super-ordinate value system, a religion or a secular dogma" and *formal rationality* which attempts "to subject various substantive rationalities to a single over-arching consensual logical structure [...] which seeks to make coherent various partially competing substantive rationalisers" (Haas, 1993: 509). Nationalism then could be understood not only as an imagined thought, but also as a rationalised reading, along substantive and formal lines. Haas refers to this as nationalism being "a form of rationality, an effort to impose coherence on societies" (Haas, 1993: 508). However, the precepts of nationalism in which some of them have been analysed above are difficult to rationalise when they are questioned from ethical and moral point of views.

### **Ethical and Moral Questions of Nationalism**

Another major problem is that although there is a general agreement about the dangers of the revival of nationalism, its moral ramifications are undeniably more difficult and obscure when it involves the brutal and barbaric face of nationalism (Caney, George and Jones, 1996: 1). Mulligan argued about the ethical and moral dimensions of nationalism in that "[n]ationalism is not dead. One effect of this discovery is that ethics, moral psychology, and political philosophy have begun to take seriously the problem of understanding the heart and the head of the nationalist" (Miscevic, 2000: 325). Walzer draws attention to one of the important facts connected to nationalism which is its "tribal entanglement is dangerous" (Walzer, 1994: 192), yet it seems there is no reasonable, let alone ethical, way to disentangle them. How do we determine what is morally permissible or what is just in case of such a nationalist action? The answer to this question is related with the ethical and moral aspects of nationalism that is embedded in a deep ethical and moral tension between solidarity with oppressed national groups, who are seeking self-determination and independence on the one hand, and genocide in the face of crimes perpetuated in the name of nationalism on the other. This philosophical debate for and against nationalism is a debate about the ethical and moral validity of the central claims that are searched for in the aforementioned question.

Walzer suggests that there are different arrangements of “dominance and detribalisation” or “dominance and separation” and, additionally, there are moral and political reasons for choosing different arrangements in different circumstances (Walzer, 1994: 191). But, who exactly is going to determine which ethical arrangement and what sort of *moral* justice is the best solution for which set of circumstances? Most nations in conflict are unlikely to come to any kind of ethical agreement on their own, at least not without one using force over the other. Thus, if there is to be any kind of third party intervention, the *ethical* claims of each nation must be carefully considered. It is crucial at this moment to make a distinction between the moral and ethical norms: While *moral norms* are “the rules of morality, those that people actually follow, and those that we feel people *ought* to follow,” *ethical norms* are the unofficial laws or rules underpinned by the cultural power of society (Harms and Skyrms, 2008: 1). This is likely to be highly complicated and problematic in ethnic-based conflicts. When the Israelis are fighting against the Palestinians for a piece of land which both claim historical ownership of, how an ethically and morally “just” solution be achieved, if indeed there is one at all? If there is to be a third party intervention in order to resolve this kind of nationalist conflict, then that intervening party will need some criteria by which to judge which ethical arrangement is best for particular circumstances. For example, should historical claims and religious claims be treated as equally important? Should past injustices be taken into consideration and if so how far back does one go? These are extremely complex questions for which there are no straightforward answers and yet the judgments made will have important and far-reaching consequences.

Of particular importance when discussing the ethical and moral dimension of nationalism is the question of national self-determination. At the heart of nationalism is the idea that nations are distinct entities and that this being so, each nation should have self-determination rights. According to the classical definition of national self-determination, every nation must be free to establish its preferred form of government, whether as a component of a multi-national state or federation or as an independent state. (Evans and Newnham, 1998: 497-98; Kedourie, 1960: 62-91; Baum, 2001: 140). The action of nationalist ideology nevertheless goes far beyond setting up self-government, self-determination, secession, distinctive ethnic history and statehood as objectives. If the right to statehood carries with it the right to choose the form of self-government within that state, then there are serious implications: If the state opts for a one-party regime then it is exercising its right to self-determination just as much as a state which chooses a liberal-democratic form of

government (Caney, 1996: 10). Another problem with the right to national self-determination is whether or not this implies the right to secession. This involves all sorts of complex and sensitive issues such as the place of minority groups, indigenous peoples and, particularly, the issue of territorial claims (Corntassel, 2003: 75-100). In fact, self-determination does not give groups the right to change internationally recognised borders in order to unify a group of people with a common national identity. Dan Smith argued that “it is impossible to sustain the argument of the nation’s exclusive legitimacy for state and government if there is no moral right to national self-determination” and that “there is no reason to accept that there is a moral right to national self-determination. The self in question is too arbitrary and the process by which it is realised cannot be universalised, nor can a right of national self-determination be granted as a general principle except at unacceptable risk of high cost to important moral goods” (Smith, 2000: 489-502). However, generally self-determination is not attained peacefully and this forceful action gains a true legitimacy particularly, if a community systematically and violently attempts to dominate, but subsequently fails to thwart the self-government struggle of another community in multi-ethnic societies.

For example, when Turkish Cypriots wanted to use their right to self-determination after the break down of the bi-communal Republic of Cyprus in 1963 to form their own state, it seemed not all kinds of ethical questions were addressed. One of the most important issues is the right of an indigenous group of people to govern themselves within an effectively controlled piece of land. As having equal political rights, what specific rights do Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities have in order to be able to make territorial claims? No one would deny that they should be allowed to govern themselves if they choose to do so, but what would be the borders of this new state or states? If anyone ought to have the right to make territorial claims, it is the indigenous peoples. What would be the ‘just’ treatment for minority groups, including their right to secede, beside Greek and Turkish communities and their territorial concentration? Had territorially concentrated Greek Cypriots more right to secession and national self-determination than territorially dispersed Turkish Cypriots in 1963? Such questions are linked to issues that were raised earlier about “digging up” history and bringing forward similar problems about reconsidering historical injustices. However, it does not seem possible to ignore these issues, for how could present difficulties be solved without redressing past and in some cases ancient injustices? The answers lie in Greek Cypriot nationalist movements – an ideological part of Greek nationalist movements against the Ottoman Empire in 1821 to form a Greater Greek State – against the colonial rule of Great

Britain in 1931 and Turkish Cypriots in 1963. In a more detailed manner, the answers also lie in the desire of Greek Cypriots' to achieve an ethnically homogenised nation-state and how to restructure a decentralised unitary or federal state, with its policies, the influence of constituent state institutions and the structural opportunities and constraints on political activities condition the behaviour of Greek Cypriot nationalist movements and its resultant resistive Turkish Cypriot nationalist movements in making political choices (Stavrinides, 1976: 12, 17-43). These questions and answers are at the heart of ethical problems which nationalism presents and they show the fundamental complexities of nationalist issues.

It is also interesting to look at immigrant societies and complexities they create for the amorphous concept of nationalism. In a multicultural society like in the USA, it would be absurd for one group to try to make claims over another. One of the exceptions here is that native Indians were fighting against new settlers in the past. In a multicultural society, people are more likely to identify themselves with more than one group, so that their loyalties and identities spread among different groups. For example, if one would like to delineate Shia Muslims from Sunni Muslims, one would also need to identify with people of various cultural backgrounds: Turkish, Iranian, Iraqi, Syrian or Egyptian. The national identity is in fact also refers to one of multiculturalism. In multicultural communities, the constitutive explanation of identity and ethics seems more plausible, because individuals in such communities identify themselves with the family, with civil society, and with the state. However, there are many states in which people identify themselves primarily with a particular nation rather than a state. The nationalist elites of Scotland, Catalonia and Quebec seek through 'civic' nationalism to develop a place in the new international order. If it is asked to a Scot, a Basque or a Québécois what their identity is, their respond is expected to be as it is stated, rather than British, Spanish or Canadian. There are many people who would identify with the nation before identifying with the state, and even those who would go so far as to identify with the nation *instead of* the state. The province of Quebec, the autonomous region of Catalonia and the Scottish parliament all participate in the process of stateless nation-building (Keating, 1997: 692-93). So, where does the nation rank in terms of identity and ethics? Everyone is born into a state, but this cannot be said for nations, so perhaps it should rank below the state. There are many people who choose to identify themselves primarily with the nation. In such a case, should the nation be ranked above the state for these groups? This is just another example of the problems which nationalism presents not only for the international relations theorists but also for the global society.

It is undeniable that nationalism has become rooted in every facet of international relations and domestic affairs. It brings normative considerations to bear and serve as a primary ordering principle for all facets of a nation including policies on immigration, cross-border activities such as trade, transportation, information technology, mass communication, finance, military activity, and domestic activities such as education, security, culture, arts, and even religion. As a result, nationalists in such an environment are easily mobilising international support for their independence movements and this perhaps explains why some nations see the process of globalisation or international economic interactions as a threat to the traditional form of nation-state (Meadwell and Martin, 1996: 67-87). It is for this reason that the nation-state and nationalism is expected to wither away in the face of global political and economic dependence, mass communication and cultural hybridisation. Globalisation of national political and economic structures and identities, either through transforming states' authority or challenging the sovereignty of states, facilitated the rise of 'non-national nations' like Scots, Basques or Québécois (Keating, 1997: 692-93). However, it remains to be seen whether nations and nationalism can be totally superseded by larger units of human associations and global identities like supranationalism in an era that can be termed 'post-national' (Vhutuza and Ngoshi, 2008: 1-8). Hopefully, as analysts of international relations become increasingly concerned with the normative dimensions of global politics, there will be increased discussion and study on nationalism, particularly regarding its numerous and complex ethical aspects.

#### **Four Main Problems of Nationalism in International Relations**

The continuing influence of nationalism, which is one of the major factors for domestic and international conflicts and wars, in today's world is still observable. Several analytical reasons of nationalism are mentioned in this paper about why they pose problems in international relations. Out of these several reasons, the following four are discussed above:

Firstly, one of the main problems is that the structure of nationalism is embedded to the point where it is understood and accepted as reality. The writer's opinion is that it is not that nationalism is held as a "mythical construct" that poses problems, but rather the *level* to which that "myth" is embedded in the individuals that form a society. In other words, the degree to which the characteristic elements of a nation – including ethnicity, race, language, culture and religion – have been internalised by the efforts of collective individuals in a given society. As Gellner argued, "[n]ationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-

consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist – but it does need some pre-existing differentiating marks to work on, even if [...] these are purely negative” (Gellner 1964:168). That nations maintain national symbols such as flag and anthem, that soldiers are committed to die for their country, which stands in stark contrast to the period of mercenary soldiering, and that tourism thrives as an industry are all testament to a degree of internalisation. National identities are human creations, and thus can, and do, change. This is the success for which can in part be attributed, perhaps, to the epistemic community. The practice of nationalism forms the part of our daily existence and, as a result, the part of our history. It is this reality that called history which legitimises the notion of nationalism and strengthens our beliefs and ensures continuity of nationalist behaviour by encouraging further practices such as the pledging of allegiance to symbols like flags and constitutions, recognising cultural distinctiveness and acting accordingly, and the expression of loyalty as exhibited in one’s willingness to die for one’s country. In short, national ethnic identity is configured as a unique mythico-symbolic complex composed of emotional, expressive elements like feelings and loyalties, and instrumental political interests (Máiz, 2003: 255).

Secondly, the notion of nationalism implies a certain territorial rigidity, which is inconsistent with the human element of the theory. In short, individuals within the practice of nationalism have a certain degree of choice. For example, how does one explain the movement of people across borders along with a willingness and inherent want to become a part of other nations and states? In view of this, why do other nations and states, especially those which strongly advocate nationalism, allow this movement to occur? It seems that the freedom of movement from one nation-state to another continues; because the nation-states through their practice of nationalising immigrants encourages and supports this practice. This may be viewed as contrary to principles advocated in both ethno-nationalism and to those based on common cultural and language premises. Moreover, how can the fact that in some cases these immigrants eventually identify with and hold nationalist sentiments for their “new” nation be reconciled with the nationalist principles advocated? Hobsbawm sums up these concerns neatly by arguing that “the national idea as formulated by its official champions, did not necessarily coincide with the actual self identification of the people concerned” (Hobsbawm, 1990: 71). Hobsbawm was referring to the “existence of Poles who preferred living in Germany to living in reborn Poland” (Hobsbawm, 1990: 71). Indeed, how those different ethnicities profess the same nationalist sentiments in a multi-ethnic state is a question remains to be answered.

Thirdly, nationalism bears only merit for a nation, because other nations are also engaged in a nationalist practice and, therefore, other cultures exist against which a comparative ethnic backdrop may be drawn. Nationalist sentiments only have a meaning vis-à-vis other nationalist sentiments. A nation, people, society, and culture can only claim a right to self-determination when viewed critically against the backdrop of other nations, peoples, societies, and cultures. The early civilisations of mankind certainly did not exhibit the notion of nationalism as we know it today, even though they had practices that they must have felt unique to each. However, the early civilisations of mankind certainly constructed an ‘us’ as indigenous people in order to be able to define ‘them’ as foreigners, which is the antithesis or antagonistic stereotype of foreignness in the form of a vicarious bearer of the native ethnic identity that is being asserted (Máiz, 2003: 254). The secessionist movements of the people of South and North Cyprus only have meaning against the backdrop of the “mythical social construct” of the Cypriot “nation”, which has never been existed. Cyprus in 1960 had two separate nationalities and two opposing nationalisms (Stavrínides, 1976: 43). Moreover, ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda was only possible, because there were other ethnic groups against which they could justify their beliefs and actions.

Fourthly, a history of repression, marginalisation and continuous threat of an ethnic group by the state is a crucial factor in the creation of the antagonistic ethnic identities that fuel nationalist terrorism. The uneven impact of successive waves of industrialisation and modernisation, which would generate sharp stratifications between national ethnic identities, might later result in violent nationalist movements and ultimately to secessionist actions in response to political factors that lead states to repress ethnic groups by military means. Violent nationalist movements in the form of nationalist terrorism occur when the following two conditions are met: (i) members of an ethnic group must identify themselves as a distinct national ethnic identity seeking to restore their separate heritage, language and culture; (ii) opportunities for non-violent political participation must be viewed as inadequate by the most radical members of the nationalist movement, because the relevant ethnic group lacks access to regional political institutions and influence within the central government due to multiple humiliations and discriminations or because patterns of political and social mobility within the group are structured to exclude nationalist radicals (Newman, 2000: 28). As a result of these conditions, the ruling elite of an ethnic group would seek to establish their own separate nation-state if at that time they have no feasible prospect of being fairly treated or integrated (Gellner 1964:171).

### **Conclusion**

Theorists have failed to construct a general theory of nationalism and it has continued to resist ultimate explanation (Mayall, 1990: 5). The concept of nationalism seems to defy such generalisations that are made by analysts. It may be the fact that nationalism is built on emotion and is far more a psychological issue than a political one that it defies a kind of generalisations of international relations that scholars may be looking for. Yet, it has become obvious that there are far more questions pertaining to the concept of nationalism than there are answers. There is no doubt that it is an extremely complex and problematic issue and thus the tendency for scholars of international relations not to deal with it is understandable. But, can we eschew or undo something as deeply internalized as nationalism is? We must not allow filling the concept of nationalism into the “convenient black box”, because the consequences of not dealing with this potentially highly dangerous phenomenon are likely to be very destructive. To do that would imply disintegrating society, negating history as we know it, and undermining the very structure of our existence. If nationalism is not fully addressed, it has the potential to pose a serious threat against strengthening the peaceful relations between and within states.

Nationalism appears to be a mysterious phenomenon within world politics in which theorists seemingly avoid to deal with. In any case, the process is bound to be repeated: Old practices die hard, and humans are creatures of habit. Although death of nationalism is not impossible, it is highly improbable. Nationalism may be mythical, but the reality of this myth, and the degree to which that perceived reality is embedded cannot be denied. In order to explain the reality of mythical traits of nationalism and nationalist ideological movements, attention must be paid to the detailed fabric of nationalist discourse, to the structures and devices it employs. That is, despite the problems and difficulties of defining and explaining nationalism, there can be no doubt that it is highly prevalent and central to an understanding of the modern world.

The argument in this paper is that the idea of the nation is born out of modernity and was created by a number of interrelated factors such as the evolution of industrialisation and urbanisation meant there was a need for a common language, an ancestry, national institutions and therefore the involvement of the state. According to Anderson, collectively such processes created the idea of nation. He writes that nations, nationhood and nationalism are, “cultural artefacts of a particular kind” (Anderson 1991: 4) that were created at the end of the

eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century by these various processes. However, an apparent paradox here is that while nationalism is a very strong force in the modern world as it in most cases prevails and sets the standard for what constitutes a modern state, a very few nations – mostly in the West – are considered democratically legitimate and consolidated enough according to the Western pluralist-democracy standards to use nationalism as a means for modernity and statehood. Moreover, while a successful process of consolidation and integration (supranationalism) has minimised the nationalism stirred friction and rivalry between the democratically consolidated modern liberal nation-states, a lately attained concepts of nation and nationalism mostly results in new conflict situations both internally and externally among the states outside the European Union and North America. In the same vein, in some instances the myth of national homogeneity is a unifying factor through the civic nationalism perspective of liberalist theory, while in other cases the myth of national heterogeneity is a factor for racial and national diversification and a source of violent ethno-nationalist movements such as terrorism and chauvinism according to the realist theory.

Last but not least, in this paper, the concepts of “nation” and “state” are outlined alongside a number of associated concepts such as self-determination, nationalism, nationhood and sovereignty. These are core concepts in international relations partly because they establish the main units of study in the discipline, but also because they are central to liberal and realist theoretical approaches, issues and themes that are being studied in this article. Thus, nationalism will continue to influence our decisions, shape our lives, structure our societies, and direct our history. Nationalism is widely regarded as the cause of many recent wars and for this reason it is vital that we seek to better understand it rather than place it in the too difficult category.

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**END NOTES**

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