

MULTIDIMENSIONALITY OF CENTRIPETAL AND CENTRIFUGAL NATIONALISMS

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Abstract

Traditionally, authors focus on the speech of political actors and how these define themselves in order to identify the presence of nationalist political trends. This paper aims to present a wider analytical grid so as to include how nationalism is manifested. In line with this multidimensional proposal, we aim to identify differences as to how nationalisms are made manifest according to their relation with power.

Keywords:

Centripetal nationalism; centrifugal nationalism; regional State; national identity

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Introduction

The term nationalism has a double empirical connotation in current political life: the violent connotation, whose strongest image is that of the conflicts in Yugoslavia in the 1990s and, to a lesser extent, that of the violent pro-independence groups, such as the Palestinian Liberation Front or the Irish Republican Army (whose importance has gradually decreased); and the open and democratic one, a sort of light nationalism whose claims are perfectly accepted and subdued in the political system they are integrated in. In the latter case, the most visible example are the autonomous regimes as those of Catalonia in Spain or of Scotland in the UK. This classification, rather light and more based on common sense than on a thorough analysis of facts, is accepted in some scientific approaches (Kaldor, 2004). At media level, nationalism appears in the news only when its noisy presence is made visible, either because of a holiday or a sports event that arouses nationalistic pride or because of a major demonstration in defense or against the right to self-determination.

However, some nationalistic actions, though more discreet, may take on a more transcendent nature. Active policies of defense or maintenance of a State's integrity and sovereignty led by central government, which was democratically elected, by a group of representatives who were directly or indirectly elected may be an example of this, regardless of its more discreet nature when compared to demanding or violent nationalism

In line with this issue, this paper proposes a perspective on nationalism based on its three manifestations: action, speech and self-definition. The scope of this analysis, and considering the influence that the fact that being an independent State or not has on how nationalism is present, we will use two other concepts - that of centrifugal nationalism and that of centripetal nationalism - so as to explain its multidimensional character.

Finally, in theoretical terms, we believe that structural principles are crucial for the development of ideas of "banal nationalism" and "everyday nationhood". These are the starting point for our paper and the base concepts we aim to discuss.



1. Theoretical and conceptual elements

By approaching nationalism based on the way it is made manifest we aim to demonstrate the importance of action, how it is as valid an element as speech or self-definition. The development of concepts such as "banal nationalism" (Billig, 1995) and "everyday nationhood" (Fox and Cynthia, 2008), are noteworthy in this context. At the core of these proposals is the daily and discreet reproduction of consolidate Nation-States, which leads to an almost subconscious dimension present in common citizens' daily actions.

We believe we can go further than banal or everyday nationalism. As we will later see, there are actions by a State's political actor that are conscious and premeditated to preserve and consolidate a specific nation that are more than discreet, they as much as deny and reject nationalism itself, as paradoxical as that may be. National bonds will be strengthened by factors other than nationalism, factors which are often rejected by public opinion because of their negative connotation.

John E. Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss state the importance that certain daily gestures and actions have in producing and reproducing a nation. This is not a simple consequence of structural guidelines by State elites, it includes daily actions by common people (2008 537). The core of this approach is the performative nature of each action: it does not merely evidence belonging to a person or nation, it creates the nation.

Michael Billig, emphasizing the importance of common citizens' actions, introduces the expression "banal nationalism" in the debate so as to demystify nationalism and refute the idea that it is only present in the behaviour of politicians and right-wing groups or in the fights for national independence led by those who want the independence of a State (1995: 5). Considering the commonly accepted idea that the Nation-State is, since the end of the 19thc, the main political unit of home and international systems, Billig believes it strange that nationalism is usually seen as a phenomenon that does not concern consolidated nations or States (1995: 5). In fact, nations that have their political desires framed in independent States continue to exist and are made manifest every day, though they do that in a banal and discreet way.

Therefore, there is a set of behavior and interaction that are not usually viewed as related to nationalism and are linked to extraordinary practices or have a negative connotation. The author of "Banal Nationalism" considers that nationalism in consolidated nation-States is so ingrained that citizens repeat certain actions and do not link them with manifestations of national identity. Billig exemplifies this through the showing of the United States flag in public spaces (1995: 39). This is present in the daily life of millions of citizens and is so natural that it not qualified, unlike violent radical phenomena. According to Billig, besides being ignored by citizens and politicians, the study of this element of nationalism has also been neglected by scholars studying this theme (1995: 43). However, Billig assumes his modernist perspective when he emphasizes the guiding role nationalism has had in the development of the current State (1995: 19). The Nation-State established patterns that citizens take for granted today and do not realize that their link to national identity is something relatively new.



2. Centripetal and centrifugal nationalisms

In the context of western democracies, democratic nationalism ends up being a monopoly of those Anwen Elias (2009) describes as minority nationalist parties (for example the Catalonia Democratic Convergence), a concept that is similar to that of "little nationalism" used by Mary Kaldor (2004). Definitely, great parties and State governments do not use this type of language, which is in line with the concepts of "banal nationalism" by Michael Billig (1995) and "everyday nationhood" by John E. Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss (2008) when they advocate the enhancing of other manifestations besides rhetoric. Billig himself emphasizes that essentially nationalisms are associated with fascist ideology or separatist movements.

We must now make clear, separate and justify our interpretation of two core concepts to our approach: centripetal nationalism and centrifugal nationalism. We believe centripetal nationalism to be the nationalism that aims to maintain together or gather one or several national identities within the same political entity (typically the State) in as much an integrated way as possible. We refer integration and not homogeneity (more used in traditional approaches) because political dynamics in the last decades has evidenced there are several types of nations, some more embracing and tolerant towards internal diversity. Integration seems to be gaining over homogeneity.

Opting for the term 'centripetal' is linked with the evolution of democratic political systems. In the context of autonomic States, the term 'centralizing' tends to lose strength. In these cases, political decentralisation is perfectly compatible with the existence of a national identity which seeks to maintain supremacy over other identities within the territory. On the other hand, centrifugal nationalism attempts to separate from the driving force it is integrated in. Its end objective may be the independence of a political unit or have greater autonomy within a regional or federal State.

As in any political regime in a multinational State within the scope of a democracy, the shock between centrifugal and centripetal nationalism necessarily leads to an asymmetric conflict relation. The structure of an organized central State contributes to centripetal nationalism, as this State allows the political actor in power leeway to direct their project. When centrifugal nationalisms opt to respect the constitutional order established in the State they are in as it occurred in Scotland until recently. The highest institutional level they may initially aspire to was regional or local governmental structures. Obviously, the change of a reversal in constitutional order cannot be ruled out. This is often the objective of centrifugal democratic nationalisms because of the constitutional protection to State sovereignty. Considering that traditionally the ultimate goal of nationalism is the implementation of an independent Nation-state, it is natural that it aims to subvert the order stopping from reaching that level. However, there are types of State which lead to more pragmatic behavior and favor establishing objectives prior to a hypothetical independence.

Among the types of State with a territorial organization more adequate to combining different national identities within the same sovereign political unit, there is the federal State and what Jorge Miranda defines as "regional unitary State" (1994: 259). The latter, also known as autonomic State or autonomy State, contributed to end exclusivity in terms of the image of a centralizing nation that aims to subdue, through the State, its peripheral counterparts without recognizing any specific rights. The dichotomy we have been describing may perfectly fit this political model: central State



institutions include mostly those from or advocates of centripetal nation and regional autonomies include mostly advocates of centrifugal nations. It seems obvious that, in the same regional State, there may be regions in which centrifugal national identity is predominant and regions that only have centripetal national identity, once their regional specificities have been safeguarded. This adequacy between a certain political system and a plural national scenario does not harm other contexts in which the regional State is implemented in ethnically homogeneous countries or that have no predominant national identity.

Contemporary State does not correspond to the standard image of the Jacobinical centralizing models whose national sovereignty bodies are the only to be able to exercise political power. Currently, several state territorial organization models coexist, a regional unitary State may aim to accommodate peripheral political desires through resorting to the creation of new power poles which are not the capital and to where competences traditionally exercised by central government are transferred. Through applying these legal constitutional rules, escape mechanisms are created to alleviate, at least partially, the identity tensions through institutional means. This is in line with the ideas of liberal nationalism scholars who relativize national independence in favour of cultural self-determining processes and of regional or federal enhancement (Tamir, 1995: 69, Miller, 2000: 124).

Federal State which, at a superficial analysis, may be viewed as the more logical option for democratic countries that have internal national tensions, ends up not being a very interesting option. There may be some fear in exaggerating formal decentralization, which does not prevent a regional unitary State from being as decentralizing as a federation in terms of competences at infrastate levels. In issues concerning sovereignty, the symbolic still pulls a heavy weight. As an example of this, we may realize that three of the most relevant federal states, the North American, the Brazilian and the German, have no politically relevant centrifugal nationalism. The Canadian federal system, which includes the province of Quebec (which has a strong centrifugal nationalist movement) is a rare exception among western democracies. On the other hand, there are several similar States that opt of formally unitary though decentralized models, as is the case of the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy.

Considering that nationalism and power are two directly related concepts, centrifugal nationalisms are the obvious beneficiaries of the creations of institutional peripheral power centers. This framework contributes to demystify the idea of the close link between nationalism and violence through political democratization of non-violent national conflicts or which gradually tend to be non-violent. Face to face, resorting only to democratic channels, are a centripetal nationalism, which may be defined by its speech subtlety, and one or several centrifugal well-defined and affirmative nationalisms.

In this context, the famous expression "Independence or death" by emperor Pedro the first when Brazil became independent, which appeared to adapt to decades of secessionist or expansionist conflicts, no longer makes any sense. The final objective of independence may now be postponed to a more convenient moment by centrifugal nationalism and becomes a more undefined and complex grid of intermediate objectives which, once met, may lead or not to secession. This may lead to a change of strategy by centripetal nationalism, which may forgo the muscled speech and focus on the less visible conflict for intermediate objectives. In fact, this is the main debate as, depending on what happens, there will be room or not to evolve to the final debate: that of national independence day.



3. Dimensions of nationalism: action, speech and self-definition

Citizens are fundamental in electing political agents. It is inevitable that, in the context of current democratic system, highly publicized, there is constant assessment of the convergence and divergence between speech and action, as well as the conformity between these manifestations and their agents' self-definition. In the case of identity, the issue is more relevant as the essence of a main structural element of the main political unit of the international system is in question - the nation-State. Thus, for example, we may assume, when discussion government action, that nationalism is a phenomenon that is made manifest in a multidimensional way and we may isolate and analyse its three specific materializations: action, speech and self-definition.

By valuing action and disregarding speech as the manifestation of nationalism, this concept becomes more encompassing and the focus becomes its intensity. Defending an identity with political objectives in the context of State internal and external activity is more common than we usually believe it to be but they rather c«vary in intensity. A nationalism that is only that will be less intense than another that, besides acting also speaks in its defense and advocates its identity; this will be less intense than the nationalism that acts, speaks and assumes that option.

The fact that we understand nationalism as a multidimensional phenomenon and that we consider action must be the focus of attention in analytical terms does not imply that we devalue speech, probably the most visible and indispensable element in what we define as affirmative nationalism. Often, it is through speech that nationalism mobilizes and keeps cohesion of its bases, in peaceful and democratic contexts and in violent conflicting contexts. There is a wide variety of nationalist speeches as several cases indicate. For example, at the time when fascist dictatorships were in their peak (between the 1920s and the 1940s), nationalist regimes par excellence, the type of speech these governments used was clearly affirmative, violent, praised their identity values and excluded what was different. In parallel, the speech of liberal democratic regimes claimed another type of values though they still assumed and praised their identity (probably because they consider that democratic and liberal values were inherent). Based on this terminology, we may state that fascist regimes were the perfect example of nationalism in an affirmative and assumed State, one which is against the non-existence of this type of nationalism in contemporary independent democratic State governments.

A speech with similar features to those of fascist regimes has been reused by the different parties in the war in the Balkans, in the 1990s. In this case, after almost fifty years of Cold War (when the focus was ideological speech) and subsequent speech decompression a liberal democratic practice, the world witnessed a come back of aggressive reasoning and nationalist enhancement. In the past years, as the liberal democratic system expanded and the political map became stable, the nationalist element of political speech in Europe tended to less dialectic enhancement and a more discreet profile. Nevertheless, less visibility does not necessarily mean lack of it; a more discreet attitude may lead to more effective results than a more affirmative approach.

Going back to the example of a government that acts so as to keep the nation-State it is a governing body of, we frequently realize that parallel to the policies developed



towards this goal there may be a speech praising identity that emphasizes its importance and its function. In this case, we may say that there is a link between action and speech, which materializes an action we would describe as affirmative nationalism. On the other hand, we may also find examples of governments that develop and implement similar policies but which do not have the same type of speech. They fulfill their function as a guarantee of political rights of a specific identity but are not open in terms of putting those objectives into practice. We may, in this case, speak of subtle nationalism.

Conventionally, we consider that right-wing parties and ideologies are more in line with nationalist positions (McCrone, 1998: 3). We believe that the fact that left-wing parties usually have a more urban speech with less identity references has also contributed to this idea. However, in practical terms, an analysis that sees nationalism as a multidimensional phenomenon requires readjustments, which leads us to identify that right-wing parties, governments and ideologies are more prone to fit a model of affirmative nationalism and their left-wing counterparts to a model of subtle nationalism. Both will act in favour of an identity and its political objectives and implementations, the differences residing in the speech rather than in the action.

In relation to the third dimension we propose - self-affirmation - it is materialized in someone's (or some structure's) explicit assumption that they are nationalist or advocate nationalist politics or of open defense of a specific nation's identity. This is a rather infrequent phenomenon these days, especially when we observe government action or that of great powers of developed countries. As we have referred, the link between nationalism and violent and exclusive logic has considerable media exposure, which leads to fear of negative connotation among political agents.

Nevertheless, there are several parties, of different ideologies and political contexts, who assume they are nationalist or place political rights to an identity at the core of their program. Since extreme right-wing parties, which take on the defense of the nation in the most exclusive and totalitarian assumption, as in the case of the *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NPD), to fully democratic parties that advocate the enhancement of self-governing levels of their region, within the framework of the regional rule of law they are part of, as is the case of the *Catalonia Democratic Convergence* (CDC). Obviously, we cannot infer any link between these two examples which are only mentioned to illustrate the wide scope of assumed nationalism.

4. Discourse dimension and the centripetal and centrifugal nature of nationalism

In the case of the link between speech and the centripetal or centrifugal nature of nationalism and in current political framework, the latter tends to be more affirmative than the former as we realized when referring to the CDC from Catalonia. There seems to be a correlation between the degree of affirmation in nationalist speech and its position in relation to power (its peak position being that of a Nation-state).

In this sense, Xosé M. Núñez Seixas states that



the nationalist component (...) has a protagonist role in the agenda of social and political parties or movements who nation of reference whose institutional and, above all, sovereign recognition is not deemed sufficient (2010: 13-14).

Lets us consider the case of Scotland, a region with historic independent desire which is part of the United Kingdom: Scottish nationalism is clearly affirmative and assumed, materialized in the name of the local nationalist party, the Scottish National Party (SNP) and in its student organization, the Federation of Student Nationalists (FSN). The British government, main executive body in the United Kingdom, probably as a result of the comfort a power position that until recently was taken for granted and rather uncontested, does not use the same terminology and maintains a formally open position towards a potential political evolution in the status of the region by resorting to a model that is between the affirmative and the subtle.

Another noteworthy aspect is the absence of an effective English regional nationalist movement (English, 2011: 5). Unlike Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, England is the only region in the United Kingdom that does not have a regional parliament. The political power the England holds on the State of the United Kingdom is such that it is probably the English themselves who do not want a regional parliament, as that would take away some of the symbolic power of Great Britain's parliament (the state parliament of the United Kingdom), which is in London, the English (and British) capital. On the other hand, British nationalism openly accepted and affirmative, which advocates the maintenance of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland as an independent and unified State, is limited to clearly conservative or right-wing personalities and movements.

It therefore appears to be a space of speech silence that is dominant in centripetal nationalism. Its proneness to what we call subtle or affirmative (but not assumed) nationalism may not be justified merely by the fear of connotation with the more negative elements of identity speech. There may be a deliberate attempt by a certain centripetal nationalist agent to draw the attention of citizenship towards other issues (for example social and economic policies) as means to achieve new objectives and keep already attained achievements in terms of political power. Under certain circumstances, subtle nationalism or not assumed affirmative nationalism may be the most adequate recipe to materialize the political objectives of an identity, especially when this is already materialized in a State.

In parallel, advocates of a breaking away from centrality and building of new political units based on a national idea that understands these are not in accordance with such as encompassing entity, tend to openly assume their nationalist positions. One of the probable causes for this difference may lie in the referred association between nationalism, expansionism and violence, a rather rash and wrong association (Everea, 1994: 5). It is understandable that, before this framework, centripetal nationalisms opt for a less declarative means as those a more easily associated with expansion strategies and the derived potential conflict situations. Moreover, centrifugal nationalism is more acceptable from an intellectual point of view, as may be made visible when Mary Kaldor describes what she classifies "Little nationalism" a being non-violent, open and inclusive. 173).



Conclusion

We propose to analyze nationalism based on two specific elements: the defense of multi dimension in its actions, in particular, the role of action (often ignored to the detriment of superficial analyses mostly focused on speech and self-definition; and in the difference among the different nationalisms in terms of their closeness or not to sovereign power (centrifugal and centripetal nationalism).

It is also possible to identify a trend to correlate the two identified variables. In the time in which we live, probably as a result of less positive examples in recent history, sovereign States political agents avoid identifying themselves as nationalists though in their daily life they do act aiming towards the corollary of nationalist desires: maintaining national identity as the basis for the State, a sovereign political unit par excellence, and of the international system. On the other hand, nationalists that advocate national identities not materialized in sovereign and independent States seem to be prone to fully assume nationalism, inclusively in the speech and self-definition dimensions.

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