
Democracy and Nationalism: Twin Children of the Sovereignty of the People

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Abstract

Democracy as a form of rule is universal. Since only a small number of people wish to see the creation of a global state, all democracies remain separate from each other for an unforeseeable period of time, with a limited *demos* (people) and state territory. The size and spatial scope of a *demos* cannot be founded on democratic principles. The first function of nationalism is to determine which people should belong to a *demos* in an existing state, or one which is to be restored or newly created. When people attain the right to free public speech, gatherings and associations, and to the election of legislative people's representative bodies and governments, they create the opportunity for the self-constitution of a people that wishes to attain its own nation state. In this regard, liberalisation and democratisation threaten the existence of autocratic states that are not borne by a nation. Nationalism, i.e. the concept of the nation state, and democracy are not opposites, but rather twin children of the notion of sovereignty of the people.

Of the actual or supposed nation states currently in existence, only 18 were created through the transformation of princely states into nation states, whereby most of them were forced to abdicate a large amount of territory to separatist national movements. Only three nation states were created as a result of the unification of states. All remaining 174 states owe their existence to separatist nationalism. The most prevalent type of nation state is that of the linguistic nation state. In the age of nationalism, attempts are being made both to push the linguistic border towards the state border, as well as to adjust the state border so that it approximates the linguistic border. While the number of languages overall in the world has decreased dramatically, the number of state languages has risen. 129 different official languages are spoken in 195 states. A small number of language groups is divided into several territorial nations, however. This applies

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above all to speakers of Arabic and the former European imperial languages in America and Africa.

Linguistic nationalism can be explained as a modern phenomenon resulting from the increasing social intermeshing and division of labour caused by industrialisation, urbanisation, literacy, secularisation and bureaucratisation. The more people become dependent in their work on their written language abilities, the more their knowledge of the dominant language gains exceptional importance for their chances on the labour market and their social position. This encourages either linguistic assimilation to the dominant language group, or efforts to join with others in order to make one's own native tongue the dominant language in a separate state.

2.1 The Nation as a Community by Will in State Politics

With the dissemination of the notion of the nation state from France and the USA to other countries, the original narrow connection between nationalism and democracy, the nation state and civic-liberal constitutionalism was further loosened. To an increasing degree, nationalism focussed on achieving a purely state political goal, namely to obtain a separate state for a nation by will, and in socio-political terms became entirely neutral. Since then, nationalism can be either democratic or autocratic, liberal, conservative, socialist, communist, fascist, Islamist, etc. This paved the way for a use of language which began with the founding of the League of Nations: people, nation and state became synonymous, with a certain tendency to name the institutions "state" (or "nation") and the people who are members of the state as "people" (or "nation"). In Anglo-Saxon languages, countries are sometimes also referred to as "nation", while in German and in many other languages, the word "nation" refers solely to a group of people (the French, Germans, etc.).

If by contrast one takes a nation to be a community by will in state politics, then the question of which groups of people wish to create a common state, such as the members of an existing state (state maintaining nationalism) or those in several states (unification nationalism) or in a border region of a state (separation nationalism or secessionism) is an empirical one. These groups can consist of people with a different mother tongue and of different origin (multilingual, polyethnic nations), as well as people from one single language group. Nationalism has an inclusive, integrative function and an exclusive function: it brings together people from different regions and confessions, while excluding others.

Since the entire population of a region will probably never have a common state political will, one can refer to nations only in approximation to an empirically specifiable or probable majority will among a population,¹ which during the course

¹ In cases in which a population is politically apathetic and disinterested, a politically active minority can also articulate a national will for a large group. During the nineteenth century, it is likely that only a minority among the linguistic-ethnic Poles were nationally conscious, and had a will to create their own state. Even so, it is correct to speak of a (stateless) Polish nation.

of time can be fluctuating or fixed, and which is borne by a very large or only extremely slight majority. There are minorities living in every country who have a divergent national will. Nations always also contain people who have no voice, such as small children or adults who don't care in which state they live. The nation to which they belong is thus determined externally by the population among which they find themselves. Finally, these same people can also be claimed by competing nationalisms. Nations by will are created first in the heads of individual people before their concept of the people who belong to a nation (the reference group for its nationalism) and of a state to be formed incorporates first minorities of the designated nation and finally its majority. Accordingly, it can be claimed that a mass embracing nationalism, understood here as being national consciousness or a common will to form a separate state, constitutes a nation. And it is not the case, as is claimed in the older literature on the subject of nations, that slumbering nations held in spiritual darkness are awakening, experiencing a national rebirth and thus spawning a nationalism.

Some nation building remains frozen on the drawing board of fantasists or in the imagination of minorities of the reference group intended for the nation formation, thus in particular the large pan-national projects which aspire to unite all Slavs, Scandinavians, Arabs, Africans, the Turkic peoples, Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus etc. first in a single nation and then in a state. However, smaller projects such as those for a Kasubian, Bavarian, Padanian or Siberian nation have not to date progressed beyond the planning stage. If the minorities who wish to form a nation from a reference group designated for the purpose attain state power, which frequently occurs through the support of other states, they attempt to use their state and educational power to nationalise (thus creating a national consciousness) the people selected for the formation of the nation. They usually do so using a carrot and stick method, whereby the stick in empirical terms frequently generates something completely different from the national consciousness that is aspired to, namely a rebellious consciousness against the existing state. If there is no progression beyond an attempt by "national enterprisers" who are in opposition or who are underpinning the state—usually known in the language of the national movements as "awakeners" or "fathers" of the nation—the result is merely perceived nations, or putative nations. The Soviet, Yugoslav, Czechoslovak and GDR nations were of this putative type, which were anchored solely in the consciousness of ruling minorities and of the UN, but not in the political awareness of the majority of the respective population. Since in most states there is no interest in knowing precisely or imparting to the general public how broad agreement is among the population, in particular in border regions, to its existence, it is in many cases extremely difficult to determine which state is in fact a nation state and which is not, since it is not underpinned by a state-wide nation by will.

Nations are historically created social units. They are changeable. National consciousness can shift during the course of time, and up to a certain extent is also subject to economic and political advantage calculations. Thus for example, after 1945, the majority of national Germans from Vienna to Bregenz became national Austrians. Wars frequently have the effect of welding a nation together

while at the same time being divisive in people's consciousness and emotions. Only the handful of states that have continued their existence over hundreds of years have been able to develop a nation-building force; otherwise, the states have come and gone, although the ethnic groups that have formed nations in the modern era have remained in place for a relatively long time, even if they were robbed of their own state for over a century (as was the case with the Poles) or were refused their own state entirely. Where people switched state citizenship more frequently during their lifetime than their best Sunday clothes, it was not possible for identification with a state or a state nation to develop.

All three narrower concepts of the nation state (the statist, ethnicistic, voluntaristic, i.e. the legal, cultural and political) which do not declare every state to be a nation state make a clear differentiation between the nation state and the imperial state. Dynastic empires were based on rule by a small, frequently polyethnic, social class. During the nineteenth century, they transformed in western and northern Europe into national empires; imperial foreign rule became the cause, the "mission" of a nation, while the nation state became the core, the "motherland" of an empire. The half-hearted attempts to bring a common polyethnic, multilingual national consciousness to the subjects of these empires failed entirely. The nationalism of the peoples who felt oppressed, and who aspired to their own nation state, turned against national imperialism. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the second half of the twentieth century, this nationalism perhaps definitively delegitimized all forms of imperial foreign rule, even if it has not ended everywhere, and to make the nation state the only legitimate state. However, in many nation states, a residue of imperialism remains wherever a larger nation asserts majority rule over marginal areas of the state in which smaller nations wish to have their own state (e.g. Kosovo) or national groups wish to annex their settlement area to their co-national neighbour state (e.g. parts of Northern Ireland). National majority rule of this nature can even be asserted in constitutional democracies, even though the national minorities experience it as being a majority dictatorship to the extent that they have no opportunity to have their interests represented in elections, parliaments and the government.

2.2 Democratisation as a Condition of Nationalism and Successful State Formation

It continues to be the case in many parts of the world that states are held together by autocratic minority rule alone. Where national autocracies, whether they are traditional monarchies or modern dictatorships, are supported solely by social minorities, a process of democratisation simply changes the political and socio-economic order, as in Poland. However, democratisation creates a risk for a state wherever the existence of a state nation is claimed only by a national minority that underpins the state. Democratisation is a threat to the existence of a state when significant parts of the population living in border regions wish to have their own state.

However, democratisation is not the cause but only the precondition of the dissolution of some states. After all, democratisation permits free expression of opinion, public gatherings and the political self-organisation of the population, i.e. also the formation of separate national organisations, parties and movements. The democratisation of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia amounted to the dissolution of these states, since during the late communist process of disintegration no Soviet, Yugoslav or Czechoslovak parties worthy of mention were created, but only separate national parties. While in Belgium there are also no Belgian parties, only Flemish and Walloon ones, these parties are for now able to agree on Belgian parliamentary and governmental majorities, since Belgian national consciousness is still sufficiently strong.

Successful national secessionism not only requires a weakness in the existing state, but usually also needs sponsorship from major powers which maintain an interest in the dissolution or reduction in size of an existing state, and which apply political and military pressure on behalf of a national secessionist movement that for its own part is unable to provide sufficient strength for a civilian or armed uprising in order to force down the apparatus of force, the military and police, of an existing state. Almost all states invoke the principle of territorial integrity and tend to negatively judge national movements in public, condemning them as nationalist movements, or to disparage them as being purely ethnic or ethnopolitical ones. In everyday political polemics, nationalism is the patriotism of those who think differently about the order of states. For political analysis, however, the issue in the vote on Scottish independence in September 2014, for example, was whether British or Scottish nationalism is more firmly anchored among the population of the country.

2.3 Nation State Formation Through State Transformation, State Unification and State Separation

The transformation of princely states into nation states has only succeeded in four cases in the world: France, Portugal, Japan—although its colonies were not included in the formation of the nation—and Nepal. Only at the last moment of national imperialism, as it were, was an attempt made to incorporate Algeria into the nation state of France and the Portuguese colonies into the nation state of Portugal.² While in Spain a single core nation was created, two other nations were also established at the same time that tended towards state separation. In a further 13 princely states, nations were also formed from the core population, although these states were forced to cede large areas (e.g. the Netherlands, Sweden,

² Algeria already became a *Département* in 1848. However, it was not until 1947 that the Algerians, who were given the status of a subject (*sujet*) in 1875, were granted French state citizenship. In 1951, Portugal classified its colonies as overseas provinces and declared itself a “multi-racial and pluricontinental nation” (*nação multirracial e pluricontinental*), without adopting the population as Portuguese state citizens.

Great Britain) or very large areas (Austria, Turkey, Russia, China) to separatist movements, frequently only after long battles and wars. In some cases, they are still fighting such movements today. Overall, there are therefore only 18 princely states which through full or partial transformation into nation states and in part with huge losses of territory (even without taking into account colonial possessions) which have succeeded in surviving into the twenty-first century, of which ten alone are in Europe, only seven in Asia and one in Africa: France, Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, Great Britain, Denmark, Sweden, Austria, Russia, Turkey, Japan, China, Thailand, Nepal, Afghanistan, Iran, Oman and Ethiopia. San Marino is the only example of a patrician republic that has become a nation state. Only three nation states in the world were created through the unification of pre-modern states: Switzerland, Italy and Germany. The USA, Tanzania and Cameroon were also established following the unification of only short-lived states, although essentially, they are a product of national separatism in colonial empires.

Most states on earth, 173 out of 195, including most territorial states in Europe (32 out of 45)³ accordingly have national secessionism or independence separatism,⁴ in other words a separatist nation and state formation, to thank for their existence. This does not preclude the fact that large parts of the population in many countries have only developed a national consciousness and a modern political commitment to democratic or autocratic regimes per se following the formation of the state. It is a decisive factor that they did not offer sustained resistance to the national activists who were forming the state by attempting to maintain the imperial state.

Separatist nationalism was frequently only successful after terrible wars and mass murders and unbearable suffering on the part of the people, and could only rarely assert itself using peaceful, non-violent means. The separate nation and state formation within the empires has essentially taken two forms. On the one hand, a nation emerged *cum grano salis* from a language group, or several regional nations emerged from within a language group, whether due to geographical separation by seas, through a religious split within the language group passed down from the time of pre-modern rule (as is the case e.g. between the Dutch and the Flemish, or between Serbs, Croats and Bosniacs), or due to the weight of a longstanding tradition of a separate state (e.g. in the cantons of Switzerland, Austria, Luxembourg, Moldova or Montenegro). While many nations by will include linguistic minorities, very clearly separated language areas are only in very few cases united by an overarching multilingual national consciousness (as with

³ Not included are the five small states of Europe: Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco, San Marino and Vatican City.

⁴ This is different to annexation separatism, which aims to annex a piece of the territory of an existing state into another existing one (e.g. the Sudeten territories of the first Czechoslovak Republic), or into a state that does not yet exist (e.g. Poland in 1918). Annexation separatism usually requires irredentism (the striving to “liberate” national “brothers and sisters” or only a territory per se in a neighbouring state) in the national reference state to which annexation is intended to follow.

Switzerland, Cameroon and Vanuatu). Many multilingual nations of this type are extremely fragile, such as the Belgian, Canadian and Indian nation, let alone the Bosnian-Herzegovinian, Cypriot or, as was still being claimed until just a few years ago, the Serb nation (including the population of Kosovo). Furthermore, the majority nations of the transformed western and northern European empires, in which the administrative language had already standardised since the sixteenth century and where long before 1789, the beginnings of a national consciousness were already emerging among the nobility and the bourgeoisie,⁵ are also separated from their neighbouring countries by their own respective national language, and not solely by a historical state border. In France also, which continues to be regarded as a model for a constitutionally defined nation, there has been an ongoing awareness of the linguistic (as well as the ethnic) connotation of the nation. The pre-state concept of the nation,⁶ which has been passed down since antiquity, and which originally related to smaller tribes (*nationes*, *gentes*) with a common language and origin, had become regionalised during the Middle Ages, and was now used to describe territorial associations. However, despite all the prevalent regionalisation⁷ and state dominated concept of the nation, a linguistic connotation remained in the French and English usage of the term. Thus, in the eighteenth century, in the *Dictionnaire académique*, the term *nation* was defined as being “constituted by all inhabitants of a state, a country, who live under the same laws and who use the same language”.⁸ In German and even more clearly in Russian (*natsiya*), the meaning of “nation” that was closer to its linguistic origin remained dominant, while in French and English, the significance of the state was emphasised.

2.4 The Linguistic Nation State as the Dominant Type of Nation State

The large mother tongue areas to which the European imperial languages of English, Spanish, Portuguese, French and Dutch expanded could be divided into between 40 and 50 regional nation states, while the around 150 states remaining have a more or less strong individual mono- or multilingual national character.

⁵ Greenfeld (1992) claims that as early as the sixteenth century in England, the historically first modern nation emerged, with a national consciousness and nationalism, p. 14.

⁶ On the historic changes to the many meanings and nuances of the terms “people” and “nation” in German, see the detailed discussion by Kosellek (1992).

⁷ Even during the French Revolution, individual regions of France were still described as “nations”, according to Fehrenbach (1986, p. 95).

⁸ Fehrenbach (1986, p. 77).

2.4.1 The Distribution of the Types of Nation State in the Regions of the World

In Europe, there is an astonishing degree of correlation between the language map and the state map. In most states, the population speaks its own national language. Only a handful of states combine two, three or four more or less equally valid language groups (Switzerland, Belgium), which usually have territorial dominance. In several other states, there are also regional linguistic majorities with legally undefined and thus more easily fluctuating language borders, which represent a minority in the state overall (Macedonia, Belarus, Ukraine). The latter are more susceptible to linguistic national conflicts than the former, as was shown in Cyprus before 1974, in Bosnia-Herzegovina before 1995 and in Ukraine since 2014.

America is divided into five regions with dominant European languages of the former colonial powers, primarily the Spanish region (with 18 states), the English region (with 14 states) and the Portuguese region (Brazil), also the French region (Haiti, the member state of Quebec and overseas territories of France) and the Dutch region (Surinam and overseas territories of the Netherlands). In America, the European settlers became the dominant majority over the original population, which largely assimilated itself linguistically to the ruling colonial language group and merged with it ethnically. When nation states were formed, territorial nationalism on the basis of the inner-state division of the colonial empires dominated almost exclusively. Indigenous and newly created mixed language groups (such as that of the Creole speakers) did not lead to state-forming nationalism.

Only the break in civilisation with the First World War and the influence of the nation states of America cautiously paved the way for the decolonisation of Africa and Oceania before the Second World War, followed by the anti-colonialism of the world powers, the USA and the Soviet Union, broke the resistance of the European colonial powers and paved the way for the formation of numerous states in these three parts of the world and in the Caribbean. In Africa, as in America, the states were formed through separatist territorial nationalism based on the usually highly random colonial administrative units, which took no consideration of the ethnic groups and languages of the native population. Aside from the Arab-speaking region in northern Africa and in parts of western Asia, to date in Sub-Saharan Africa, none of the indigenous languages has succeeded in fully replacing the function of the imperial languages as official state languages, which accordingly also do not exude the same nation-building power as in America. The people underpinning them are not settlers from Europe, but local elites who were socialised in the imperial languages. These post-colonial elites regarded themselves as being tasked, following the creation of the state, with also encouraging the creation of a nation among the population by expanding the infrastructure, economic and social integration, education in the state language and above all political education and indoctrination. In these countries, the pre-colonial order of rule, and that of the colonial period, which lasted only a few generations, together with the low degree of socio-economic development and integration, only promoted to a low degree the

merging of the numerous languages (dialects) and their development to become modern written languages, and thus also the merging of smaller ethnic groups to become larger ones. Thus in the Sub-Saharan states, the development of a national consciousness that underpins the state has been made far more difficult. Some of the states did not become functional in the long term at all, and were shaken by violent ethnic and religious conflicts. Some states broke up into several areas of rule (Somalia, Congo, etc.). However, here it was not new and smaller nation states founded on language and ethnicity that were created, but frequently only short-lived ruling structures of tribes and clans, or simply criminal gangs who had neither the ability nor the will to form a nation state. However, in legal terms, the state fabric has to date only been altered slightly. Zanzibar joined Tanganyika, and South Sudan broke away from Sudan. Morocco occupied the largest portion of Western Sahara without international approval. Numerous separatist movements, which for a time were able to control large areas, were suppressed in an extremely bloody fashion, as was recently the case with the Tuareg in Mali.

In Asia, the borders of pre-colonial, usually multilingual and polyethnic empires, of which only a small number were able to avoid colonial rule, played an important role, although those drawn by the colonial powers did so too. Overall, pre-colonial economic and social development and institutionalisation of the state as well as ethnic and linguistic merging between related ethnic groups and the development of written languages and cultures has progressed further than in Africa, so that here it has been possible to create larger, more compact nations. However, since many states are still autocratic, it can be assumed that their democratisation will be accompanied by national separatist movements.

In Oceania, the linguistic-ethnic diversity of the population, aside from the two former British settlement colonies of Australia and New Zealand, as well as the large distances between the islands, helped cause the British and former German colonies, which for decades had been transformed into international mandate and trust territories, to be divided into several very small island states and nations.

How many of the 195 states that are in existence today are really now nation states in line with the above descriptions, i.e. states that are desired by the overwhelming majority of their citizens and whose territorial integrity is not questioned by smaller nations or national groups in marginal areas of the state? It is not possible to give a reliable, empirically proven answer to this question, since states, even democracies, have no interest in really researching or even making it known how many of their citizens wish to have the existing state with its state territory and its state people, or desire a unification of their state with one or more others, or to see it divided into two or more states. The fact that the Soviet, Yugoslav, Czechoslovak and GDR nations were only houses of cards was one that only very few contemporaries and even academic experts were willing to accept in 1988. Many examples could be given of nationally fragile states. Contrary to the widely held view, a single language is not a condition of stable statehood and stable national consciousness. Switzerland is certainly one of the most nationally well-established states in the world. Even so, however, weak or insufficient common national consciousness is very frequently linked to linguistic, ethnic or religious-

confessional fault lines among citizens of a state. It is worth asking how this can be explained.

2.4.2 The Decline in Languages and Simultaneous Increase in State Languages

No study has been made of the current number of politically active and relevant national movements in the world, i.e. movements that speak for large, nationally mobilised parts of a language or ethno-national group that represent the majority of a border region population, which is therefore hypothetically capable of separation. Groups of this nature would be in a position to join another state or to form their own independent state, a federated member state or an autonomous territory. If one wished to calculate the number of hypothetical aspirants to their own independent nation statehood among the number of language groups in the world, one would have to have the following information. If one sets the condition that future states should first not have fewer inhabitants than the currently smallest state with a population of 10,000, and second that they should have at least two neighbouring states or border a sea that offers free access to other states—at present, only two states are fully surrounded by the territory of another state: San Marino and Lesotho—third, that they must be desired by the majority of their inhabitants. If one further and fourthly requires the will to form a separate state to be restricted essentially to groups with their own mother tongue, then only relatively few stateless language groups would have a hypothetical chance to become independent.

The number of languages still spoken today has drastically decreased over the last 200 years to around 10,000, since their speakers have been amalgamated into other language groups, died out as a result of a mass outbreak of disease or were simply killed. However, in 2000, approximately 6417 living languages—in other words, languages used in everyday life—were still counted, although most of them had only very few speakers.⁹ The difficulty of making a statistical analysis is partly due to the fact that the concept of “language” is highly controversial, and language is extremely difficult to differentiate from a dialect of the same language. Sometimes the claim that a separate language exists is a purely political matter. It is assumed that in 2050, there will only be 4500 languages left, with just 3000 still in

⁹ Only 273 languages were spoken by more than one million people, although in 1982 between 1 and 1000 people, with the remaining 4162 being spoken by between more than 1000 and one million people, in Haarmann (2006, p. 326). According to Crystal (2003), who refers to C.F. and F.M. Voegelin, before 1977 there were 138 languages with over one million speakers, 258 with over 100,000 and 597 with over 10,000 speakers. Crystal calculates that there are currently just over 4000 languages in existence. The hypothetical maximum figure for linguistic nations would thus be 993, although it is unclear to what extent they live in a compact territory and in reality are able to form a small state of up to 10,000 inhabitants. Brown and Ogilvie (2009, p. XVII) talk of an estimated 6800 languages and more.

existence 50 years later. Only a small proportion of all these languages are written languages,¹⁰ regarding which no figures can be found. In 1992, the Bible, a document which has perhaps been translated into most languages, was available in its entirety or in parts in 2018 languages,¹¹ of which several are no longer used in everyday life. Of all the languages on earth, only 129 are official languages in the 195 states, several of which are only used in a legally separate part of the state, such as in a federative member state, an autonomous territory or in individual circles and communities. English is the official language in 51 states, French in 26, Arabic in 21, Spanish in 15, Portuguese and German in seven and Italian in four. All other 122 languages are the official language in just one or two states.¹² Almost all of these 122 languages have the success of linguistic national movements and the huge increase in the number of states since 1815 and 1900 described earlier to thank for their existence. It can be assumed that the number of potential language nations that have been stateless to date, but which could form their own state, could at best be between 100 and 300 at the most.

The nation member states and territories that already exist today within nation states, which almost always have their own linguistic-ethnic basis, have not yet been counted. For them (as for example with Tatarstan), it is not the above mentioned de-facto condition of two external borders on land or a sea border that applies, as it does to independent states. Thus, the number of potential national state entities of all types (independent states, federated states, autonomous territories) increases to between perhaps 150 and 400. A tolerant nationalities policy is a very decisive determining factor when it comes to deciding whether the frustrated national aspirations within the existing states can be satisfied through a decentralisation of state power, or whether they are driven to radicalisation and demands for independence through centralist, national-imperial politics of the state leadership.

2.5 The Politicisation of Language as a Result of Modernisation

Why, however, are language groups, and not random regional groups, dialect groups, religious confession communities, groups with the same skin colour or even entire continental populations, so frequently nation forming? Why do

¹⁰ Their existence is documented for example by the presence of a literary work, a dictionary and a grammar book.

¹¹ In 1800, parts of the Bible had only been issued in 68 languages. From that point on until today, the number of translations has rapidly and continuously increased. See United Bible Societies (1993, p. 6).

¹² My own compilation based on information from the Fischer Weltalmanach 1997 and 2014, the CIA factbook of the world: <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/in.html> and from Indian languages: <http://india.gov.org/culture/language/language.htm>. These figures are inadequate, since they do not take into account the regional official languages with limited validity in Russia, China and some other states.

“national enterprisers” not dream of a nation, and “imagine”¹³ an Alpine nation or a Danube nation, i.e. the inhabitants of natural areas such as mountains, valleys, plains or river landscapes? Peter Glotz even claimed that language groups were nothing other than a feature classification such as non-swimmers or driving licence owners.¹⁴ Why did some multilingual nations ultimately remain only putative nations, failed national projects such as that of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia or Czechoslovakia? Although these official “constructs” were advocated by powerful interested parties that had vast institutional, economic, police, military, medial and schooling resources, while those in opposition were only able to mobilise extremely modest resources in support of their separate national “constructs”, and yet were able to win over majorities in the population to their cause. Why are many multilingual or polyethnic nations highly fragile entities, such as the Cypriot, Belgian, Canadian and perhaps also the British and Spanish nations, quite aside from many African and Asian nations? Why are so many of these multilingual and polyethnic nations put into doubt by separatist linguistic and ethno-national movements? Why could the UN, NATO and the EU, as well as legions of political scientists with a purely statist view not persuade over 90 % of Kosovars that they belong to the Serbian nation because they were citizens of the Republic of Serbia? In other words: why since the nineteenth century has the politicisation of the ethnic groups or language groups, which is the prerequisite for the much maligned ethnicising of politics, occurred so frequently?

Ethnos, ethnîe, people or nation in the sense of a group with a common name that stands for the same language, culture and origin, is not the same as a language group. Most people only know more detailed information about ancestors from just a few generations, and thus cannot be certain that they share their origins with other members of their people, who for the most part remain entirely unfamiliar to them throughout their lives, but can only assume that this is the case. However, common origin is not only a myth arbitrarily created by national “enterprisers” during the nineteenth or twentieth centuries, but is a social reality in the sense of compacted family relations. By contrast, it is a pure myth that the ethnic groups of today are units that have been endogamous and in relational terms closed off from each other, and which were created by God or nature. All the peoples of today have been created by the original ethnic groups mixing together.

At first glance, differing origins are only recognisable on the basis of physical appearance with a high or approximate degree of probability with a very small number of interrelated peoples. The most important and frequently used distinctive feature between most peoples is language, even if the few imperial languages that have become the mother tongue for most Americans and many Africans make it necessary to emphasise other distinctive features between the ethnic groups.

¹³ See Anderson (1993). The title of the German edition, “Die Erfindung der Nation” (which translates as “The invention of the Nation”), is misleading. The subject discussed is “imagined communities” or “cultural artefacts”.

¹⁴ Glotz (1990, p. 50).

Although the large colonial language areas in America and Africa have been divided into national-territorial entities, the border between them has always (except in Canada) been a national border. In Europe, also, the language group does not correlate in all cases with the ethnic self- or external identification, or even with its own national and state political understanding, although this is usually so. In 1882, Ernest Renan used the nice phrase: “La langue invite à se réunir; elle n’y force pas.” (Language invites one to unite, but does not force one to do so).¹⁵ Most people who speak Portuguese, Czech, Slovenian, Greek, etc. as their mother tongue count themselves as belonging to the relevant people and to the relevant nation, whether or not it has its own state. Thus, the differences between the languages throughout the world are assigned an eminent national and state political significance. Within many democratic, multilingual states, particularly also in Switzerland, language borders are also consolidated by inner-state political self-determination by means of federal and communal boundaries.

Nationalism founded on ancestry still plays a certain role wherever the linguistic assimilation of a people has not yet been completed, and memories of its own, linguistically separate, past have not yet entirely faded, when regional and confessional division furthermore nurtures such memories. Thus, the Irish and the Scottish, despite their extensive Anglicisation, have not become English. However, across the world, it is linguistic nationalism that dominates alongside territorial nationalism, and not nationalism founded on ancestry.

Linguistic and ethnic or even national group bonds are not a relic of traditional, pre-modern societies, but can in quite the opposite way be traced back to the modernisation of society. Since time immemorial, there has always been an awareness of the linguistic and ethnic differences between people, which has led to the formation of communities and to an infinite number of non-violent and not infrequently also violent conflicts.¹⁶ However, as a general rule, this was limited to local and small regional areas. Occasionally, it could also contribute to a change of dynasty in states, only legitimising the existence of very small, pre-state ruling groups, but not those in large empires.

Over thousands of years, most speakers of a language had no notion of the size of the geographical area in which their language or its closely related dialects was spoken. It was only later that private creators of written languages, and occasionally also creators encouraged by the state, incorporated the dialects into a process of standardisation. In many places, this process is still being implemented today.¹⁷ And during the last few decades, languages have emerged which had not existed before, such as Afrikaans and several Creole languages, with attempts being made to standardise them through dictionaries, grammar rules and literature. Even in the

¹⁵ Renan (1992, p. 49).

¹⁶ Some examples of this can be found e.g. in Lemberg (1964, pp. 38–42).

¹⁷ Thus, the language created by Heinrich Schmid in 1982, Rumantsch Grischun, is designed to bridge the five Rhaeto-Romance languages as a standard language. To date, there has been no uniform Kurdish language, only between three and five different Kurdish languages.

twentieth century, there were still areas in Europe in which people referred to their language and ethnic identity simply as “from here”, thus restricting themselves to a small regional area. It is a known fact that many names given to peoples originally mean nothing other than simply “people” or “humans”. Historians like to conduct research into the first written mention of the name of languages and ethnic groups in documents, and the first signs of a “national” consciousness among some literate individuals, but most people who in retrospect can be described as Germans or French, for example, would probably only have learned after the revolution in the Kingdom of France, and after the immense population movements during the course of the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars during the early nineteenth century or later that they could be identified as such.

The creation of today’s groups and regions with a written language has been strongly influenced by human arbitrariness and historically random decisions taken by countless people. It has neither been determined by nature, nor has it been controlled by long-term planning. However, it is also not a product of arbitrary “inventions” or “constructs” on the part of a few intellectuals, but rather of collective steps taken along long paths of development. It is resultant from countless uncoordinated and in some cases coordinated human actions and omissions. Every so often, historical bifurcations can be identified, at which a very small number of people decided that a common written language, or several closely related but separate written languages should be created. Each creation of a language, an ethnic group, a nation or a nation state has unmistakeably unique features. Even so, historic trends can be discovered and named in which generalisation is possible.

2.6 An Economical Explanation of Linguistic Nationalism

The creation and dissemination of nationalism, i.e. the nation state principle, cannot be separated from the creation of the capitalist and in the twentieth century also the bureaucratic-socialist mode of production. Since 1949, a third of humanity has lived under communist rule in a bureaucratic-socialist society. Many researchers of nationalism who were critical of capitalism allowed themselves to be blinded by the official internationalist ideology and failed to recognise the processes that in non-capitalist and capitalist societies alike strengthened the older forms of nationalism or even occasionally generated new ones.¹⁸ Modernisation is a common feature of both societies.

During the course of the process, which in historical terms is very far from being complete, of the industrialisation,¹⁹ urbanisation, secularisation, bureaucratisation and politicisation of the global population, an increasing number of people with

¹⁸ See in detail the case studies on nation state formation in Jahn (2008–2009).

¹⁹ The transition from an agrarian to an industrial society is the focus of discussion by Gellner (2006, pp. 38–57).

different mother tongues come into social contact. With the extension of primary education and increases in literacy, an ability to use the written language has become increasingly important for the success of individuals on the extremely specialised labour market, which demands intensive cooperation. It is only since the nineteenth century that language has become the most important work tool for an ever larger number of people, initially for educated urban citizens, the clergy and some members of the nobility, and increasingly since the end of the nineteenth century also for workers and farmers. In modern society, the social position of people depends essentially on their verbal and written linguistic skills. However, it is necessary to speak the “correct” language, and not any random one, if one wishes to have one’s skills recognised on the labour market. The problem can provisionally be resolved by learning the dominant language as a foreign language. However, one remains identifiable as an outsider and social climber for life, as well as being relatively isolated socially. In an environment where a different language is spoken, one feels slightly linguistically handicapped. Being able to speak a foreign language also usually does not have the same quality as one’s mother tongue, and provides no comparable psychological sense of security when dealing with others. Accents in pronunciation lead one to being identified throughout one’s life as being an outsider and not fully belonging.

The problem of the disadvantage to linguistic minorities²⁰ caused by the economy of language can simply be resolved by their linguistic assimilation in the following generation, and only in extremely rare cases through perfect dual or multilingualism from early childhood onwards. One alternative to linguistic assimilation is the attempt, together with others, to make one’s own mother tongue the socially dominant language, first in one’s more immediate environment, and finally in one’s own state. Protagonists for the formation of their own nation state are initially usually only a handful of representatives of professions that are highly dependent on the people’s language, and are therefore in most cases not the professors and bishops who have been socialised in the dominant language, but primary and middle school teachers, lower members of the clergy, journalists, writers, doctors and lawyers, as well as traders.²¹ With the inclusion of workers and farmers into the written language education system and into work processes that require a broader level of communication, the urban civic desire to create a nation state becomes a general one within society. From civic nationalism there

²⁰ The many authors who feel that nationalism and separatism can be explained by socio-economic inequality between ethnic groups, and that it can accordingly be eradicated through economic compensation measures, usually fail to ask why inequality within an ethnic group frequently is not met with the same degree of anger or lead to regional separatism, for example, in the way that inequality between ethnic groups does. They also fail to tackle the issue of the inevitable linguistic-economic roots of this inequality, even if the other reasons for its emergence, including ethnic prejudice, were to be eradicated.

²¹ In 1985, Miroslav Hroch developed an influential three-stage thesis on the development of national movements among small groups through to the broad mass of the reference group for the formation of a nation, see also idem (2015).

emerges a mass nationalism that extends to all social classes and strata, from which the upper social layers that underpin the princely states and empires endeavour to extract themselves if need be.

Even the best professional insights are almost worthless if they need to be applied in a foreign language and the expert cannot be provided with an expensive interpreter. Despite the liberal legal framework in the European Union and extreme differences in terms of wage levels and the number of unemployed, language barriers continue to be an important obstacle to migration within the EU. It contributes to the fact that the group that speaks the dominant language remains in the more prosperous countries a social majority and that they in part linguistically assimilate the immigrants. Naturally, today, social welfare reasons such as the creation of equal opportunities on the employment market are given for the policy of linguistic assimilation in nurseries and primary schools, and not ethno-national ones. The increasing state domination of a large part of children's early education and upbringing, which just a few years ago was maligned as being communist, is today propagated as being a means of social integration, while at the same time forcing the immigrants to assimilate in terms of their language. Currently, however, the rate of migration is higher than the rate of assimilation, so that in the long term, in some places in Europe, the linguistic majority ratios will begin to change, giving a boost to linguistic nationalism first among the longstanding residents, and then among the immigrants of the third or fourth generation who have not or only partially been assimilated. European integration and globalisation thus promote nationalism, and do not reduce it, as so many people would like to believe.

When one's own mother tongue becomes the dominant state language, those who speak this language also become the group that dominates in the state and generally also in society, and their social position rises as opposed to those who speak the language that has dominated to date, and speakers of minority languages. There are more than just a few new ministerial and civil servant posts which a power-hungry clique of ethnicisers in the political sphere have created for themselves, as a popular reductionist explanation of ethnonationalism would like us to believe.

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