# Marketing Nations: Analyzing : the Rise of Nationalism in a Globalized World

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## Karen Connie Abalos-Orendain

When Donald Trump won, French far-right leader Marine le Pen called it a "sign of hope". Along with her, Britain's UK Independence Party leader, whose party was credited with Brexit, is the first European politician to congratulate the populist US president right after he won the election. (The Washington Post 2016) These, along with the continued power of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party, the Sweden Democrats and the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands seem to suggest that nationalism is on the rise. In this paper, we discuss the rise of nationalism even as the world becomes more global. We will show that the neoliberal tendency of economies has given rise to a kind of nationalism which sells the idea of the nation-state as a product, a commodity. This perspective gives us a unique means to understand the rise of nationalism in the contemporary setting.

### Introduction

Nationalism rises whenever boundaries are questioned, territories tightly drawn. The abstractions that we derive from the term seem to provide more questions than clear answers. Is it language, culture, history, and/or traditions that give it credence? Thus, the purpose of this paper is to show the justifications of acts that are done in the name of nationalism, to clarify if there are moral or ethical foundations that give it credence.

The question, unfortunately, is not as easy as asking whether things done in the name of nationalism is good or bad. It is simplistic to approach it from this point of view because it assumes several things: first, that there is inherent value in the idea of the nation that to do things in its name is automatically good; second, that there are clearly defined norms, a clear sense of what is

right and wrong when nationalism is invoked; third, membership to a nation automatically demands its recognition and practice. Thus, the question itself needs clarification. The scope of this paper is limited to the implied morality that is behind the idea of nationalism. However, it is necessary to discuss the various ways in which nationalism is defined and purveyed so that we have a better understanding of how it can be analyzed.

**Defining Nationalism**

There are indeed many ways in which Nationalism can be viewed.   It can be seen as a "form of politics". (Breuilly 1993, 1) If this is so, we can then concentrate on the structures, movements, and procedures that shape political activities within a nation as opposed to focusing on abstract notions of national identity with which nationalism is usually associated with.   We can also choose to view it, as David Miller does, as a principle, which he believes "offer us rational guidance when, as individuals or citizens, we have to respond practically to some national question." (Miller, On Nationality 1995) Still, others recognize it, as Max Weber did, as "a form of rationality, an effort to impose coherence on societies undergoing change." (Haas 1997) This is an interesting notion, especially if taken with the accompanying thought that the nation is an entity that undergoes constant changes. If this is the case then the scope of what constitutes nationalism should not be as narrow, as others sometimes choose to assess it. Hannah Arendt argued that nationalism is a form of ideology [1] and many others agree with her point. Right after the second World War, for example, she articulated how totalitarian regimes such as the German Nazi political party started gaining power with a strong nationalist propaganda. She also stated that nationalism will rise again and again, and it will continue to manifest itself in sinister ways.   According to the Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Thought,

If an ideology is a general way of thinking about the world that has prescriptive

implications for politics, then nationalism is an ideology—and by far the most potent ideology in the world. As a way of thinking about the world it emphasizes the importance of nations in explaining historical developments and analyzing contemporary politics, and also typically claims that 'national character' is a pervasive factor in differentiating human beings. (1991)

This quote summarizes the main issue that we raise with the concept of nationalism, that is, 'national character' as the foremost motivation for any political act or decision by a nation-state. It implies that this concept of 'national character' is a homogenous idea made more concrete by history, language, and a clearly shared personality we generally refer to as culture. Thus, this also means that each individual should only have one nationality and that all these different elements ensure exclusivity of membership. Moreover, this exclusivity comes at a price. There are certain expectations and responsibilities that come with this privilege of membership. The definitions mentioned above help us to focus on the political aspects of the concept of nationalism and less on the generally accepted but ambiguous uses of the term. There are many ways to conceive of nationalism but no matter what variances is taken to approach the problem or which methodology is used to analyze it as an occurrence, a social construct, or even as a moral pursuit, etc., but the general understanding, it seems, is that it refers to a consciousness—shared by its citizens, as an establishing marker of identity. Hence the term, *national consciousness*. But the term, *consciousness*, is also problematic, bringing with it a host of other questions and demanding further clarifications. Nationalism's very ambiguity serves as a highly malleable characteristic and therein lies its usability, its utility. John Bruielly posits,

Nationalism is not the expression of nationality, if by nationality is understood an independently developed ideology or group sentiment broadly diffused through the 'nation'. If it were we should first encounter colonial nationalism in areas

where racial and cultural discrimination is most acute, such as South and east Africa rather than in areas where it was an impersonal colonial administration which was of central importance, such as India or British West Africa. Nationalism is not a response to simple oppression. If it were we should expect the Rumanians to have been nationalist before Magyars, and the inhabitants of the Belgian Congo before those of India. Rather, an effective nationalism develops where it makes political sense for an opposition to the government to claim to represent the nation against the present state. In doing this I have stressed its rationality even while recognizing the ideological and frequently irrational form in which nationalist claims were couched. Too much of the literature on nationalism has tended to ignore its political rationality and sought to find its true meaning beyond politics. (Breuilly 1993, 398)

These statements though, is not claiming that there is no such thing as nationalism or that it is empty of meaning. It is quite possible that the very opposite is the case, that it captures a legitimate, essential concept that is beyond the scope of our individual subjectivities. So maybe it makes sense to begin with the idea of the nation, if the assumption here is that nationalism is the amniotic twin of the nation, that it arose as soon as the nation came into existence, then it might make sense to begin at its birth. As much as the history of the nation, its birth and its continued existence, from the modern period onwards is helpful to this study though, there simply is not enough time or space to delve into the intricacies of how the nation came to be, and hence how nationalism was brought to the fore. However, we will contend that this is not the case, nationalism did not necessarily come to existence as soon as the nation did. We will prove this by drawing on several arguments that show, first of all, that the essence of nationalism which pertains to a specific national character is a problematic concept. The problem lies, not just in the ambiguity we have referred to in this section. It also lies in our definition the term nation.

**Differentiating between the State and the Nation**

According to historian Caspar Hirschi, nations in the nineteenth century "were described as collective bodies with particular biographies, qualities and characteristics, interacting with each other on the allegedly main stage of history, international politics… This image of the nation was to a considerable degree shaped by Romantic ideals of an organic community, as opposed to the 'mechanical' structure of modern society. (Hirschi 2012, 4) With the onset of modernity, this conception of the nation hardly changed. The modern nation-state has transformed in the sense that it has acquired new roles and the changing international political scene has, at times, challenged its initial description but its original characteristic as, what Karatani terms, 'imagined community' has not changed. Hence, the modern-state is a layered concept with multi-faceted roles and complex structures but in essence, it has not changed its raison d'être.   Whether this fundamental reason for existence is held in high esteem or used as a mere catchphrase to manipulate its constituents, it still goes to show that it is a belief that is still widely held and is a power in itself. But of course, the state is different from the concept of the nation, and this is why in the sciences we make distinctions between nation, state, and nation-state. "The state's core claim to legitimacy lay in its role in assuring the security of the community within state frontiers." (Haslam 2002, 17)

Thus, even our terminologies and language usage have expanded to accommodate the changes that we observe and study.   Hannah Arendt explains the fundamental characteristic of the modern nation-state as:

> The breakdown of the feudal order had given rise to the new revolutionary concept of equality, according to which a "nation within the nation" could no longer be tolerated… This growth of equality, however, depended largely upon the growth of an independent state machine which, either as an enlightened despotism or as a constitutional government above all classes and parties, could, in splendid

isolation, function, rule, and represent the interests of the nation as a whole. (Arendt 1979, 11)

What Hannah Arendt describes here is a functional distinction between state and nation. The nation, as we have already defined earlier, corresponds to the imagined community. It is the space or place which addresses our need to belong. It is a literal anchor, which we may interpret in a positive or negative way, that is, as a prison or as a home. In any case, the nation is a concept that conjures security and sustainability, since it is the primary source of our necessities. The state, at least according to Arendt is the "machine", the structure that rules over and represents the nation. It has specific functions which are all, in theory, designed to preserve and accentuate the interests of the nation.

> The primary significance of the state as a social structure lies not merely in its role as a provider of goods (public and private) or manager of assets. It also has a more symbolic social function, embodying the sense which people have of belonging to a particular social unit…. The modern nation-state became the central structure of modern society not only because of the Second Industrial Revolution, but also because it embodied what Florian Znaniecki has called a 'national culture society'. (Cerny 1998, 130-131)

The questions we pose do not mean that we are undermining the meaning and significance of the nation-state's symbolic social function. There are fundamental reasons why people need a sense of identity and belonging, just as there are probably fundamental reasons why a nation-state becomes a unit based on these imagined characteristics. The sense of us and others is a legitimate concern which raises a plethora of other questions once again. There are also logistical reasons why our governments pertain to territories for their jurisdictions. These geographical boundaries as we have mentioned in earlier

chapters are instrumental in maintaining a legal and practical way to manage the constituency. This is how, "The territorial state became a national state, an entity whose population made the transition from impassive and inert subject to participant; nationalism implied accountability of some kind to the populace. Rulers mattered less and people mattered more. The legitimacy of the state was believed to rest on the approval of its inhabitants." (Haas 1997, 18) This system however seems to rest on a very tenuous foundation wherein rulers are aware that people do matter more, they matter more than political self-interests as well as so-called national-interests.   Because with the ideological character of nationalism as well as its fluid definition, it seems that it can be easily used as a tool by the ruler, political party, or even well-funded private entities as an idea to further their own self-interests. Thus, in relation to the problem we ask of nationalism, there is the concept of "reason of state".   This is not the same as nationalism but it does have parallel motivations. "The following propositions arise from viewing the evolution of Reasons of State since Machiavelli:

- Reasons of state emerged to legitimize a new social formation, the state, against a universalist alternative: initially the Holy Roman Empire and universal church.
- On the practical plane, Reasons of State also represented an attempt to order policy to cope with a universal predisposition to conflict.
- Reasons of State thus played a dual role: one of legitimacy and one of ensuring efficiency in achieving goals set by the state."

(Haslam 2002,17)


The ideological basis of state-centrism and nationalism, therefore, seems to be the same, in that it pertains to ensuring legitimacies. With the ambiguities we mentioned earlier pertaining to "national character", does the

same apply to reasons of state? If nation is "imagined community" but state is a real structure, there should be an integral difference between the two and how we approach the problem. Regarding the state, there are several elements that need to be discussed. First, since state structures have specific functions which are more tangible than that of state, these structures need to be stable. This stability helps us anchor the idea of the state to something that is more palpable and, hence more easily measured in terms of legitimacy. Second, reasons of state should be easier to analyze from an empirical and ethical perspective since these are measurable in terms of beneficiality and practicability.

**Conclusion:**

The Marketable Nation: Image and Symbolisms

The nation-state is thought to be in a fragile condition because of the internal and external factors that question its continued viability and question its legitimacy. When such a structure becomes insecure, it has a tendency to bend towards the form of politics that is what we have identified as nationalism. But what are these factors that are thought to weaken the nation-state [2]?

In the early days of modern nation-states, it seems that main issues that threaten sovereignty is usually, simply pressures that pertain to territoriality where neighbors fight over boundaries. This is still a problem in so many parts of the world, we only have to look at the cases of Pakistan and India, Israel and Palestine, Japan and China, Philippines and China, Vietnam and China, and other examples. With the political milieu becoming more intricate as it is, these tensions are, strangely enough, much more straightforward compared to other issues that relate to, for example, economic, religious, and cultural ones as in the case of the civil war in Syria. The intervention of other countries such

as Russia, USA, Iran and Saudi Arabia as well as the involvement of jihadists and the "so-called Islamic States (IS)" has further complicated the already contentious issue.     (BBC 2016)      With the rise of capitalism and neo-liberalism, the state has had to adjust to the global economic superstructure as well. From a general economic perspective, states have specific roles to play [3]. The economic superstructure has led to an interdependence amongst nations that underlie these perceptions of sovereignty. Hence, when analyzing our sovereignties, we should frame these analyses from this context otherwise we narrow our discussions of what we mean by national, local, and global.

If nation-states are one of modernity's fruits, then the state as a marketable force is a more contemporary concept.     As states become players in this increasingly economic driven world, the image of nationhood thus becomes even more important. That sense of identity becomes a unique handprint which can be utilized as a marketable character, differentiating the nation from other nations. Apart from endemic raw materials and native products; culture, language, and even customs are "sold" as the idea of a nation. This is what we can offer, that others could not. It sounds like a tagline to lure tourists, and sometimes it comes in that form. But more than anything else, these character-defining factors (i.e. culture, language, art, etc.) seem to make-up the concept of nationhood and is thus utilized as appealing marketable characteristics. Thus, there is a need to view nationalism from a different perspective.

Nation-states are insecure, it seems on many levels, not only in terms of sovereignty. Nationhood as identities are also insecure, probably caused by a genealogical, historical existence, a problem which may belong to another branch of philosophy. However, what we question here is the essentialism we attribute to our so-called sovereign identities as nations. What we invoke when we call for nationalism, may be an identity that is not as solid as one may surmise. Leading us to ask, in the face of globalization, does this mean that the

nation-state is being swept by forces greater than itself?

**Notes**

(1)  See Kaldor (2004), Karatani (2014)

(2)  "Why is the nation-state thought to be obsolescent? Some of the reasons are internal, having to do with the difficulty of sustaining common national identities in societies that, through immigration and for other reasons, are becoming increasingly more multicultural in character. Other reasons concern the external environment in which states now have to operate: their diminished capacity to control global economic forces, and the widening range of problems—especially environmental problems—that can only be solved by cooperation between states or by international bodies." (David Miller 2003, 120)

(3)  "State structures today are being transformed into more and more market-oriented and even market-based organizations themselves, fundamentally altering the way that public and private goods are provided. Indeed, states are transforming, marketing—*themselves* in the search for competitiveness in an increasingly economically interpenetrated world." (Cerny 1998, 124)

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