

Modern National Identity and Patriotism

VAIDA NEDZINSKAITĖ-MITKĖ, NERIJUS STASIULIS

Department of Philosophy and Cultural Studies, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, 1 Trakų Street, 01132 Vilnius, Lithuania

Email: vaida.nedzinskaite-mitke@vilniustech.lt; nerijus.stasiulis@vilniustech.lt

This article examines the national identity and the nature of patriotic attitudes of individuals with respect to their nation-state. It discusses the dialectic between the nation as a living community and the nation as an organisation based on abstract principles and situates the modern individual with its (non)patriotic attitudes in this dialectic. It seeks to unravel the complex relation between the modern individual consciousness and the modern experience of community and, by juxtaposing the classical and liberal nationalism and communitarianism, to examine the origin of modern national identity. The investigation is informed by the ontological notion of a relation between unity and plurality.

Keywords: nation-state, patriotism, individual, community, nationalism

INTRODUCTION

The problem discussed in this article is how and why individuals identify or fail to identify with their modern nation and nation-state. A concurrent issue is the (un)willingness of individuals to go to war to defend the interest of their nation-state and possibly sacrifice their lives for it. This specific problem is presented as rooted in a higher-level philosophical dialectic and mutual dependence between the modern individual and the modern state, or a type of order that the modern state embodies. Hence, the discussion also encompasses the aspect of the relation between the phenomenon of the modern nation-state and other modern phenomena such as the consciousness of individual freedom, capitalism or print press. Is allegiance to one's nation a modern phenomenon which is 'constructed' or shaped solely by the order of modernity, or is it prior to modernity historically and to its constructivist form metaphysically? What are moral claims of nationalism based on? What is the origin and meaning of national identity?

This article provides a problematic analysis of the above-mentioned questions which is also informed by a comparative analysis of liberal nationalist, classical nationalist and communitarian approaches. It is a critical discussion of the modern phenomenon of nationalism which is seen as a hard-to-untie knot of the ideas of individual autonomy and right to self-determination, elevated economic activity and participation in a genuine community. It is also an ontological investigation of how the dialectic of one and many functions in the case of nationalism and the nation-state. The article employs the Hegelian triad of thesis (natural community), antithesis (civil society) and synthesis (higher unity of free individuals in a polity) as a tool for the analysis of the above-mentioned issues.

The issues of national identity, nationalism and patriotism have recently been analysed by Dambrauskas (2021), Grishchenko and Titarenko (2019), Kleingeld (2000), Kostagiannis (2018), Perný (2021), Sadowski (2016), Skórczewski (2020), et al.

MODERN STATE BETWEEN PLURALITY AND UNITY

The modern nation appeared as an unfolding of the principle of deduction from a fundamental premise, or centre (centralisation), and the principle of individual free will. The political counterpart of the *more geometrico* was absolutist centralisation and the political counterpart of the introspective contemplation and free will was the concept of individual human rights. The birth of modern nationalism is historically-politically associated with the France of Cardinal Richelieu who during the 30 years' war first elevated the national interest of France as the main interest above theretofore more important other interests (dynastic, religious or, for instance, those of the Holy Roman Empire) and in this sense it became a prototype for all future *democratic nation-states*: 'the doctrine of national interests, political, economic and otherwise, constitutes a significant connection between the governmental policies of the modern democratic nation and of the absolute state in the seventeenth century' (Palm 1924: 650). The theoretical substance of the modern nation was formulated by the classic authors Th. Hobbes, J. Locke and J. J. Rousseau. The set of their theories make evident the tension between the absolutist tendencies of a modern centralised state and liberal individualistic spirit. But, to note, the strong centralisation itself can be seen as a result of the principle of individual free will and individual quest for the certainty in the soul which politically manifested as a plurality of faiths and beliefs and the religious destructive wars in response to which the need for strong absolutist centralisation came to the fore. Strong plurality of wills required strong centralisation to create the unity out of chaos. Hence, modern political opposite poles of plurality and unity do not only oppose but also support and reinforce each other.

The ontological principle of the problematic of the nation-state as expressed above was formulated in the 17th and 18th centuries. In political terms, the principle of state sovereignty (the state's right to govern its *territory* without external interference) became recognised with the Peace of Westphalia and it fused with the principle of national sovereignty (the right of *nations* to govern themselves) to give rise to the nation-state which became the dominant principle of legitimacy since late 18th century. The nation-state rules over a *territory* and over the *population* which inhabits it; it rules in the name of a founding population which 'ideally' coincides with the whole of the state's population but 'really' is a group, even though it may be the largest group, of people among others. The unifying principle is the state-founding nation but virtually no country is homogenic in terms of nationality; the modern political organisation is based on the culture of one ethno-nation as the dominating and unifying principle of free individuals and diverse ethnic groups. In the feudal estate system, which preceded the system of nation-states, the 'political nation', even though it did play a significant role, was synonymous with the dominant estate, the nobility, and the monarch served as a 'soul' or unifying principle of a body politic. Hence, the very upheaval of nation-states at the conjunction of the 18th and 19th centuries (Kramer 2011; Kohn 2013; Roeder 2007) and later expressed particularist tendencies based on the above-mentioned structure of the relation of the 'unity' ('whole' or 'abstract') and the 'plurality' ('individual' or 'part'), which was at this period closely related to the Romantic movements – which we see here as an expression of particularism because they opposed itself to the rationality of Enlightenment (which we see here as an expression of the 'abstract'). Paradoxically, particular 'romantic' nation-states had to employ the modern

rational order to exist and to compete with other nation-states. And, of course, it is a peculiar form of particularism because here the particular is not an individual human being but an ethno-nation the participation in which provides a particular individual with life and meaning.

According to the Hegelian triad, the first moment of unity and the first school of communitary life is the family, its plural antithesis is the modern civil society with its economic relations and the individual pursuit of style and happiness, while the political life is the synthesis where the law (the constitution) is an expression of both will and order, unity and plurality (as a sort of the general will of the people dedicated to the constitution and law which derives from their own willfulness). Perhaps similarly V. Radžvilas (Jusys 2022), a political philosopher and ideologist of the (Lithuanian) nation-state, asserts that only ethno-national culture of the title nation of the state, and not its economy, can serve as the uniting principle: economy is about a problematic sharing of resources that tend to be conceived as limited whereas cultural traits and goods are not limited or exhausted by their use.

Thus, it can be claimed that modernity gives birth to the principle of modern individual which in turn paradoxically promotes the need for a strong centralised (order of) state, and then (in a logical, not necessarily temporal, sense) the modern state provides itself with the modern nation as its 'soul', or unifying principle. The nation-state in this sense is an oxymoron where 'nation' stands for a romantic *vis viva* and 'state' stands for a rationalistic *vis mortua*. The modern individual is embedded between these two forces and divides his identity between the cold order which enables individual (particularist) economic achievement, or achievement of resources, and the living order, that should bring one back to the moral state of a communitary life beyond the disagreement between the one and the many.

A similar structure repeats itself at the level of individual nations: like the individual is caught between the *vis mortua* of economics and the *vis viva* of political (communitary) participation, so the state is caught between A) the cold economic need to claim resources as well as to aggressively ensure its existence as a united nation-state and B) to provide individuals with a warm sense of belonging. Because of emphasis on A, nationalism has recently gained a tint of a bad reputation, while its reputation is saved by emphasising B and also equating it with patriotism.

According to Hegel, the ultimate test of one's patriotism is precisely war; he sees defense of one's nation as an ethical duty. In a state, as mentioned above, particular interest and universal interest, right and duty, coincide. For the philosopher of contradiction Hegel, conflicts between nation-states leading to wars are inevitable because there is no higher power (as within a state) above nation-states that seek to preserve their existence and sovereignty (Duquette 2022). Hegel does not see the goal of 'perpetual peace' as set by I. Kant realistic. Whereas Kant saw the living unity of all states (as peace) as the ultimate goal of the movement of history because the natural extension of a moral and republican individual character leads also to a moral relation between republics. Kant also places emphasis on the character of people, especially perhaps of citizens of modern republics where private and commercial life is elevated (Bennett 2016). According to him, throughout history the decision whether to go to war or not has belonged to rulers of states (usually filled with lust for power, characteristic of human nature) from whom it did not require much sacrifice. Under a republican constitution, a popular consent of modern individuals to go to war is required and Kant considers it unlikely given the many sacrifices entailed in this (Kant: 7). In a republic legislative (law respects each citizen) and executive branches are separate, and if they are not, the state is despotic. Thus, democratic states (like the so-called 'republics' of antiquity), where *all* have executive power, are despotic.

These ancient 'republics' tended to bellicosity; thus the popular/democratic consent alone is no guaranty against (unnecessary) war and may even make it more likely. Thus it is possible to see patriotism as dedication to one's nation-state as a republic where republic is, ideally, successful in providing both economic utility and a sense of belonging, not destructive of one's individuality and of the ideal of peace (the very principle of unity).

Here it is evident that we need to provide somewhat sharper definitions of nationalism and patriotism with respect to their relation. According to Primoratz (2020), patriotism as a separate philosophical problem was only formulated very late, in the 1980s. It must partly be because of a kind of recent hair-splitting tendencies in thought. But it was also grounded in real opposition between the purely individualistic philosophy and the newly revived communitarianism, as well as in the problematic status of nationalism both with respect to liberal views and to its own 'aggressive' aspects. As an example, we can use G. Orwell's contrast between 'nationalism' – close to our sense A above – and 'patriotism' – close to our sense B: the former is 'aggressive' because it is about acquiring as much power and prestige for one's country as possible and the individuality is washed out in the nation, whereas the latter is 'defensive' because it is merely a devotion to the place and the way of life one thinks the best but does not impose on others. This critique is somewhat similar to A. Schopenhauer's ireful 19th century wisdom: he saw national pride as the cheapest sort of pride because it is typical of people who have no qualities of their own of which they can be proud and they 'defend [their nation's] faults and follies tooth and nail, thus reimbursing [themselves] for [their] own inferiority' (Schopenhauer 2018). His successor Fr. Nietzsche, who lived stateless for most of his life (Blue 2007: 73), was also critical of making people fit to service the state but them losing their (individual) culture (Nietzsche 1997: 43, 46–47). Here we understand all three of them as criticising the reduction of life and (individual) ethical consciousness to the *vis mortua* aspect of the modern state.

Nietzsche called feelings for the nation 'archaic emotional convulsions' (Nietzsche 2008: 132) and spoke of a 'long-drawn-out comedy of [Europe's] small-state system' (Nietzsche 200: 101) with its 'petty politics' (*ibid.*). Ironically, depriving one of statehood and citizenship was a key tool for the 20th century totalitarian (including national-socialist) *vis mortua* regimes (to strip one of those *universal human rights* which are only enjoyed by citizens of the most advanced states) to give him over to inhuman treatment (e.g. Arendt 1958: 280). As famously noted by G. Agamben in his continuous study of the principle of *homo sacer*, such exclusion can also happen within a state but, interestingly, he does not see this principle, or rather the roots thereof, as exclusively modern. What is common to all these insights, in our opinion, is the indicated need to overcome the tendency of the modern state order to turn things into objects, the movement which Heidegger called *Gestell*. Patriotism, as opposed to nationalism in a pejorative sense, should succeed in this overcoming.

We define patriotism as a devotion to one's *patria* – country, homeland. We define nationalism as devotion to one's *nation*. When a country is composed of several nations, nationalism and patriotism can differ and come into conflict. In the case where one's nation and state coincide, nationalism and patriotism coincide as well (cf. Joseph 1929). Now, the word 'nation', as we have partly already seen, can refer to an ethno-cultural unit or a domain of political organisation (Radžvilas would call the former (mere) *ethnos* and (only) the latter a *nation*). The problematic of nationalism is situated between these two meanings.

Nationalism has also recently been linked to the so-called *populist* movements which are characterised by the opposition of 'pure people' (defined in terms of either belonging to a certain ethnic/cultural group – right-wing populism – or a social class/status – left-wing populism)

versus 'corrupt elite' and the claim that politics should be based on the general will of the people. Right-wing populism is nationalist populism: it is about people *as* an ethno-nation against corrupt elite. Themes of aversion to immigrants are also prominent which contrast to more Samaritan views (Miscevic 2020). Of course, the 'elite' versus 'underdog' contrast was already problematised in Aristotle and Plato where it leads to a civil war or a strong civil opposition ('two states within one state') with the underdog favouring a tyrant or a foreign power which supports their resentment. But as a modern and current phenomenon, the existence of a nation-state points to a peculiar modern problematic, unknown to the ancient authors, to which the next chapter is dedicated.

NATION BETWEEN A LIVING FORCE AND AN ARTIFICIAL CONSTRUCT

The quarrel between the Romanticism and the Rationalism, between the particular and the abstract, reflected in the existence of the modern nation-state, points to the need of the synthesis of the two, that is a political community which provides individuals with a sense of belonging. For example, communitarian A. McIntyre argues that capitalism with which a modern state is closely intertwined promotes the pursuit of personal gain, money (for the sake of itself) and effectiveness rather than ethical excellence, and, as a result, societies engender large inequalities and are organised into competing and antagonising interests. Furthermore, modern politics has no place for patriotism because the modern state is too abstract, allows people no effective voice, deprives them of any kind of shared community and frustrates many of their projects (Clayton 2022). Thus, should communitarians point to 'natural', 'empirical' reality and human ties, which, according to the Romantics, was more characteristic of pre-Modern times? Or should they side with Hegel who saw in modernity a more noble kind of devotion to the state because now it is an idea rather than something merely empirical: a soldier does not fight head to head with an empirically experienced enemy in a personal relation but shoots the enemy from another state while participating in an idea. But if we follow Hegel here closely, then idea must be a synthesis, that is, not something merely empirical or merely abstract but a sublation of the two.

The modern nation, having or seeking to express its existence in statehood, exists in a tension between its national substrate and its form of political organisation. According to classic modern authors Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, territorial sovereignty is the defining feature of statehood and also crucial for nationhood. But a nation cannot be defined solely in terms of statehood because the issue of nationalism is particularly prominent with peoples who do not (yet) have a state (Miscevic 2000). Also, there is also the distinction between the nation as an ethnic (or ethno-cultural) group where one's membership is essentially involuntary based on 'the accident of origin and early socialisation', similar to a familial unity, and the nation as a civic/politic unit where one's membership and identity depend on a voluntary state-like organisation of any group. The latter meaning is said to be more Western European and the former more Central and Eastern European, originating in Germany. But such a distinction turns them into oppositions whereas we are looking for a sublated position (where a family-like unity and a civil society-like plurality meet, to form a community or nation). Are nation and nationalism good candidates for this?

Here one can ask how real nations are and, accordingly, how deeply entrenched in human lives nationalism is. Some see nationalism as a phenomenon of modernity. Other view ethno-cultural nations as 'primordial'. The third option is to see ethno-cultural nations or groups as predating modernity but its actual statist organisation to be modern. Well-known is the position of B. Anderson (1991) who shows in his study that the nation(-state) is a modern

phenomenon enabled by the fusion of capitalism and print media (collective experience of the news, irrespective of a physical or social distance). In this sense the nation is an 'imagined community' that substitutes a horizontal comradeship for previous traditional ties of kinship. Only the closest community that is experienced directly with the senses is not 'imagined' whereas other communities, especially the modern nation, are 'imagined'. This is not to deny (or assert) its metaphysical reality but only to state the fact that such a nation gave people a strong sense of belonging and was a key factor in the development of (nation-)states since the late 18th century. This seems to echo both Hegel's admiration for the 'spiritual' moment in the existence of the modern nation-state and McIntyre's disappointment with the abstract and deadening character of its organisation. So we move again to the thesis that the modern state provides itself with a nation as its 'soul', or unifying principle, and the modern individual is situated between the cage of its organisation (which nevertheless allows him to be a modern individual) and his need to belong to a living unit.

The meaning of nation in the sense of merely political state-like organisation can be completely disengaged from the aspect of common ethnic origin but it is more usual to use the word 'nation' in the ethno-cultural sense or at least not excluding it. Still, as noted by many, ethnic groups have been mixing for millennia so definition of a nation in terms of a common ethnic origin is somewhat mythical. For this reason, more liberal authors tend to stress the commonality of culture rather than ethnos (*ibid.*). They suggest tolerating ethno-national mythologies as 'important falsehoods' only if they are benign and they also derive ethno-national claims from individual claims. For example, nationalism is advocated along the lines of the necessity of community for individual persons to flourish and of the protection as well as the guaranty of justice that the nation-state provides. It can be argued that understanding of the commonality of belonging to the same ethno-cultural nation contributes a lot to the solidarity/justice between members and groups of the state. On the other hand, liberal nationalists (as opposed to classical nationalists) tend to abandon the old nationalist ideal of a state owned by a single dominant ethno-cultural group and accept that identification with a plurality of cultures and communities is important for a person's social identity. Authors like Roger Scruton claim that 'for a liberal state to be secure, the citizens must understand the *national* interest as something other than the interest of the *state*. Only the first can evoke in them the sacrificial spirit upon which the second depends' (quoted from Primoratz 2020). Others, on the contrary, tend to de-emphasise pre-political ties such as language, culture or common ancestry and to prioritise loyalty to one's political community and its laws and the way of life they make possible (*ibid.*). The example to follow here is usually the United States of America whose citizens, according to Schaar, 'were bonded together not by blood or religion, not by tradition or territory, not by the walls and traditions of a city, but by a political idea ... by a covenant, by dedication to a set of principles and by an exchange of promises to uphold and advance certain commitments' (quoted from *ibid.*) Such authors are also more sensitive to transnational issues and embrace a partly cosmopolitan perspective (Miscević 2020). The opponents of the purely 'civic' ideal note that patriotism without pre-political attachments is insufficient to motivate political participation and generates only a 'much too thin' sense of identity (Primoratz 2020).

According to A. Gat, who defends the pre-modern reality of nations, Anderson's emphasis on print and literacy is exaggerated because illiterate societies had their own potent means of 'imagining' a large-scale community: after common language, it was oral means, being read to, epos, ritual and religion with its dense clerical and cultic network (33–34). Similarly, Jokubaitis (11) notes that it has always been plainly evident that human spiritual, social and political life

needs imagination as its key instrument. Gat is also critical of Anderson's assertion that the universal religious identity preceded the national identity: in fact, national religions seem to have preceded universal religions and the national bias is characteristic of local branches of universal faiths. Religion has actually been one of the strongest pillars of patriotism and especially nationalist patriotism, especially with respect to the lower clergy free from the considerations of high politics and closest to the people (Gat 34). Gat employs multiple examples of national identities which both preceded national modern states, were instrumental in establishing them and were in general the norm historically (which does not mean that they were always fixed, especially in volatile times such as the Age of Migration (ibid: 36).

Jokubaitis reproaches Anderson for his nominalism which is probably related to his lack of emphasis on the moral significance of national patriotism. Anderson's approach is seen as descriptive rather than prescriptive. Here we can remember M. Heidegger who demonstrated that things turn into objects when they get out of hand and lose their significance. Is the root of the merely descriptive approach, which lacks 'devotion', not the ontological problems which are hinted at in the common criticisms of modernity?

CONCLUSIONS

Current theoretical and practical (political) controversies regarding nationalist attitudes and the existence of the nation-state have been programmed in the very nature of the modern nation-state. On the one hand, modernity is an expression of the modern individual subjective consciousness. On the other hand, human and political reality involves a common/political existence that must have its specific shape fit for the modern individual and particularist consciousness. Being 'spiritual' in nature, the modern consciousness drifts away from the empirical and embodied aspect of reality and in turn this movement rebounds as a conflict between the spiritual universalist attitudes centering on individual human rights and the need for an experience of reality which is both empirical and partial. The individual consciousness is divided between a devotion to an abstract order, which was first national, but now has been turning international and deterritorialized, and the empirical experience of reality with concrete needs and relations. The patriotic attitude requires the unity of the two aspects.

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VAIDA NEDZINSKAITĖ-MITKĖ, NERIJUS STASIULIS

Modernioji tautinė tapatybė ir patriotizmas

Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje nagrinėjamas tautinis identitetas ir individų patriotinių nuostatų savo tautinės valstybės atžvilgiu prigimtis. Jame aptariama dialektika tarp tautos, kaip gyvos bendruomenės, ir tautos, kaip abstrakčiais principais grindžiamos organizacijos, o šiuolaikinis individas, kuris vadovaujasi (ne)patriotinėmis nuostatomis, parodomas šioje dialektikoje. Siekiama atskleisti kompleksiską moderniosios individualios sąmonės ir moderniosios bendruomenės patirties santykį ir, gretinant klasikinį ir liberalųjį nacionalizmą bei komunitarizmą, išnagrinėti moderniosios tautinės tapatybės kilmę. Tyrimas grindžiamas ontologine vienumo ir daugialypumo santykio sąvoka.

Raktažodžiai: bendruomenė, individas, nacionalizmas, patriotizmas, tautinė valstybė