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## **Nationalism – Subject of Study and Term of Abuse**

*Nationalism* is a subject about which many hold strong opinions, both in positive and negative directions. It is not clear, though, that all agents in the public arena envision the same things when talking about "nationalism". Before we expand on why nationalism is important for the understanding of modern formations of society, there may be a reason to determine, or at least outline, the understanding of the term.

Lexically, it can be said that *nationalism* is a doctrine about the nation, and that *nation* is derived from the Latin *natio*, meaning birth. Still, it would be too simplistic to say that nationalism is a doctrine about people's community of birth. Nor is it sufficient to speak of the nation in political terms, as a community at an intermediate level – more encompassing than a family-based and local community, and more limited than a community with a universal aim: a universal church, a UN community. Nevertheless, saying that a nation includes more people than one individual can know or have met, but not all people, gives us an entrance into the subject of nationalism.

Different definitions of nationalism may emphasise somewhat different aspects. The historian Arne Bergsgård claimed that a nation has five distinguishing dimensions: 1) The (native) country. 2) Kinship – Bergsgård takes care not to use the word "race", as European populations are not what is called racially pure peoples. 3) Language, "which binds people together in an intimate and instinctive understanding, and which presents the most important conditions for spiritual unity". 4) Religion, which, alongside language, creates spiritual and moral community – and which may also keep a people together in drawing a boundary against peoples with other forms of religion. Bergsgård, being a historian, here captures an important point in the social sciences: that community, the feeling of "we", presupposes the drawing of a boundary between a "we" and a "not-we" – a "they". 5) Finally, Bergsgård mentions the state and the historical collective life. (Bergsgård p. 9)

This is a compound definition, consisting of ethnical, geographical, spiritual and political elements. This approach has its traditions. In the humanist tradition, the doctrine of the nation is commonly connected with the philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder, who regarded a historically developed spirit of the people (*volksgeist*) as a prerequisite of the successful formation of a nation (Clark). The best conditions for people to develop their spirits lay in a community with other people sharing a common culture. Herder's programme would be that *cultural and political borders should coincide*.

This German tradition, which many in our time connect to Romanticism, stands in a certain opposition to French thought about the formation of nations. This was developed at the same time, in the last half of the eighteenth century and partly in the first half of the nineteenth. In France, *La nation* had earlier been a term referring to the spokesmen of the nation, the elite or the aristocracy, when it was not just regarded as a collective term for all groups under the king's administration. This older form of nationalism has also been called a *dynastic nationalism* – people have formed political nations through their loyalty to a dynasty, a prince or a royal family. During the French Revolution, the notion of nationality changed. The nation was defined as a community of citizens based on rights: Those who subscribed to this view could be regarded as a part of the nation (Østerud 91). Those who remained outside, and demanded to retain the privileges of their families or their social rank, became enemies of the nation. Many regarded the revolutionary front as the struggle of the nation against the old regime.

### **Ethnos and Demos**

This view of the nation – as a community for people with equal rights – was basically juridically and politically determined, not historically and culturally as according to Herder's premises. Both Germans and French regarded the nation as a people's concern relevant to a unit larger than the family and local society, but their view of what characterised "the people" differed (Dann 91). With hindsight, the difference between the German and the French view of the people has been explained with reference to two Greek terms that can both be translated by "people", namely *ethnos* and *demos*. Somewhat simplified, it can be said that *ethnos* is the historically developed people, *demos* is the politically choosing people.

The fact that German philosophers of two hundred years ago put limited emphasis on *demos*, and on the immediate participation of the people in political life, is connected to the political circumstances in Central Europe at the time. Germany was not ripe for democratisation – at least, this was the view of the elite. But even if German nationalism initially took a somewhat one-sided cultural form, the French view would also prove one-sided. The French were soon to realise that building a nation based exclusively on law and rights was not very useful for keeping the nation together, or for lending general authority to centrally made decisions. In France, this led to cultural influences, directed from the centre, aimed at making all French French, not least by making Parisian French the only official language of the country. Also, unitary politics were continually exercised in the administration and through certain forms of national education.

In the war waged between the French and the Germans in the 1870s, where they could not agree whether Alsace–Lorraine or Elsass–Lothringen was French or German, persistent propaganda from both sides supported each of these two views. The German professor M. Mommsen gave historically and ethnically based arguments that the Elsasser were actually Germans. On the French side, Fustel de Coulanges presented a passionate defence for the Alsatians being French, and consequently for their territory belonging to France. His pamphlet "*Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*" is probably one of the most crackling cannonades ever to have been fired in the French language: "What determines the nation" wrote de Coulanges, "is not the race, nor the language. It is in their hearts humans feel that they belong to the same people; because they have a community of ideas, of interests, of passions, memories and aspirations. Here is the explanation of why people will act together, work together, fight together, live and die, one for the other. The native country is what one loves" – *La patrie, c'est ce qu'on aime*.

The French had learnt. The program for *demos* could not stand on its own feet. The people both had to be constituted as a people and be passionately aware of this before choices could be made and expect to be respected. There is little reason to believe that the French form of nationalism, led from above, became less intense than for instance the more popular Norwegian form, led from below, but it could become more programmatic, and perhaps more extravagant. Gradually, French nationalism did at least obtain a more cultural quality. On the other hand, German nationalism developed a more political quality throughout the nineteenth century.

In scholarly research on modernity and democratic mobilisation there was a gradual realisation that a people's government depended upon a population whose common feeling of belonging to the same people was both historical and directed towards the future. *Ethnos* could be regarded as a precondition for *demos*. Nationalism became a precondition for democracy. It might be hard to imagine a functioning representative democracy not based on a people with common characteristics. But if it was difficult to imagine a national democracy without nationalism, it would prove possible to develop a nationalism that did not lead to democracy.

### **Modern Nationalism**

At this point, there are reasons to interject that the philosopher Aristotle did not, in his time, put much faith in the possibility of governing large states by democratic principles. City-states, where free men discussed in a council, could be democratically regulated. Large societies, on the other hand, where people did not know each other, would depend on a king or a despot. What Aristotle lacked notions of was representative democracy – a form of government chosen by the majority of the people by way of programmes and a confidence in leaders the people did not know personally. For this to become possible, such confidence had to be based on a similarity of basic views and a common use of symbols signalling adherence to the same values and views.

This indicates that democracies must be based on a certain common cultural ground. Among others, the political scientist Roald Dahl has said that homogenous democracies have better conditions for functioning than do heterogeneous ones. Disagreements between researchers of democracy and nationality have mainly dealt with the question of how this homogeneity is to be understood. Should provenance and community of birth be understood in a literal way, as a common biological heritage, focussing, for instance, on common racial characteristics? Or is the culturally determined common ground sufficient – possibly in combination with myths of origin. The cultural historian Benedict Anderson has maintained that modern large societies are based on *imagined communities*. With the growth of modern technology and mass media, the possibilities for developing and maintenance of this kind of communities have increased.

Here, none the less, we are faced with a paradox: In order to enjoy the benefits of freedom in modern democracies, people must first subordinate their identity and orientation to a common culture, with certain values and structures of preference, a certain view of history that constitutes loyalty, and a conception of the nation's mission. The precondition for expecting that individuals will subject themselves to decisions made by the majority is that the majority represents a unit of which the individuals see themselves as a part. If the individuals regard themselves as cultural beings, so that personal realisation and cultural realisation are parallel processes, this does not necessarily pose a problem. But to people who think that democracy should mean the largest degree of rights in making individual choices, this poses a paradox.

Not least in a post-modern culture, with its scepticism towards everything that limits the freedom of the individual, many have dreamt of an advanced democracy only based on individual rights – on *demos* – and not on the conditions for a politically well-functioning community – on *ethnos*.

In European nations, Christianity has been an important part of the common cultural ground. During the French Revolution and the subsequent discourse on modernisation, the Church was by many regarded as a reactionary enemy of modernity – this view was presented by principles of replacing the authority of tradition by that of rationality. In progressive quarters during the nineteenth century, many approached natural science in order to find an objective, preferably biologically based, alternative to the Christianity presented by the Church. Darwin's doctrine of evolution, and later social Darwinism, was regarded by many rationalist liberals as an alternative of this kind: If it could be made likely that the rise of one group of people was due to selection in a long struggle against nature and other peoples, one could also explain that those who had done best were likely to be elect, not only as regards social adaptation, but also by hereditary qualities (Pickens).

From the end of the nineteenth century through the first decades of the twentieth, racism was regarded as a part of the explanation of the fact that there were different nations, where people had partly differing characteristics. It was assumed that these differences could be identified between nations as well as between people from different regions within nations.

Racism, at least when presented in certain ways, could contribute to a strengthened national confidence of a given people. Those who had done well, like the English, deserved their status, because the citizens of that nation had superior racial characteristics. Those who had not been as fortunate in politics, like the Germans, did in fact deserve political pre-eminence, because their cultural contributions proved that collectively they belonged to a race with superior characteristics. During the First World War, several warring sides could use racial arguments for boosting the morale of their own troops.

Experience from the outbreak of the First World War showed that alliances based on international agreements was not a good principle for ensuring world peace. Gradually, more and more people realised that making national loyalty absolute, at the expense of all other forms of loyalty, was a dubious principle. In fact, nothing in the nationalistic reasoning of Herder's tradition indicates that the nation should be people's only binding frame of reference. Tasks of supranational character should be assigned to organisations of supranational character. As agreements between families had not been a good principle for solving local tasks, and agreements between local societies had not been a useful principle for solving national tasks, so agreements between nations did not prove sufficient for meeting civilisational and global challenges. In this field, significant progress has been made during the twentieth century, in thought as well as in organisation.

### **Experiences from the Second World War**

Experiences from the First World War could indicate a political addendum to previous doctrine. Experiences from the Second World War have by posterity been presented as destructive to the adherence to nationalism. Still, it can be claimed that these presentations are due to certain interpretations of the war, rather than to the war itself.

The interpretation of the Second World War as the fight of the forces of good against violent nationalism seems to have achieved widespread acceptance. That does not imply, though, that this interpretation is neutrally descriptive, nor that it represents the warring sides' perceptions of their own motivation. In a strange way, we are facing a narrative that breaks analytical as well as hermeneutic principles. While research on the Second World War has laid the foundations of a less black and white view of the implications of nationalism, many loud-spoken interpreters have come forth as spokesmen for a mythical and simplified understanding of nationalism, compared to the understanding of previous generations. In fact, there is nothing new in nationalism becoming an element of a mythical rather than a rational worldview; what is new is the degree to which nationalism has been given a demonic role. In recent encyclopaedias, nationalism is defined as a form of national feeling that may damage other nations.

There is little doubt that the connection between nationalism and perdition in these interpretations is due to the experiences of German racist National Socialism. Still, the question is whether Hitler's politics can be explained from the aspects of his propaganda that can be called nationalistic, and whether German National Socialism can be explained as an extreme version of general nationalism. Scholars have pointed out that this nationalism played an intermediate role between a pre-modern and a modern way of viewing the state (Burnham). German National Socialism was not founded upon the modern principle of people's sovereignty, with democratic procedures for changing government. Nor was it dynastic in a traditional sense. German National Socialism was tied to a political party, which in turn was tied to the will of one leader. A consequence of this was that once Hitler had come to power, it became impossible to depose him by legal means. When not even the planned coup against him before the Munich meeting was successful, he could hardly be stopped in interpreting nationalism in a way that was independent of a popular referendum, and in waging war after his own will. As opposed to nationalist leaders of state in the nineteenth century, Hitler did not allow himself to be stopped by the Herderian principle that a government is legitimate only when it governs its own people. Apart from this, there are reasons to think that all in all, this principle had led to fewer wars of conquest in nineteenth-century Europe than could have been expected from the weapons technology and political ambitions of power we faced at that time.

A characteristic of Hitler's politics was that his propaganda could change from offended national appeal in the 1930s to arrogant racism when he started his politics of expansion in the 1940s. This was imperialistic, and cannot be explained or defended as nationalism, at least not in the sense for which Herder was a spokesman. Indeed, this has been pointed out in our time by several central historians of nationalism (Alter, p. 50f and Smith 1983).

The lasting nationalism of the Second World War was on the side of the Allies. The resistance against Hitler was to a decisive degree based on national resistance in occupied territories, and on several peoples' nationalistic conviction that strangers had no right to rule their country. The appeals in the Norwegian illegal press tell us much about this. What was to stop Hitler was an alliance between Russian, American, British, French, Dutch, Polish, Serb and Norwegian nationalism. Indeed, the Second World War may be interpreted as the victory of nationalists over imperialists.

### **Scholarly Research and Media Go Separate Ways**

Our time's understanding of nationalism depends on interpretations, and also on a fight between different traditions of interpretation. A conspicuous feature of this fight is that scholarly research and mediated information to the people have to a large degree gone their separate ways. Here we find the foundations of much of what in our days must be called an abuse of interpretations of the conditions and effects of nationalism.

In research, as mentioned, the unit of the nation represents an intermediate community, between the local and the all-encompassing. A working community of rights, a *demos*, presupposes a strong identity of "we", based on a predetermined community through common religion, language, kinship, land, history and possibly future mission in the world. Not all ingredients are necessary for every formation of a nation, but unless at least a few of them are present to a rather high degree, we will probably not attain the solidarity that is a necessary condition for a working politics of rights (Østerud 1994). It can be discussed what is necessary for which types of challenges. Scholars may also discuss at which point an ethnic group, an *ethnie*, turn into a nation – as Anthony D. Smith has treated the national formation in early nineteenth-century Norway (Smith 1986 and 1991, p. 21). They may discuss how the development of communications and industrialisation establishes the conditions for new forms of the building of societies (Anderson, Gellner, Hutchinson, Kohn). They may discuss the difference between dynastic nationalism and modern nationalism, based on a sovereignty of the people, and what was characteristic for the intermediate German position (Armstrong, Burnham, Smith 1983). They may discuss what kind of tasks are best solved nationally and what is best dealt with by family and local units, or alternatively by units at the civilisational or global level (Huntington, Smith 1991). They may discuss connections between modernity, differentiation and integration at the national level. And they may discuss differences between successful and less successful forms of nationalism in various developing countries (Grannes). There is much here that should interest others than small groups of specialists. Nevertheless, only a limited part of this debate has reached the public at large.

There is a great difference between the discussions in the serious part of international literature on nationalism and various interpretations of nationalism found in politicising organisations and the mass media. Here, nationalism is mainly used as a term of abuse. The expression is often used to *characterise* a wide variety of groups that most people disapprove of, or that they are encouraged to disapprove of. The term "nationalists" can be used for those who support an undemocratic military dictatorship, or for guerrilla groups that seek to violently depose a government in charge. Norwegian opponents of membership of the European Union, who think Norway is best served by looser political ties to Brussels, have been called nationalists. People who are sceptical of more liberal immigration politics are nationalists, as are skinheads who fight left-wing radical activists in the streets of Oslo. The media's use of the term "nationalists" is not exactly characterised by analytical precision.

Another usual characteristic feature of presentations in the media is that violent conflicts around the world is seen as *explained* when at least one of the sides can be called "nationalists". Television, not least, has done much to develop certain associative links from nationalism to Nazism to racism, and to the persecution of the Jews and the Holocaust. Thus, the connection is again made to the events of the Second World War. We need to look deeper into the last decade's interpretation of this conflict, in order to understand why the scholars' subject of study has become media's term of abuse.

Clearly, the spread of condemning views must have other references than does research, at least other than those that can be derived from serious and comparative research. Neither can

these interpretations be explained as market-oriented populism. Most people have retained considerable amounts of a nationalistic stance; the interest in national sporting events, not least, testifies about this. It may sometimes look as if celebrities and media commentators have their own references, relatively independently of both most people and scholars.

It would be wrong to regard the permeating anti-nationalism of large media as a phenomenon that has developed in a cultural and political vacuum. It is possible to outline certain explanations of the phenomenon by marking off the boundaries of the period at the start of which national stances were generally regarded as a honorary term, and which ended by giving superiority to the opposite position. There is reason to stress at this point that the tarnishing of nationalism was not due to the concrete experiences of the Second World War. - In this connection, we can refer to volume 14 of Cappelen's History of Norway, written by the distinguished professor Edvard Bull. Below a photo on page 41, picturing a mass meeting at Youngstorget in Oslo in August 1945, we read that people rallied round posters with the text: "Traitors and unnational elements away – We want a cleaner society". At that time, in the 1940s, "unnational elements" was a term of abuse able to expel people from the community, more or less like the term "nationalists" has become in the 1990s. In order to explain this change in the interpretations presented by the media, focus should be placed on something that happened between 1950 and 1990.

### **Anti-nationalism and the Heritage of the Cold War**

Much has happened in the period mentioned, nationally as well as internationally. Not all of it, though, is equally useful for explaining a complete about-turn in the attitudes towards nationalistic principles.

Technological and economical development can explain much of the increase in international communications. But even though this gives a reference to the increased orientation towards supranational units, and also to a gradual shift of the centre of gravity of people's identity, this development cannot explain the negative position towards nationalism as a politico-cultural principle. Increased communications with others may also lead to an increased interest in one's own identity and in building an exterior to one's national self-image, and this does certainly not necessarily lead to a weakened nationalism. Furthermore, the economical development has led to people depending increasingly on national welfare programmes, and consequently on the maintenance of the cultural preconditions of national loyalty.

Culturally, this period has been characterised by a strong adherence to anti-authoritarian views. This change is often interpreted as an expansion of democracy based on the individual, at the expense of among other things a substantial nationalism. But even this explanation is not quite credible. If democratisation is regarded as a general yardstick of development, strong arguments can be made that democracy, more than other systems of government based on external use of power, is dependent on its citizens' social morale, not on a decomposition of moral duties. And if there was anything earlier generations of democracies regarded as their experience, it was that a morale of this kind depended on a collectively binding identification with more groups than those the individual knew personally. An increased democratisation might have a strong nationalism as its precondition rather than its opposite.

Nevertheless, the dissemination of culture based in the media has become characterised by a growing anti-nationalism. It is an unsatisfactory thought that these changes of cultural references should have happened quite independently of other forces in society. In other

words, there are good reasons to focus on changes in the signals from global politics in order to explain why nationalism became a quantity with mainly negative connotations.

The epoch we are talking about here may be called the period of the Cold War. Many have presented this period as determined by authoritarian politicians, military strategists and more or less secret planners. A more realistic perspective could be to view these changes in culture as unintentional side-effects of processes that have only been partly subject to rational control, but still as responses to the challenges politicians have had to deal with.

The post-war period presented many kinds of challenges to politicians. The settlement after the war was one thing; another was reconstruction. But the views of who were allies in the post-war period were also problematic. After the Russian politics of expansion in Eastern Europe, it was difficult to retain the image of the Soviet Union as an old ally. On the other hand, the Western powers needed the new West Germany as their ally. This meant a demand for a new ideological orientation in view of the fronts during the war.

For the Soviet Union, there were no great problems connected to displaying its former allies, the Western powers, as hostile capitalist powers who had formed a temporary alliance with the Soviet Union in order to defeat a rival. At the same time, the Russians could label the Second World War "the Great War of the fatherland". For the United States, the problems were greater. The war propaganda of Frank Capra, against German mentality and culture, could not be used to strengthen the new alliances. Joseph McCarthy's propaganda against communism as "un-American activity" was also unsuitable in a new alliance which would preferably include all anti-Communists. In the West, there was a great deal of ideological confusion by the end of the 1940s. In the 1950s, however, the fronts of the Cold War took shape.

The West desired to appear as the defender of freedom and democracy. Gradually, human rights also gained a political position in this building of fronts. The opponents of the West, whether they were former Nazis or fascists or contemporary Communists, were branded with the same labels, as politically totalitarian, culturally authoritarian, and generally inimical to freedom. Here, we are faced with an ideological mobilisation which was to have a profound effect, and which encompassed politico-military assessments as well as scholarly interpretations.

As regards intellectual reorientation – in the leading strata, that is – the 1950s may have been one of the most redefining, if not actually revolutionary, decades of our century. In the social sciences, which after the war had displaced the earlier biological–evolutionistic research to a high degree, several significant works explaining the reasons for the appeal of the enemies of democracy appeared. The most profound understanding of the conditions for the totalitarian breakthrough may have been the one of Hannah Arendt. But another, more one-dimensional work was to point out the directions for the new ideological comprehension, namely *The Authoritarian Personality* from 1950 (Adorno). In this book, Theodor Adorno claimed that psychological research had shown that Nazis, and also fervent nationalist in their own countries, did in fact think and speak from an authoritarian structure of personality with common undemocratic characteristics. Gradually, the diagnosis of the authoritarian and undemocratic personality was extended to Communists and left-wing radicals as well (Rokeach). Although this literature received strong criticisms from scholars, it was to exert a stronger cultural influence than almost any other research in the social sciences in the post-war period (Christie, McKinney, Stones, Skirbekk). Newspapers and other media have later



been able to count on support from cultural circles if they have attacked authoritarian traits in culture, while a defence of supra-individual authority would trigger the wrath of many.

In addition, philosophers of science were to support the demonisation of non-liberal cultural traits. Karl Popper divided Western thinkers into two groups, those who favoured an open and those who favoured a closed society. His book on this subject was used as syllabus at many universities. Here, "nationalism" was, among other things, attacked for being psychologically irrational, impossible in practice, utopian, and also illiberal. In sum, many intellectuals at this time used their authority for supporting the view that democracies fought for the best and against the worst parts of Western culture, by siding with neo-liberals against non-liberal interpretations of various subjects of debate.

But while democracy was strongly emphasised, several of the conditions for democracy were to be concealed. A democratic front that was in ideal open to all anti-Communists, was not easily unified with an emphasis on various versions of an excluding *ethnos*. Democracy was legitimated in a negative way, as an opposition to authoritarian arrangements. The increasing scepticism and aversion to nationalism as political ideal can largely be explained as an ideological appendix to the Cold War.

It was in the 1960s, when the Cold War was no longer quite as cold, that anti-authoritarian thoughts had their breakthrough in earnest in the parts of cultural life visible to the general public. Youth conforming to the new signals were able to use the increase in prosperity and leisure, and, not least, the new media, to create an anti-authoritarian lifestyle – and even achieve status as rebels for freedom when they adapted to the trends of the time. Many who attached themselves to these currents in the 1960s did so as an act of loyalty to a liberal–radical complex of ideas, not in order to defend NATO or a techno–economical globalisation. Thus, even groups that we might have expected to be opposed to time-specific ideologies took part in legitimising a general anti-nationalism.

In time, the European Union was to become an important reference for anti-national interpretations. But even here the changes were gradual. In 1961, the participants at an academic congress in Toulouse felt obliged to sign as citizens of their respective states, when they in a letter to several national assemblies encouraged an increased European integration. This kind of national legitimisation would soon become unnecessary. By the middle of the 1990s, Francois Mitterand would be able to say at his retirement from office that nationalism meant war – "*Le nationalisme, c'est la guerre*".

### **The Loss of Contact with Reality**

Strong ideologies have a tendency of leading to distortions of reality; this is also true of ideologies that at first seem to be the victorious ones.

The West won the Cold War, but at a tall ideological price. Its one-dimensional interpretations of democracy as anti-authoritarian idolisation of freedom on behalf of the individual was in a certain period able to serve the dedication of many to common Western politics; on the other hand, it also contributed to the displacement of several preconditions for a functioning civilisation. Nationally, this meant that *ethnos* was displaced by *demos*.

Consequences had to follow. In most *demos*-idolising countries, we register, in spite of prosperity and distribution, a marked increase in crime and asocial behaviour, indicating a

weakening of internal morale and solidarity. This can be explained in many ways, partly as a consequence of insufficient welfare aid to certain groups, partly as a consequence of welfare rights so broad that the moral responsibility of people has decayed. Partly this development can be interpreted as the consequences of insufficient threats of punishment, partly as a reaction to an environment focussing on punishment. What most explanations have in common is that they avoid criticising what has become known as our basic values. One rarely sees the development of "aberrations" explained as an unintentional consequence of the main pattern in the cultural profile presented by society.

Many also have a hard time seeing that problems with "multicultural society" can be due to anything else than racism. It is possible that groups of people with different traditions can live peacefully together within the same state if they have something that unites them at a higher level, as has been the case in the best periods of American history. But without common civilisational roots or adherence to a common national mission, there is little reason to expect integration to be successful. When this is not understood, it testifies to a failing orientation towards reality among neo-liberal elites.

Not only in the interpretation of internal conflicts does contemporary neo-liberalism fall short. The orientation towards reality also seems to be stunted by a limited repertoire of interpretations when it comes to interpreting and solving international conflicts; this limited repertoire may have had a function during the Cold War, but not today.

Strikingly enough, no one in the leading strata of political interpreters in the 1980s were able to predict the approaching dissolution of the Soviet Union. The only one would have to be the sociologist Randall Collins, who had had scholarly reasons for making nationalism a subject of his studies. Based on analyses of the central decay and growing nationalism in the region, in 1986 he published an analysis titled *The Future Fall of the Russian Empire*.

Leading Western interpreters have not only fallen short in their predictions about the radical nationalistic changes in Eastern Europe. Also in the interpretation of what happened, after the fact, we find ideological myopia. The wishes of Eastern European peoples for democratisation have been interpreted as wishes for realising as much as possible of the Western ideals of individual freedom, not for a nationalism on their own premises. In spite of the perceivable fact that the nationalistic mobilisations happened before, and not after, the dissolution of the Soviet empire – in the Baltic states, for instance – it was usual for a long time in Western media to treat this nationalism as some sort of stuffing used in the alleged political vacuum after the fall of communism.

The orientation towards reality among Western experts on Russia has not been impressive, nor, for that matter, has that of Western German experts on East Germany. The attempts at introducing a Western democracy in the East by legal reforms and market economy alone testify to a failing consciousness of what are the conditions for a working democracy. Without a culturally strengthened identity of "we" and supra-individual morale, political democracy cannot function as intended.

The misjudgements of the conditions for democracy would have their worst consequences in the former Yugoslavia. Here, as elsewhere, politicians did not use the expertise of social scientists who could have told them that the forming of states presupposes something more than political decisions (Amersfoort 1991, p. 92f; McGarry 1993, p. 172f). As regards the politicians of the German-speaking world dealing with foreign affairs, they managed for the

third time in one century to underestimate Serb nationalism – and, as before, to present misjudgements with great military–political consequences. Interpreters in anti-nationalistic milieus managed after a while to give passable explanations of the conflicts in former Yugoslavia, but they never really became very convincing.

A common explanation of the Balkan conflict originated in a juridical–administrative understanding of the nature of the conflict. After Slovenia and Croatia had chosen to withdraw from the Yugoslav federation, the administrative unit of Bosnia-Herzegovina was in turn; this region was now internationally recognised as a new state. In 1991, a referendum was arranged in the region. The majority of the inhabitants voted for the establishment of a Moslem–Croat–Serb state, although the Bosnian Serbs were opposed to this and boycotted the referendum. When the majority in the newly proclaimed republic refused to allow the Bosnian Serbs to create their own state on the grounds of people’s sovereignty, the Serbs took the matter into their own hands and used their temporary military superiority for establishing a contiguous region of Serbian sovereignty. That the Serbs took liberties in this way was the cause of the Serbs being branded as aggressors. The military superiority of the Serbs in the first phase of the war, and also their bloody way of waging war, was later interpreted as evidence that they had to be the aggressors. As an alternative to an ethnically based division, the desirability of a non-discriminating multi-ethnic state was spoken of. The fact that the three groups had put up with each other during Communist rule was taken as evidence that this was natural in a state based on democracy, as well. Those who had never protested against Tito’s relocations of people, made to avoid opposition from ethnically homogenous nations, now protested with moral indignation against what was called "ethnic cleansing" and compared to the earlier actions of the Nazis. The expulsions were, without reservations, presented as unique in post-war Europe, in spite of serious studies showing something quite different. (Cf. Rummel 1994, Ch. 14: *Tito’s Slaughterhouse*.)

A characteristic of this conception of conflict is that it fits strikingly well into a neo-liberal ideology, based on an understanding of states as juridically regulated communities of rights, where the majority of individuals within the state legitimises the unity through democratic elections. Negative characterisations of the opponent’s motives have also contributed to the legitimisation of just this conception of conflict. Terms like "ethnic nationalism" have recurred in the commentaries, both as a characterisation of the conditions and as an implicit explanation of the evil of nationalism.

The first problem with this interpretation is that not all parts in the conflict have identified with it. Furthermore, it did not really generate realistic solutions. To a certain extent, it could even contribute to the view that only weapons could end the war. The Serbs in particular felt stigmatised, and had little to lose in Western regard by an exclusive focus on military strategy. (Cf. Huntington, p. 285f.)

From the Second World War, there have existed many ties between Serbs and Norwegian. But also for other reasons we might have expected Norwegian politicians to represent another understanding of the situation than the one thrust forward by German foreign administration. The Norwegians might have assumed a more realistic, which in this case means nationalistic, understanding of the conflict. The reason that specifically Norwegians ought to have had the prerequisites for such an understanding has to do with the experiences connected to the 17<sup>th</sup> of May, the Norwegian National Day.

The celebration of the 17<sup>th</sup> of May was not introduced as a holiday for celebrating banners and brass bands, barbecues and booze. The 17<sup>th</sup> of May was to be a yearly reminder of the events of 1814, and of the preconditions for the birth of a nation. To repeat: After the defeat to Napoleon's imperialism, the Scandinavian peninsula was at a meeting of the great powers in Kiel proclaimed a new political union. The majority of the population of the union – the Swedes – was undoubtedly content with this arrangement, and would accept it as legal. But the Norwegians, a minority in the new state and at that time merely an *ethnie* with a certain historical identity, opposed the formation of the union. When the Norwegian opposition did not succeed by political arguments, mobilisation took place. During the spring of 1814, while the Swedish main army was still on the Continent, the Norwegians used their temporary military superiority to establish a constitution for autonomous rule on their own territory, on the grounds of people's sovereignty – to the great displeasure of the Swedish marshal von Essen. Through the subsequent events, the Norwegians were luckier than the Serbs; martial culture was different, and the boundaries between the peoples more stable. Nevertheless, it is hard to ignore the parallels between the political principles the Norwegians referred to in 1814 and those by which the Serbs acted in 1992.

When this example is put forth, it is done, among other reasons, in order to illustrate that the nationalistic principle does not necessarily imply a shutting ourselves in from involvement with the rest of the world. On the contrary, Norwegian experiences with a successful nationalistic modernisation could have been exploited more, as a resource for understanding the conflicts of other peoples, and maybe also for suggesting possible solutions that are difficult to see for those who are in the middle of the conflict.

But if the proposal of this kind of interpretations is to be legitimate, we probably first need a re-evaluation of the views of democracy and nationalism that became current during the Cold War.

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