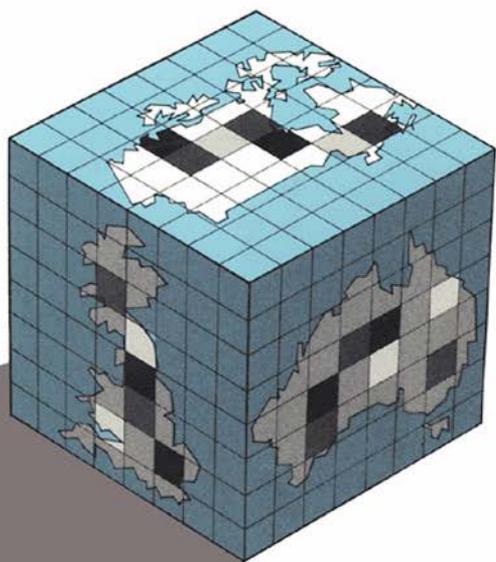


NATIONALISM & NATIONAL INTEGRATION

**Anthony
H. Birch**



NATIONALISM
AND
NATIONAL
INTEGRATION

By the same author

Federalism, Finance and Social Legislation

Small-Town Politics

Representative and Responsible Government

The British System of Government

Representation

Political Integration and Disintegration in the British Isles

NATIONALISM
AND
NATIONAL
INTEGRATION

Anthony H. Birch

University of Victoria, British Columbia

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Anthony H. Birch
Victoria, B.C.

PART I

Theory and Principles

1 *Concepts and problems*

Nationalism is the most successful political ideology in human history. In the two centuries since its first formulation in the writings of European philosophers, it has caused the political map of the world to be completely redrawn, with the entire land surface (apart from Antarctica) now divided between nation-states. Nevertheless, nearly all of these states contain ethnic or cultural minorities within their borders that are only imperfectly integrated into the national society. The process, problems and frequent failures of national integration are issues of central importance in the contemporary world.

The main object of this book is to relate the theory of nationalism to the practice of national integration. Chapters 2 and 3 contain an outline of the way in which nationalist theory emerged together with an analysis of the criticisms that have been levelled against it. Chapters 4 and 5 explain the processes that are summed up by the term 'national integration'; examine the normative arguments that have been advanced in support or criticism of these processes; and discuss the vexed contemporary question of the circumstances in which cultural minorities within a national state can reasonably be said to have rights. Chapter 6 discusses the further question of whether such minorities, if territorially concentrated, can ever have the right to secede; and includes a set of hypotheses to explain why minority nationalist movements have become more prominent in the past two decades.

The second part of the book is devoted to case studies of national integration in the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia. The fact that these three countries are all liberal democracies with similar traditions of parliamentary government facilitates the task of making comparative generalizations about their differing experiences in respect of social, economic and political integration. However, the case studies also illustrate some of the problems of integration that are experienced in states with widely differing systems of government. As a preliminary to this analysis, the present chapter will deal with questions of definition.

Defining nationalism

One of the problems faced by all students of politics is that the terms they use are also used, in ways that are often confusing, by politicians, journalists and members of the general public. This is conspicuously true of the term 'nationalism', which is commonly used in a great variety of ways. It is sometimes used to describe loyalty to the state, for which the proper term is patriotism. It is sometimes used to describe the belief that one's own culture and civilization are superior to all others, for which the proper term is chauvinism. It is sometimes used to describe feelings of national identity, which is not so much an incorrect usage as an understandable but loose usage. Scotsmen in England who make a habit of wearing the kilt and eating haggis might well be described by their neighbours as 'real Scots nationalists'. However, Scotsmen in Scotland would only be described in that way if they supported the creation of a Scottish National Assembly and the eventual secession of Scotland from the United Kingdom, and this second way of using the term is more correct. Properly used, the term nationalism refers to a political doctrine about the organization of political authority.

This doctrine is generally expressed in terms that are specific to particular communities, but it can and should also be expressed in terms of a general theory about good government. The specific versions of nationalism take two slightly different forms, of which one is 'the Ruritanian people ought to be united under a single Ruritanian government' and the other is 'the Ruritanian people ought to be liberated from foreign domination so that they can govern themselves'. The general theory has been neatly summarized by Kedourie in the three propositions 'that humanity is naturally divided into nations, that nations are known by certain characteristics which can be ascertained, and that the only legitimate type of government is national self-government' (Kedourie, 1961, p. 9). The central thrust of this doctrine, which has inspired numerous movements for reform or revolution, is that political authority exercised by principalities, city-states and empires is illegitimate. It is a European doctrine, that emerged at the time of the French revolution, and has since been exported to or copied by politicians in other parts of the world. It is not always a helpful guide to the practical problems of government in the various areas in which it has been adopted, and indeed Kedourie is one of those who believe that the emergence and influence of the doctrine has been deeply unfortunate. Nevertheless, it is the most popular

and influential political doctrine ever promoted, and it has transformed the political map of the world.

There are two main sources of ambiguity about the character of this influential but sometimes misunderstood doctrine. The less important of these is that most nationalist writers and leaders, from J.G.Fichte to Yasser Arafat, have been concerned with making a case for the independence of a particular nation rather than with nationalism as an abstract and generalized doctrine. Whereas socialist and liberal propagandists have commonly drawn particular lessons for their societies from universal principles about good government, proponents of nationalism have tended to be more parochial.

Fichte emphasized the special virtues of the German language and culture. When Mazzini was promoting the cause of Italian unification and self-government he spent much of his time writing about the glories of the Roman Empire and the historic virtues of Italian civilization. When the Parti Quebecois campaigned for the secession of Quebec from Canada, it based its case largely on French-Canadian grievances about their treatment by the anglophone majority and the belief that the French language and culture could only be protected in North America if Quebec became self-governing. All of these claims rested upon the generalized belief that a society with a distinct language and civilization is entitled to govern itself, but in these and other cases the student of nationalist ideas has to extract the generalized argument from a mass of particular arguments of purely local relevance.

The second and more important source of ambiguity about nationalism is the extreme difficulty of defining the social unit which, according to nationalist principles, is entitled to govern itself. If one claims that every people or society has this right, one is immediately in trouble. How many peoples or societies are there in the world? How are their boundaries to be defined and charted? If one says that only a national society has this right, how is one to define a national society without falling into the circular argument that it is a society that governs itself? How, in fact, can one define a nation? The problem can be illustrated by tabulating three groups of concepts, one sociological, one cultural and the third institutional.

The concepts in these three columns all refer to entities which can be identified by consulting documentary sources or by charting personal relationships. The difficulty about the concept of nation is that it seems to spread across all three categories. Ideally, it might be (and has been) said that a nation is a society which has a distinctive civilization and also possesses its own state. However, as a general

<i>Sociological Concepts</i>	<i>Cultural Concepts</i>	<i>Institutional Concepts</i>
Family	Religion	Municipality
Clan	Language	County
Tribe	Literature	Province
Community	Culture	State
Society	Civilization	Empire

definition this has the crippling disadvantage of rendering the proposition that every nation ought to have its own state purely circular. What is wanted is a more modest definition that would identify the characteristics a society needs to support a claim to be a national society. Various authors have tried to do this in terms of such qualities as a common language, a common religion, or a common ethnic identity. In practice, however, the real world presents such a variety of social bases for nationhood that no one of them can plausibly be singled out as either sufficient or necessary. A territory is necessary, but that is a geographical requirement rather than a social basis. The social bases of nationhood have included culture and history in France, language in Germany, ethnicity in Japan, and religion in Pakistan and Israel. It is just not possible to define nationhood in terms of any one social or cultural criterion.

The French theorist Ernest Renan fell back on the purely subjective definition that a nation is a group of people who believe themselves to be a nation, but this is not very helpful. It is true that there are elements of subjectivity in the establishment of national identity, but neither individuals nor groups have a free choice in this matter. Group identity is established by the situation and the observers at least as much as it is by the individual or collective self. The present author, for instance, is identified as a Londoner when in the north of England, an Englishman when in Scotland, a European when in Africa, a Canadian when crossing the 49th parallel, a white when in Harlem, and a middle-class male almost everywhere. He does not have much choice about these ascribed identities.

If the search for a purely social or cultural definition of nationhood is ultimately fruitless, there is no alternative to that of adding a political ingredient. A nation is best defined as a society which either governs itself today, or has done so in the past, or has a credible claim to do so in the not-too-distant future. This lends a degree of circularity to the definition of nationalism quoted above, which in logical terms is most regrettable. Unfortunately, logic and historical

reality are somewhat incompatible in this instance. The pure theory of nationalism supposes the existence of nations before they acquire political expression, but in reality nations have to be created by a process which is at least partly political. Objection may also be taken to the insistence on credibility in regard to nationalist aspirations, but this is by no means an insuperable objection. What makes a claim to self-government credible is an empirical question rather than a conceptual one, and it will be discussed later in this book.

There are two other sources of confusion or difficulty about nationalism that may appropriately be mentioned at this point. One is a purely intellectual confusion, caused by writers who have linked the doctrine of nationalism with other contemporary doctrines, producing such categories as conservative nationalism, liberal nationalism and socialist nationalism. This is a mistake, for nationalism is a doctrine about the proper relationship between society and the political regime which can be held simultaneously with any one of the various doctrines about the proper extent and nature of government policies. People are not conservative nationalists or liberal nationalists; they are nationalists who may happen also to be either conservatives or liberals.

Another kind of difficulty in understanding nationalism arises from the fact that it is a European doctrine which has spread to other parts of the world where circumstances are different. Because the United States, for instance, is populated by immigrants from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and cultures, American nationalism cannot have quite the same character as German or French or Polish nationalism. It is not easy for Americans, brought up to believe that all men are equal, to understand fully the feelings of ethnic and cultural pride that underlie nationalist sentiments in most parts of Europe. Even more clearly, in tropical Africa nationalism is an alien doctrine, adopted by governing elites to enhance the legitimacy of their rule, but not easily compatible with the reality of tribal loyalties and rivalries. The language and message of nationalism has spread round the globe, but the political forces described as nationalist differ from one region to another.

National integration

The most inconvenient fact about the world for nationalist theorists or propagandists is that the number of communities and cultural groups far exceeds the number of states that either exist or could reasonably be established. The first of Kedourie's three propositions, while accurate as a summation of the logical foundation of nationalist

theory, is at complete variance with historical truth. Humanity is not naturally divided into nations. For most of human history, for at least 60,000 years and possibly for twice that period, humanity was divided into small tribes. As populations increased and communications improved, these tribes merged into larger social groupings, but nations are relatively recent and relatively artificial creations. Very few of the national societies that now exist are completely homogeneous in a social and cultural sense. With a handful of exceptions, modern nations are an amalgam of historical communities which possessed a fairly clear sense of separate identity in the past but have been brought together by various economic, social and political developments. The process by which they are brought together is known as political integration, and when it takes place at the national level (as distinct from the regional or international levels) it is best described as national integration. The elements of the process are not difficult to identify.

Let it be supposed that a group of political leaders acquire power over a designated territory and its inhabitants. Their first step will be to consolidate political control of the area, by quelling internal rivals, setting up frontier guards, establishing police and courts to maintain order. Their second step, commonly known as administrative penetration, will be to establish machinery for collecting taxes and implementing laws through the area, which will involve the appointment of bureaucrats and the creation of a register of taxpayers. These steps constitute the process of state-building, which has occurred in European states from the twelfth century onwards, in the United States, Canada and Australia in the nineteenth century, in the new states of the third world since the Second World War.

Until the last two centuries in Europe and North America, and until very recently in most other parts of the world, the demands made by the state or empire on its citizens were so small that no active sense of loyalty was required for the governmental system to operate. Taxes were minimal; government services were minimal; laws and regulations left people without interference in their normal lives; and wars were fought by volunteers and mercenaries. In this kind of situation, state-building was enough to make the governmental system work.

In recent generations, the development of the positive state has transformed the situation. Citizens are now expected to comply with a myriad of laws and regulations; they are required to surrender a large proportion of their income through taxation; they have to accept conscription in times of war and to endure bombing and other

hardships if they are not conscripted. For all this to be possible, the regime requires an active sense of loyalty on the part of the overwhelming majority of its citizens. They must feel that it is *their* government whom they are obeying, *their* country for which they are making sacrifices. They are unlikely to feel this kind of loyalty except in a society that both governs itself and has experienced a process of national integration.

The essential steps in this process can be listed. One of them is the creation of symbols of national identity, such as a head of state, a flag and a national anthem. Another is the establishment of national political institutions which bring all citizens under the same laws and are also seen to be representative of the various sections of society. It is not essential that members of these institutions should be elected, except in those western societies where free election is now regarded as the only proper way of choosing representatives. What is required for the legitimation of the regime is simply that the main governing bodies should contain members to speak on behalf of, and possibly drawn from, the main divisions of the nation. In the Soviet Union the Central Committee of the Communist Party owes part of its authority to the fact that it contains representatives from the Ukraine, Siberia, Georgia and the Muslim republics. In Nigeria the cabinet is expected to contain members of at least the three largest tribes. In Canada the cabinet is made up of a nicely-calculated mixture of anglophones and francophones, Protestants and Catholics, and representatives of the various regions of the country.

A third essential step in the integrative process is the creation of an educational system which gives children a sense of national identity, teaches them about their common history, and (directly or indirectly) inculcates patriotism. The control of the educational system is an instrument of socialization which no modern state can afford to neglect. The first political leader to realize this was Robespierre, who stated as early as 1793 that 'the nation alone has the right to bring up its children; we cannot confide this trust to family pride and individual prejudice'. Numerous nationalist spokesmen since that time have echoed these sentiments, and school curricula everywhere have been shaped to serve nationalistic and patriotic ends.

In some countries, such as the United States, a deliberate attempt is made to teach civics, while in others, such as Britain, national awareness is imparted simply through the teaching of history. But since a neutral version of history is unthinkable, the result is very similar. The importance of education in this context is dramatically illustrated by the example of Northern Ireland, where communal conflict has been exacerbated by the fact that the Protestant schools

have taught mainly British history, in which Ireland appears as a nuisance, while the Catholic schools have emphasized Irish history, in which Britain is depicted as an enemy. In most, if not all, societies the activity of extracting an historical narrative from the multitudinous events of the past is an exercise in national myth-making which serves the end of national integration.

A fourth element, which to some extent follows on from the third, is the development of national pride. If people are to feel that their country is worth special sacrifices they have to feel that it embodies special virtues. The French are proud of their civilization and their cuisine; the Germans of their efficiency; the English of their tolerance and sense of humour; the Americans of their democratic institutions. A regime which feels the need to bolster the morale of its citizens may even make a deliberate effort to create a focus for national pride, as the German Democratic Republic did in the 1970s by its highly successful program to train world-beating athletes.

The main obstacle to the development of national integration is the existence of ethnic or cultural minorities within the state who resist integrative tendencies. If a handful of city-states are disregarded, nearly all modern states contain such minorities. Japan is socially homogeneous; Portugal, Sweden and the Irish Republic are almost homogeneous; but these are the exceptions.

Cultural minorities are partially integrated into the larger national community by two types of process, one unplanned and the other resulting from deliberate decisions. The unplanned process, generally known as social mobilization, is a consequence of industrialization. The need to leave the land to find employment in industrial areas causes personal mobility, which breaks the social bonds of local communities. The development of mass markets, rapid transport facilities, and mass media of communication tends to standardize tastes and values.

The planned measures to integrate cultural minorities normally begin with the adoption of a single official language for political, legal and commercial transactions. This immediately forces the elite of the minorities to communicate in the language of the majority and quickly acts as an incentive for ambitious members of the minorities to become fluent in that language. The official language soon becomes the dominant language among educated members of the minority. Since bilingualism is an unnatural state of affairs for human beings, there is an inevitable tendency for the dominant language to drive out the second language, except in so far as it is kept alive by the schools.

The second step is for the state to insist that the official national language should be the only language of instruction in schools and universities. This makes sense on utilitarian grounds as well as in terms of national integration. A further step, taken by many governments at crucial stages in the integrative process, is to ban the teaching of the minority language and even to institute punishments for children heard talking to each other in that language in school buildings and grounds. By measures of this kind the French almost stamped out the speaking of Breton, the lowland Scots rendered Gaelic extinct on the Scottish mainland, and the English drove the Welsh language into decline.

State control of radio and television, which is the norm except in North America, also requires an essentially political decision about the language or languages to be used. The state may be blind to differences of colour among its citizens, but it cannot be deaf to differences of language. There has to be an official language and the inevitable consequence of this is to drive other languages into decline. A minority language can be protected if the state adopts two official languages, but the experiences of Belgium and Canada indicate that the political costs of this policy can be very high indeed. There are several other kinds of planned integration, but it is unnecessary to multiply examples at this stage. The point of mentioning these matters in this introductory chapter is to indicate that the process of national integration poses some interesting general questions.

There is a set of normative questions about the extent to which integration can be justified. Is it right for a state to embark on policies which will condemn a minority language, valued by a local community and said to be essential to the preservation of that community's culture, to the certainty of decline and the possibility of eventual extinction? On what grounds can such policies be attacked and defended? If defenders of local cultures claim that cultural minorities have rights that national governments are morally obliged to recognize, what philosophical problems are involved in such a claim? There is also a set of sociological questions, relating to the conditions which determine the rate of decline of a minority language, the problems of bilingualism, and so forth. There are rival sociological models of the integrative process, one maintaining that the assimilation of minorities is an inevitable concomitant of modernization, and therefore by implication desirable, the other maintaining that the process involves exploitation of the minorities by the majority and can appropriately be described as internal colonialism.

A third model, not yet so well articulated, depicts the cost of social mobilization and national integration as being not so much exploitation as isolation. According to this view, these processes replace local bonds of community membership that were organic and meaningful by a sense of identification with the national society that is weaker because it is induced and artificial. The result is either an atomistic society or a society that has real meaning to members of the core community but only a superficial significance for members of what were once peripheral communities but are now little more than peripheral areas.

There are also questions, both normative and sociological, about the development of minority nationalist movements and the measures which national governments should or can take either to frustrate these movements or to meet these demands. And if national governments fail in this endeavour, there is a question about whether and in what circumstances the minority could reasonably claim a right to secede from the state. All these questions will be discussed in

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