Nationalism and ethnicity in a global context.
Toward the sociology of global hierarchies

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Abstract

1. Postcolonial criticism and Eastern Europe?

Globalisation confronts us with enormous paradoxes in understanding global change. First it seems that nationalism and different forms of regional and religious fundamentalism are on the rise in an era when transnational relationships have risen to previously unknown level. Transnational social and political practices can actually lead to radical and exclusive identities very clearly exemplified by the ethnic and religious revival of migrants' identity.

Altogether at least in the short run, the globalisation has led to extremely "abnormal" and partly unexpected disintegrative tendencies around the word. Federal structures and states collapsed creating geopolitical uncertainties, harsh disputes over minorities and territories evolved, and in some cases ugly and devastating civil and international wars were conducted, hindering the return to "normalcy" and thus the hoped-for disappearance of national and regional divides. This is why we need postcolonial criticism.

2. On the East/West slope

The role of the East-West discourse and the East-West civilizational slope is to set the terms and rules of global and local positioning and to formulate cognitive perspectives and maps in which different actors can locate themselves, each other and their own societies in the late-modern capitalist world system or modern/colonial systems. In other words, the East-West slope is a dominant discourse for the articulation of identities and political programs and the creation of institutions in the struggle for control and/or social or political recognition.

This is an overall discourse which folds actors/communities/countries into a hierarchical order born in the 18th century (The idea of Central Europe, Eastern Europe and the Balkans etc). This contextually defines identities, actions and political programs. This is major framework of social science as well. The hierarchy itself is basically unchallenged and thus provides a flexible reservoir of hierarchical interpretation and representation.

The basis of this hierarchical imagination is a hierarchical world economy. The basic social and economic condition of the East-West slope is the existence of a

capitalist world economy. For the last three hundred years the world economy as a hierarchical economic system lacking a unifying political structure has found its ideological framework in the universalistic idea of a single "civilization" and its gradation. This idea has been a key element of capitalist expansion and colonization since the 18th century (Wallerstein, 1991, Cesaire 1972; Amin 1989; Wolff 1994)

3. Nationalism and the slope

This is how Eastern European experience can be fruitfully incorporated into postcolonial thinking. We can solve most of the problems as nationalism is a possible reaction to this hierarchy with many faces according to the way it actors position themselves.

What might we solve with global hierarchical analysis?

Nationalism can be analysed as a relational and flexible concept and thus we can avoid the problem of "ontological" nationalism. There is no need to look for why people group themselves according to ethnicity or "nation", we can understand this as a way of combing memory, pride and communal background within a system of hierarchical imagination. In this way the economic source of nationalism is not print capitalism and other most frequently mentioned social and economic conditions of capitalism *per se*, but the hierarchical world economy, which generates competition, positioning within the secular trend of the destruction of agrarian systems.

Looking at nationalism in this way we can avoid the issue of good or bad nationalism in terms of anticolonial movements so much cherished in postcolonial literature (see for instance Chatterjee, Omnibus). There is also no need to conceptualise Eastern and Western nationalism as done by some classics of nationalism literature (Kohn, Smith, Gellner etc.). At the same time we can also put aside the debate whether the copy elements were important in the analysed nationalism or the original ones dominated. It is always a mixture and the originality should be seen in finding some original/creative answers to being on a certain level of the hierarchy. Eastern European nationalism has provided a lot of experience in this respect and there are many interesting perspectives like the different forms of petit imperialisms, Bovarysm, vertical ontologies, nesting orientalisms. These are the forms and basically we have to put aside the "positive", "original" versus "negative" and "copy" aspects of nationalism. We have to see this "neutrally" and in a linked fashion and in comparative perspectives. Which forms are taken by which groups in which part of the world?

One of the most important thing what we can learn from the above described comparative analysis of nationalism and ethnicity is the techniques used by different elites to position themselves in this global hierarchy and to base their rule on this

hierarchy. Different forms of nationalisms come handy in this struggle as we can understand for instance the late Kádár regime as a somewhat nationalist attempt to gain legitimacy out of the hierarchy by looking eastward. Or the nationalist system of Ceausescu can also be seen as an attempt for vertical onthology etc.

Or in another way we can see the slope creating internal repression and racism. The slope directly serves and facilitates class projects. That is why one of the most important functions of the East-West slope is the recreation and maintenance of racism and other forms of exclusion inherent in hierarchical Eurocentric constructions (Amin 1989; Chakrabarty 2000). Sociologically the slope controls, or to put it better, filters movement between different areas of the world or between social groups. This could be demonstrated in several spheres of social life in the preceding chapters.

4. Possible positive reaction

Just one sentence can put forward in finding a way out of this hierarchical jungle. We have to challenge authentically the hierarchy itself as proposed by Wallerstein.