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National Strategies and the Uses of Dichotomy

There is broad consensus among contemporary theorists of nationalism that "nation" always is – or ultimately becomes – both political and cultural. Rather than a useful theoretical typology, the political-cultural dichotomy is better viewed as part of the repertoire of nationalist strategies. Although modern nationalists have understood the importance of forging both political and cultural unity if they desire to create stable institutional paths for perpetuating a nation on a desired territory, one of their prominent strategies has been to emphasize either political or cultural requirements of "nationhood" to accomplish this end.[1]

Influential theorists of nationalism have provided interesting accounts of the evolution of the concept and practice of nationhood from primarily political in early cases of nation-building to predominantly cultural in late-nationalizing states in Europe.[2] There is another side of the political-cultural nationalist strategy, however, that has received less attention in the literature: Change from one set of requirements over another is not linear; shifts can take place from political strategy to cultural and back even in the course of one national history. Depending on the particular conditions under which they act (what their territorial interests are, in what phase they find themselves in creating or consolidating a link between territory and people, and what the international framework allows or encourages at the time), national-

1 Nationalism as a political strategy is inherently linked to the emergence of the modern territorial state. For a comprehensive account of the modernist-primordialist spectrum of theories, see Anthony D. Smith: *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism*. London: Routledge, 2001.

2 Perhaps the most influential account of the consequences of this process for the European states' democratic potentials is Liah Greenfeld's *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.

ist political elites will at times advocate political nation and at other times cultural nation.

A simplified account of Hungarian nationalism, for instance, might be the following: Hungarian political elites pursued a political nation until the second part of the 19th century (although this political nation was by no means civic in the contemporary democratic sense), then in the second part of the same century shifted to a nationalist strategy that pursued a nation based on the idea of cultural homogeneity (although this cultural concept of the nation was rarely ethnic in a narrow sense of the term). The idea of a unitary Hungarian nation in the Carpathian basin, based on shared ethnicity, was prevalent during the interwar period and World War II. After the Soviet takeover in the region, the Hungarian government placed no obvious emphasis on nation-building and limited its scope to the population living within Hungary's political borders – a strategy that might be viewed as based on the political concept of the nation. Then, the post-communist Hungarian state shifted back to a cultural concept of the nation.

Such simplified accounts, however, veil the essence of nationalism – the one thing that all nationalisms share – i.e. that it always entails contestations over the meaning and boundaries of nation and national homeland.[3] Even under communist one-party rule in Hungary, when political elites appeared to be de-emphasizing nation and liberal dissidents (i.e. the counter-elites) considered themselves to be part of trans-border communities with their intellectual kin in the region, the so-called populist (nape) movement in Hungary participated in a decidedly ethnic process of national reproduction. The participants of this movement (many of them educated urban youth) set out to revive (in some sense even re-live) Hungarian folk traditions and to re-establish links with co-ethnics in neighboring countries, particularly in Romania. Indeed, the "populist-urban" intellectual debate that gained renewed prominence in the latter part of Hungarian communism and continued well into the first years of democratization highlighted key points of contention among Hungary's cultural elites (many of them in political office, especially in the first parliamentary cycle) about whether nation is an attractive category and, if so, who should belong to the nation and under what terms. After 1990, the most significant change from the communist period was that Hungarian minority elites in neighboring countries could openly join this debate

3 On nationalism and contestation, see Mark Beissinger: How Nationalisms Spread: Eastern Europe Adrift the Tides and Cycles of Nationalist Contention. *Social Research,* Vol. 63, No. 1, Spring, 1996. 100.

about the nation. Prominent minority Hungarian leaders began sending strong messages to Budapest that they claimed part of the Hungarian culture and wanted to be included in the new/old Hungarian definition of the nation.

The re-emergence of the vision of a unitary Hungarian nation after decades of sharp political boundaries separating the citizens of Hungary from their kin coupled with aggressive policies of de-nationalization directed at Hungarians especially in Romania and Czechoslovakia raises an intriguing question for nationalist theory: Once modern national institutionalization proceeds long enough to create a sense of common nationhood in a population, can the nation be undone through dramatic institutional changes? If the nation is, as Rogers Brubaker compellingly argues, an "institutionalized form, practical category, contingent event," does a former nation become a non-nation when the institutions that have perpetuated it change?[4] Was, for instance, the generation of Hungarians in Romania that resented becoming part of Romania after 1918, no longer part of the Hungarian nation after the border change? Was the next generation of Hungarians in Romania that refused to assimilate to the Romanian nation, a non-nation until 1990? Are Hungarians in Romania who favor the current national strategy again part of the nation? Or, will they be "denied" nationhood if the Hungarian institutional process that peaked in the so-called status law fails? Who can answer these questions?[5]

However these questions are addressed, it appears that significant part of the Hungarian population outside of Hungary maintained a concept of shared Hungarian nationhood in the changed institutional structures even during the harshest communist regimes in Romania and Czechoslovakia – perhaps precisely because of the relentlessness of these regimes. Since 1990, consecutive democratic governments of Hungary have followed a consistent trans-sovereign national strategy partly in response to this "popular demand" by critical segments of the Hungarian population inside and outside of Hungary, and partly due to key political leaders' personal beliefs and commitments. This strategy claims to be based on a cultural concept of nation but is,

4 Rogers Brubaker: *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge University Press, 1999.

5 Another example comparable to the Hungarians left outside of post-Trianon Hungary after having participated in a relatively well-established "modern" national process might be the Polish "nation" that survived – according to Polish national accounts – three political partitions.

of course, profoundly political: Its aim is to transcend the current limitations of citizenship and make it possible for Hungarians in the region to live as though there were no political borders separating them. It entails a network of trans-sovereign institutions that link Hungarians in the neighboring countries to Hungary and encourage them to remain Hungarian "in their homeland," i.e. to withstand assimilation and remain members of the Hungarian nation where they are instead of moving to Hungary. This project envisions the European Union as a supra-national framework that will allow for institutionalized Hungarian cultural reproduction in the region. Continuing tensions between Hungary and its neighbors (including those that aspire for EU membership) over the strategy, however, highlight the difficulties that Hungarian political elites face in trying unilaterally to "virtualize" their borders in a region of states that have little interest in weakening their sovereignty with respect to Hungary.[6]

Beyond the inherent interconnectedness of the cultural-political dimensions of nation-building and the difficulties of mapping the necessary and sufficient institutional forms that nations require to survive, the Hungarian case demonstrates the complexities of nationalism in the new/old Europe and highlights the challenges for nationalism in the era of globalization. Clearly, collective identities are relevant not only in post-communist Europe but throughout the world.[7] Modern collective identities are rooted in the same European political and intellectual history (and just as firmly rooted) as is the ideology of liberal individualism. Modern democracy emerged in Europe through "the exceptionally penetrative sovereign, territorial state."[8] So long as the principle of territoriality remains influential, it remains the logic of the

6 Zsuzsa Csergő and James M. Goldgeier: Virtual Nationalism. *Foreign Policy,* July/August, 2001. 76.

7 Will Kymlicka is arguably the most influential political theorist of collective identity and multiculturalism. See in particular his *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995. See also Amy Gutmann (ed.): *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition:" An Essay by Charles Taylor*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992; Crawford Young (ed.): *Ethnic Diversity and Public Policy: A Comparative Inquiry.* London; New York: MacMillan Press, 1998; Crawford Young (ed.): *The Rising Tide of Cultural Pluralism: The Nation-State at Bay?* Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1993*;* Crawford Young (ed.): *The Accommodation of Cultural Diversity: Case-Studies*. New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1999.

8 Thomas Ertman: *Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe.* Cambridge University Press, 1997. 3. See also E. Kantorowicz: *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957; and Charles Tilly (ed.): *The Formation of National States in Western Europe.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975.

state to create institutions that will preserve its stability and continued cultural ownership over a territory. In other words, the territorial state continues to promote collective national identities, and territorial states will also continue to pitch such identities against each other wherever border changes and other institutional shifts have created sharp incongruences between state borders and mutually claimed cultural spaces (homelands). Such is the case of the "Carpathian basin."

Nationalism is an inherently constraining (or particularist) ideology, yet – or perhaps precisely because of this – it has tremendous popular appeal in the region.[9] Even if we accept the claim of contemporary "democratic nationalisms" that they provide an institutional framework for the fundamental human desire to reproduce cultures on homelands, nationalism has yet to answer the following question: How can states perpetuate historically and spacially bounded collective cultures in increasingly diverse (multi-ethnic) societies at the same time they are upholding the democratic principles of inclusion, equality, and universal rights and liberties? There is an inherent tension between the aims of particularism and universalism, and the ethnic-civic dichotomy of nations provides no satisfactory solution for resolving it.[10]

The ethnic-civic spectrum does provide at least normative suggestions to those who want to make the nation a potentially more inclusive category. In contrast to more complete political ideologies (such as variants of democratic theory and Marxism), nationalism does not provide a blueprint for a desirable political and economic system. The primary pursuit of nationalism has been to sort out who should belong to which nation on which homeland (and on what basis), and what should happen to those who do not belong. This set of questions continues to constitute the most likely source of nationalist contestation not only in post-communist Europe but also in other parts of the world, such as the Middle East and Asia. The choices that nationalist elites make in emphasizing one set of requirements for nationhood over another have profound consequences for the democratic potential of the so-called Westphalian nation-state – the state model that remains deeply in-

9 Vladimir Tismăneanu: *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism and Myth in Post-Communist Societies*. Princeton University Press, 1998.

10 About tensions between the norms of national self-determination, self-government (democracy), and universal human rights, see for example Stanley Hoffmann: Nationalism and World Order. In *World Disorders: Troubled Peace in the Post-Cold War Era.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 1998. 216.

fluential in the contemporary world, despite integrative and global processes that raise questions about its future dominance.[11] Clearly, when the requirement of membership is that one share the nation's "ethnicity," it can become rather difficult for aspiring new members (and impossible for people coming from substantively different cultures) to participate in the nation under equal terms. When the primary requirement is shared citizenship, and citizenship means one's participation in a democratic social contract, the prospects for inclusion and equal participation become much more promising and membership more desirable.

Nonetheless, it is widely accepted among contemporary scholars of nationalism that the ethnic-civic typology of nations is a problematic and misleading simplification. As we find ourselves increasingly surrounded by a discursive framework of globalization, narrower conceptions of ethnicity are losing their appeal in favor of broader definitions that suggest ethnicity "happens" everywhere where human beings engage in various practices of cultural reproduction.[12] There is also broad agreement among students of ethnicity that multiple processes of cultural reproduction (ethnicity) unfold simultaneously in all societies, including inside what used to be considered "ethnic nations." Meanwhile, what used to be considered textbook cases of "civic nationalism" reveal striking similarities to "ethnic nationalism," as schools, churches, the media, the military, and various other state and private or public institutions perpetuate unified national canons and mental maps of national homeland even in places like Britain, France and the US – long considered the birthplaces of modern liberal democracy.[13] Therefore, "ethnic nationalism" is either unappealingly exclusive or theoretically "boundless." "Civic nationalism," although at first sight theoretically appealing, has too often led to justifications of majority cultural hegemony in the name of a paternalistic state that claims to create an "equal playing field" for socio-economic mobility. (From the perspective of the well-meaning member of the state's "titular" majority, assimilating to the majority culture is good for minorities.)

On its best days, civic nationalism traces its roots to the ideas of universal liberalism. Even the staunchest defenders of universal liberalism admit, how-

11 Stephen D. Krasner: *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.

12 Pierre Bourdieu: *The Field of Cultural Production.* Cambridge: Polity, 1993.

13 Eugen Weber: *Peasants into Frenchmen: the Modernization of Rural France.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976; Ralph D. Grillo: *Dominant Languages: Language and Hierarchy in Britain and France.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; Michael Billig: *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage Publications, 1995.

ever, that the state (no matter how democratic) cannot be completely neutral on questions of ethnicity, especially on the question of language use – which in the European context is the most significant means of institutionalizing cultural reproduction.[14]

How, then, is it possible to find the right institutions for spacially bounded cultures to allow for multiple processes of cultural reproduction? If "nation" is indeed to become (remain) desirable in a broadening Europe, nationalism must tame the aspiration to collapse multiple identities into one and instead allow for the richness of human experience, including different practices of nationhood within one state. Ethnic neutrality may be an impossible or undesirable goal for any social institution, but the democratic state must uphold (at least on the level of principle) the ideal of toleration that allows for the mutuality of relationship among individuals and groups who participate in multiple processes of cultural reproduction – and simultaneously protect the freedom to opt out of these processes. Any satisfactory answer to the dilemmas of nationalism must embrace mutual respect and toleration as the ultimate goal. Political community must be founded on the value of toleration that allows both for the reproduction of cultural differences and for co-existence in the same state and under the same democratic regime. In Ingrid Creppell's words, "Toleration essentially implies a continued relationship of some significant level of mutual accommodation. . . . [or] the capacity to hold both conflict and mutuality together at the same time."[15]

The "Carpathian basin" has a great potential for becoming a desirable place if various nationalist elites are willing to face up both to the diverse ways of ethnicity not only among but also within nations that claim mutual homelands. It is also critical for people in the region to acknowledge the darker sides and reclaim the sunnier legacies of *common* cultural and institutional traditions, including those of the Hungarian kingdom. Non-nationalist intellectuals and cultural elites have perhaps the largest responsibility for seeing that these legacies are reclaimed in such a way that helps national strategies become more compatible.[16]

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14 Brian Barry: *Culture and Equality.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001. 107.

15 Ingrid Creppell: Introduction. In Ingrid Creppell: *Toleration and Identity* (forthcoming, Routledge, 2003. 6.)

16 A promising example of much needed scholarly debate about these issues is the volume edited by Balázs Trencsényi et al: *Nation-Building and Contested Identities: Romanian and Hungarian Case Studies*. Budapest: Regio Books; Iași: Editura Polirom, 2001.