NATIONALISM

Despite the importance of nationalism, there is a lack of consensus about what it is and why it has maintained such a firm hold over so much of the world's population. Any examination of nationalism must be preceded by some kind of definition of what constitutes a nation.

This question is complicated by the manner in which people often use the terms nation, state, and country interchangeably. The last two terms refer to political entities. The first is a term used to describe a group of people who may or may not live in the same state or country.

The difference is conveyed in the German by the words *Staatsangehörigheit* (citizenship) and *Nationalität* (nationality). A person can be of German *Nationalität* without being a German citizen.

Definitions of nation or nationality rely either upon objective or subjective criteria, or on some combination of the two. Most objective definitions of nationality rely on the commonality of some particular trait among members of a group. Shared language, religion, **ethnicity** (common descent), and culture have all been used as criteria for defining nations. A casual examination of the history of national differentiation indicates that these factors often reinforce each other in the determination of a nationality. Certain nationalities, such as the Croats, are now defined as distinct from Serbs almost exclusively on the basis of religious differences. Likewise, Urdu-speaking Pakistanis are distinguished from Hindi-speaking Indians largely because of religion.

In other cases, however, a shared religion seems a less accurate method for drawing the boundaries of a nationality. The German nation, for example, is divided mainly among Protestants and Catholics. Conversely, the inhabitants of France and Italy, though both overwhelmingly Catholic, belong to two different nationalities.

One of the most frequently used of all the objective marks of nationality is a common language. Indeed, a shared language has been a very powerful factor in national unification. Yet this definition, too, is fraught with difficulties. For one thing, what we today call national languages are, to one degree or another, artificial constructs. This is certainly true in the case of many of the languages of east-central Europe and of the non-European world. For example, the Serb philologist Vuk Karadzic modelled modern Serbo-Croatian out of the socalled Stokavian

dialect in the early nineteenth century; this was part of a self-conscious attempt at uniting the Southern Slavs (Yugoslavs) into one nation.

Other national languages have been created for **imperial** purposes.

The various languages of central Asia (e.g. Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Khazak) did not exist until they were conjured out of local dialects by Soviet linguists during the 1920s. The languages were then used as evidence to support Soviet claims of the existence of several nations in Central Asia, which was then divided into separate Soviet Socialist Republics as part of a divide-and-rule strategy.

Even in cases where a popular vernacular becomes a national language, this transformation typically happens after the foundation of a **nation-state**. For example, French became a national language only after the creation of a French nation-state. In 1789, only about half of the population in the Kingdom of France spoke French. To the nationalist Revolutionaries, making French the common language of the nation was of the utmost importance. The same could be said of German, Italian, Hungarian, and other modern European languages. A common vernacular language of administration, state education, and military command was an important tool in the extension of the modern state's bureaucratic control. Thus, national languages are largely the creation of modern nation-states, not the other way around.

It seems, therefore, that pre-existing common linguistic or religious attributes may not be absolute indicators of a nation. Ethnicity or common descent are other possible criteria for national boundary drawing. These were especially popular during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and blended with that era's fascination with racial pseudo-science. To the modern student, however, ethnicity seems a much less compelling criterion. The people of the various Mediterranean nations, for example, are plainly the product of centuries of inter-ethnic marriages. Likewise, the American, Mexican, or British nations are made up of people of many different ethnic backgrounds.

Hence, while objective traits can be useful as very rough criteria for defining the existence of a nation, they are not enough. Indeed, a nation may be a very subjective entity. Many students of nationalism are eventually led to the (almost tautological) conclusion that people belong to a certain nation if they *feel* that they belong to it.

As an ideology, nationalism is the claim that people belonging to a particular group called a nation should inhabit a particular area and control a state of their own. Such a definition points to nationalism as a method of drawing boundaries among people. Whether nationalism is viewed as an ideology or a state of mind, one can still ask why did so many people abandon earlier, universalist ideologies (e.g. Christianity) and non-national self-identifications (e.g. occupation or social status)?

Some trace the roots of nationalism to the Reformation. The Reformation itself was important in the development of proto-nationalist feeling, especially when considered in light of the revolution in printing and the subsequent surge in publications in various vernaculars (as opposed to the universalist Latin), which weakened the church hierarchy as interpreters of the Bible and laid the groundwork for the establishment of the nation. While the print revolution may have sown the seeds of national self-consciousness, most people continued to identify themselves by their religious affiliation rather than their nationality.

Most students of nationalism draw a causal link between the changes under way in Europe during the end of the eighteenth century and the development of nationalism during that same period. As people left their villages and farms for the growing cities, they also left behind many of their previous attachments and were receptive to new ones.

The great social and economic changes under way during the late eighteenth century were accompanied by change in political thought, as liberalism began to compete effectively against the ideas of divine right of kings and absolutism. The American War of Independence, for example, was both a manifestation of the idea of national **self-determination** and an assertion of radical liberal principles. The

American nationality was defined by the belief in a set of liberal propositions which, the Americans believed, applied not only to themselves but also to all humankind. Similarly, English nationalism as it developed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries maintained its roots in the idea of individual liberty.

The growth of the centralised state as well as the fascination with vernacular languages fostered the growth of nationalism. The modern state needed to promote a common language among its subjects. Public (i.e. state-run) schools emerged at precisely the time when nationalism was growing. The state used its schools to teach a common national (i.e. enforced) language, partly to reinforce a sense of loyalty to the state, but also to facilitate state functions, such as tax collection and

military conscription. The extraction of revenues from the population and the formation of vast military organisations for territorial aggrandisement drove the evolution of the modern state system in Europe. The subsequent emergence of nationalist ideology is closely connected to this process. As direct rule expanded throughout Europe, the welfare, culture, and daily routines of ordinary Europeans came to depend on which state they happened to reside in. Internally, states undertook to impose national languages, national educational systems, national military service, and much more. Externally, they began to control movement across frontiers, to use tariffs and customs as instruments of economic policy, and to treat foreigners as distinctive kinds of people deserving limited rights and close surveillance. As a result, two mutually reinforcing forms of nationalism emerged: one refers to the mobilisation of populations that do not have their own state around a claim to political independence, the other to the mobilisation of the population of an existing state around a strong identification with that state. Besides these aspects of the growth of the modern state, it is no accident that the participation of the masses in politics coincided with the age of nationalism. As politics became more democratic and monarchs lost the last vestiges of their previous legitimacy, rulers needed something new upon which to base their **power**.

Both liberalism and nationalism shared a healthy loathing of dynastic absolutism and of the censorship and oppression that it brought, linking their fates closely together through the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, however, succeeded in destroying many aspects of individualism and liberalism that had existed in nationalism. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, the history of nationalism on the continent of Europe would be dominated by increasingly anti-liberal, or anti-individualistic, themes.

The emerging nations of Europe became acquainted with nationalism not as a vehicle of individual liberty but as an adoration of collective power.

In much of Western Europe the geographic boundaries of the nation-state had preceded the building of the nation itself. For example, there was a Kingdom of France before there was a French nation. In Central and Eastern Europe the situation was completely reversed. In these areas nations were born before nation-states. Much of east-central Europe was controlled by four great multinational empires, namely the German, Russian, Habsburg, and Ottoman. Many of the people who inhabited these empires had no historical state with which they might identify. For the peoples living in Central and Eastern Europe, the liberal

aspirations of nationalism were submerged while the goal of building a nation-state became paramount. The development of nationalism in Asia, and later in Africa, was greatly influenced by the growing role of European powers in those areas. It is, in fact, in Asia and Africa where nationalism developed last and where many of its worst manifestations are today in evidence.

The role of nationalism in international relations is ambiguous. On the one hand, nationalism provides a justification for dividing humanity on the basis of territory. On the other hand, since many territorial boundaries were determined prior to the rise of nationalism (particularly in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa), the principle of national selfdetermination is deeply subversive of contemporary **international law** based on state **sovereignty**. There are no signs that this paradox is about to come to an end in the foreseeable future.

See also: **communitarianism; cosmopolitanism; diaspora; ethnicity; imagined community; irredentism; nation-state; secession; selfdetermination; sovereignty**

Further reading: Gellner, 1983; Greenfeld, 1992; Hobsbawm, 1991; Mayall, 1989;

Smith, S., 1995

NATION-STATE

Nations and states may seem identical, but they are not. States govern people in a territory with boundaries. They have laws, taxes, officials, currencies, postal services, police, and (usually) armies. They wage **war**, negotiate treaties, put people in prison, and regulate life in thousands of ways. They claim **sovereignty** within their territory. By contrast, nations are groups of people claiming common bonds like language, culture, and historical identity. Some groups claiming to be nations have a state of their own, like the French, Dutch, Egyptians, and Japanese.

Others want a state but do not have one: Tibetans, Chechnyans, and Palestinians, for example. Others do not want statehood but claim and enjoy some autonomy. The Karen claim to be a nation trapped within the state of Burma/Myanmar. The Sioux are a nation within the boundaries of the United States. Each of these nations has its own special territory, rights, laws, and culture, but not statehood. Some imagined nations are larger than states or cross-state boundaries. The Arab nation embraces more than a dozen states, while the nation of the Kurds takes in large areas of four states.

Some people assume that states are fixed and permanently established across most of the globe. But in fact states are in flux. State boundaries are often changed – by war, negotiation, arbitration, or even by the sale of territory for money (Russia sold Alaska to the United States, for example). A few states have endured, but others may be here today and gone tomorrow. Over the past decade a number of states have disappeared – Czechoslovakia, East Germany, North and South Yemen, and of course the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Diplomatic **recognition** confers legitimacy on a new state (or on the government of a state) but sometimes there is a lack of consensus within the international community. For example, the Palestinian people are largely under the jurisdiction of other states, although they are seen by the majority of the international community as having strong claims to independent statehood. Other nations claiming the right to independent statehood fail to win backing and are dismissed as frivolous or illegitimate (such as Kosovo). When the **United Nations** was founded, it was composed of just 51 member states. Today there are nearly 190. The great majority of today's members were then either colonies (as in most of Africa) or parts of other states (such as those that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union).

The classical nation-states in Northern and Western Europe evolved within the boundaries of existing territorial states. They were part of the European state system that took on a recognisable shape with the **Peace of Westphalia** in 1648. By contrast, the 'belated' nations – beginning with Italy and Germany – followed a different course, one that was also typical for the formation of nation-states in Central and Eastern Europe; here the formation of the state followed the trail blazed by an anticipatory national consciousness. The difference between these two paths (from state to nation *versus* from nation to state) is reflected in the backgrounds of the actors who formed the vanguard of nation and state builders. In the former case, they were lawyers, diplomats, and military officers who belonged to the king's administrative staff and together constructed a state bureaucracy. In the latter case, it was writers, historians, scholars, and intellectuals who laid the groundwork for the subsequent **diplomatic** and military unification of the state. After the Second World War, a third generation of very different nation-states emerged from the process of **decolonisation**, primarily in Africa and Asia. Often these states, which were founded within the frontiers established by the former colonial regimes, acquired sovereignty before the imported forms of state organisation could take root in a national identity that transcended tribal

differences. In these cases, artificial states had first to be filled by a process of nation-building. Finally, with the collapse of the Soviet Empire, the trend towards the formation of independent nation-states in Eastern and Southern Europe has followed the path of more or less violent **secessions**. In the socially and economically precarious situation in which these countries found themselves, the old ethno-national slogans had the power to mobilize distraught populations for independence.

The nation-state at one time represented a response to the historical challenge of finding a functional equivalent for the early modern form of social **integration** that was in the process of disintegrating. Today we are confronting an analogous challenge. The **globalisation** of commerce and communication, of economic production and finance, of the spread of technology and weapons, and above all of ecological and military risks, poses problems that can no longer be solved within the framework of nation-states or by the traditional method of agreements between sovereign states. If current trends continue, the progressive undermining of national sovereignty may necessitate the founding and expansion of political institutions on the supranational level.

Some observers believe that the role of the nation-state has been reduced to that of a municipality within the global capitalist system, responsible for providing the necessary infrastructure and services to attract capital investment. However, this is much too simplistic. Societies also demand identity, and the nation-state has sometimes been successful in providing this where other identities have been weak. It can therefore play an important part in expressing to the outside world a unique identity associated with a particular locality. The nation-state is less successful in those situations where the population is fragmented between several large groups who do not wish to surrender portions of their different identities in order to produce a national identity. Malaysia, Indonesia, and Yugoslavia are just a few particularly good contemporary examples. In these cases, the national ideology for various reasons fails to assimilate large sections of the population, causing an ongoing crisis of belief within the society, that is generally responded to with the use of (sometimes violent) coercion by the apparatus of the state and by the dominant group.

The cultural effects of accelerating globalisation have brought with them disintegrating factors that tend towards the atomisation of societies, and towards the breakdown of older social, political, and cultural units, including that of the

nuclear family unit. This tendency is most pronounced in the economically advanced nation-states of the West, and has tended to reduce the authority, importance, and relevance of the nation-state as an institution.

Alongside this atomization within societies, especially Western societies, has come a seemingly contradictory tendency towards **regionalism**. The surrender of many of the economic functions of nation-states to regional entities has been a feature of this latest round of globalization. Perhaps more significant has been the growth of global cities and their increasing independence from the nation-state to which they ostensibly belong. New York, London, and Tokyo have been identified as being global cities of the first order, whilst Los Angeles, Frankfurt, Zurich, Paris, Sydney, and Singapore, among a dozen or so others, can be considered second-order global cities. The relationship of these global cities to national governments is changing, especially in critical areas such as monetary policy, interest rates, commercial treaties, and immigration.

The development of global cities has been accompanied by the growth of territory that has become peripheral from the major social and economic processes, and which cuts across the boundaries of rich and poor countries. Whilst including much of what was known as the **Third World** and the countries of the former **communist** bloc, this peripheral economic wilderness now includes large regions within the developed countries themselves.

However, it should be remembered that controlling population movements has become a key function of the modern nation-state, and keeping the poor immobile has become a principal concern, especially for those wealthy regions of the world that do not want their cities 'flooded' with people – usually unskilled – for whom their economy has no useful purpose.

In the next century we may witness the further decay of the nation-state as the all-powerful and sole center of power, and with that we will see the further growth of non-state organizations, and the concentration of actual power within the global cities. Some of these organizations stand above the state – for example, the **European Union**.

Others are of a completely different kind, such as international bodies and **multinational corporations**. What they all have in common is that they either assume some of the functions of the nation-state or manage to escape its control. Being either much larger than states or without geographical borders, they are

better positioned to take advantage of recent developments in transportation and communications.

The result is that their power seems to be growing while that of the nation-state declines.

See also: **casino capitalism; European Union; failed state; globalisation; historical sociology; imagined community; non-governmental organisations; nationalism; Peace of Westphalia; regionalism; secession**

Further reading: Barkin and Cronin, 1994; Creveld, 1999; Jackson and James, 1993