

Nationalism under the modernist perspective essay sample

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Introduction

The modern age has brought forth a series of innovations that have enabled people to organize themselves better through the formation of various structures. Modernism, as it stands, focuses on the presence of structures that provides for the organization of human actions. Verily, the concept of nationalism is a crucial aspect of modernist thought, standing as a prevalent status quo starting from the 19th century.

This study explores nationalism under the lens of modernism. How is nationalism a uniquely modern concept? What preceded nationalism in terms of organizing people politically? How did the modern period feature the emancipation of nationalist thought? A perusal of existing literature of nationalism provides this study the necessary thrust in going through the foregoing questions, founded on the premise that the overall landscape of the modern period has greatly shaped nationalism away from previous modes of political organization.

Pre-Nationalist Thought in Political Organization

The period starting from 1789 featured the emergence of the industrial revolution, which has become instrumental in terms of producing various economic and political demands. The need to provide organized workforce sets to make industrial output production possible has resulted to a string of consequences pertaining to regulations, policies and efficiency concerns on hiring people to render certain kinds of skills needed for specific industries. The eventual improvements in technology also featured consonantly the development of the capitalist system, which involved the measure between

profits and compensation for work rendered by people hired to perform their specific tasks. In other words, the need to provide people with adequate compensation for the work they have done and balancing revenues with target profits needed for ensuring the continuity of manufacturing has given rise to the concept of capitalism. Such serves as quite a departure from the mode of economic production prior to 1789. Agricultural forms of economic subsistence served as the norm prior to the formation of nationalist consciousness that happened in the years beyond 1789. The cultivation of crops for food and other materials became the lone manner of supporting the economy of states, which survived not through the kind of legitimacy that nationalism could afford but through the polarization of patronage towards one ruler or religion. The concentration of legitimate authority towards one ruler portrayed with divinity or a special status greatly regarded by the people has led to blind adherence and abuse of power (Hayes, 1968; Hutchinson, 1994).

The shift to nationalism from the belief in ruler or religion is not surprising, considering that the industrial revolution and the subsequent rise of capitalism has introduced key systemic changes. For instance, the concept of homage through practicing agriculture, as in the case of the peasant-landlord relationship, became obsolete with the eventual rise of machine building. The need for a complex system of production to make industrial production more efficient has introduced the concept of labor rights, which paid attention to the formation of standards related to working hours, salary and conditions. Financial management under industrialization grew as an inevitable consequence, given that economic organization during that time

rose on the premise of maintaining continuity in industrial production. Overall, the systemic cyclical process has rendered the idea of homage towards a single ruler or religion an impractical one. The expansion of economic activities arising from increasing industrial production has set forth the need to introduce systemic changes that run conflict to the idea of identifying oneself politically with a religion or ruler (Hutchinson, 1994; Symmons-Symonolewicz, 1968).

The Rise of Nationalism

Nationalism is a complex consequence of the systemic changes brought forth by the industrial revolution. The need to maintain production in industrialized settings has led to the exploitation of people, particularly in areas like Asia and parts of the Americas and Africa where European states used to have colonial strongholds ready for their disposal in terms of resources and labor. The emancipation of people concerning labor rights and relations happened due to the highly demanding environment of industrialized settings, in which the most important goal is to reach certain production targets within the given utility of workers defined by working hours and productive capacity. Hence, complexities in the foregoing relations have led to the eventual dissolution of the political belief towards a religion or ruler (Hayes, 1968; Hutchinson, 1994).

The shift towards nationalism entailed the transition from traditional societies to modern societies. A traditional society includes the following characteristics: absence of industrial activities capable of generating economic self-sustenance, existence of multiple authorities and plurality in

languages that disables effective communication with one another.

Nationalism could simply render itself inoperative in a traditional society, wherein there is a lack of uniting values that could cause people to form a nation. Hence, it appears that a modern society is the direct opposite of a traditional society best suited for nationalism to arise. A modern society, unlike a traditional society, consists of the following: industrial activities capable of providing economic self-sustenance, consolidated power under a legitimate authority resting on the will of the people and a centralized language or language group that enables people to communicate with one another efficiently (Hayes, 1968; Hutchinson, 1994).

The sheer prominence of states in Europe has inspired nationalism to spread towards the periphery, in which many colonial strongholds lie. Economic and political exploitation in areas such as Asia, the Americas and Africa has given people therein the common cause to revolt to fight oppression. Such has led Karl Marx to posit that the need to have a revolution against the bourgeoisie in favor of rights securing effective industrial production away from abusive tendencies attributes to the formation of nations. For instance, India was once a territory wrought by the traditional thinking of feudalism that eventually changed under the rule of the United Kingdom (UK), which introduced institutions that eventually served as inspiration for nationalism alongside the exploitation of Indians by the British that time. Elitism, a key element of traditional societies, greatly tumbled as a political ideology when nationalist movements grew stronger. The centralization of power within families or a group of individuals whose practices run counter to the will of the people came under great challenge against people interested in forming

a nation based on a formidable covenant consisting of rights and obligations. Diffusion of individual roles did not find credence under nationalism, which came to the understanding of the people as a concept establishing the need to form a nation based on the following commonalities: language, experiences on struggles and industrial economic production. Mere homage to religion or rulers whose ideologies do not necessarily fit the practicalities required by a modern society has led to the shift towards nationalism, especially at a time when industrialization became an inevitable reality that compelled the formation of proper policies that do not center on glorifying a ruler or religion without practical implications (Hutchinson, 1994; Symmons-Symonolewicz, 1968).

Ideological Underpinnings of Nationalism

Several theorists have come to connect the rise of nationalism to the emergence of the modern society. Marx, for instance, has long reiterated the stance that a modern society characterized by industrial production and the recognition of people against the exploitation of the bourgeoisie is a proper requisite for nationalism. The clamor of people to have a standardized set of rules for labor standards and relations eventually led them to identify themselves with one another as individuals coming under the oppression of the bourgeoisie. It is in that light wherein Marx asserted the emergence of nationalist sentiments based on the common idea of people on oppression led by capitalist exploitation arising from industrialization. On the part of Henry Maine, the distinction between a traditional and modern society has found characterization on the existence of elitist characterizations of people

based on families or factions yielding considerable political power. Verily, Maine stressed that a traditional society holds such elitist notions, while a modern society finds greater orientation in individuals whose interests lie on covenants with one another. Moreover, the contextualization of a modern society as an impersonal one compared to a traditional society bounded by emotional attributes has become the central thesis of Ferdinand Tonnies in conceptualizing nationalism. Yet, Tonnies has criticized the modern society based on its alienating features, compared to a traditional society characterized by familiarity. Elaborating on the concept of alienation set forth by Tonnies is Emile Durkheim, who has held that solidarity within a modern society is organic in nature, compared to the mechanical nature of solidarity within traditional societies. The authoritarian nature of a traditional society rests on the need to accept a particular culture mechanically, as opposed to the division of labor alienating people with one another, in the case of a modern society. Leadership, in the view of Max Weber, rests on its consolidation on a single charismatic person that enables the formation of a system defining state authority. The emergence of a charismatic leader has served as the centerpiece of several nationalist movements (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Symmons-Symonolewicz, 1968).

Notable Kinds of Nationalism

At least three significant kinds of nationalism help explain how people have united with one another to form a modern society - nationalism based on anti-colonialism, civic and ethnic movements. The first kind, anti-colonial nationalism, has emerged from the trend of decolonization within the

periphery after the Second World War, most notably within Asia and Africa. The prolonged oppression of territories within said areas by politically and economically powerful western nations has inspired nationalist movements to break out as a means of escaping from such sordid reality. The second kind, civic nationalism, originated from the essential notion of nationalist sentiments directed towards liberal identification with the nation. Ethnicity is typically a non-issue under civic nationalism, for it only requires association based on concurring political standpoints on legal rights and procedures. The third kind, ethnic nationalism, is self-explanatory in that the main objective of forming a nation is for people to protect their own ethnicity. The foregoing kinds of nationalism have influenced nationalist movements throughout the 20th century - a time where many nations emerged from decolonization and rising political consciousness against subduing states primarily interested in the material endowments of the territories they have previously occupied (Gagnon, 1994-1995; Trigger, 1984).

Synthesis

Is nationalism a concept unique to a modern society? The foregoing literature has stressed on the affirmative side of said question. The absence of the industrial revolution could not have triggered nationalist movements, for such has caused further exploitation to occur and has reinforced the idea of oppression among people, particularly those living within the periphery. The definition of a modern society consistently asserted the need to espouse an industrial mode of economic production, consolidation of power within a single authority and practice of speaking a common language or language

group – all being pertinent to the unifying characteristics of nationalism. The departure from the idea of political allegiance centered on religion or on a ruler stems from the need to meet the efficiency required to maintain industrial production. Given industrial production requires the need to employ a sizable workforce, it is important to utilize mechanisms that would organize them to become efficient at production. Engaging in industrial production akin to that of agricultural production based on homage for a single ruler or religion would not emerge as practical, given the systemic changes it requires. Workers have to work within a specific timeframe in order for them to exhaust their maximum utility for industrial production. There is an understanding that workers are more efficient when working within a set number of hours, since industrial production would require their endurance and motivation to be at the top level. Yet, exploitation of labor has become the overarching theme that inspired the eventual progress of nationalist movements, given that workers have departed from agricultural modes of production to industrial settings, only to find out that the bourgeoisie has abused their utility. Nationalism thus served as a response to said phenomena, in that such would enable people to agree on a covenant indicating agreement over sets of regulations and policies that would maintain harmony in labor production (Hayes, 1968; Hutchinson, 1994). Traditional societies may not stand the pressure set forth by industrial production, in that the latter requires unity within its given setting in order to prosper. Traditional societies, wherein power does not find consolidation within just one ruler, could encounter difficulties arising from the demands of workers within industrial settings. Therefore, it is noteworthy to emphasize

the importance of having a modern society in making nationalism work. A modern society involves the recognition of a leader whose consolidated power legitimizes his rule over the people; with such a leader in place, nationalism could progress through providing a formidable response to the demands of industrial production. Moreover, the growth of industrial production has also emphasized the importance of proper communication, best resolved through the prevalence of a common language or language group. Therefore, it would not be absurd to assert that nationalism would work best within a modern society (Hayes, 1968; Symmons-Symonolewicz, 1968).

The formation of nationalist consciousness rests on the notion of oppression held by people seeking to establish their own nation. Such is what the three prominent kinds of nationalism - anti-colonialist, civic and ethnic, have in common. The anticolonialist kind of nationalism stems from the oppression inflicted by colonizing nations on territories in periphery areas such as parts of Asia and Africa. The civic kind of nationalism derives its concerns from the recognition of a single national identity based on concurrence to political realities consisting of legal rights and procedure, without necessarily paying attention to ethnicity. Oppression, in this case, comes from conflicts over recognizing the legitimacy of rulers or changes in religion, which has proven to undermine the organization of industrial production. The ethnic kind of nationalism centers on protecting an ethnicity from external influences through making it as a basis for nation building. Overall, nationalism transpires from the traditional-to-modern society transition, with several

modes of oppression serving as formidable triggers (Gagnon, 1994-1995; Hutchinson, 1994; Trigger, 1984).

Conclusion

Nationalism is quintessentially a product of modernism, in that it has proven itself compatible with the characteristics of a modern society. A modern society rests on the following characteristics - prevalence of an industrialized economic mode of production that is self-subsistent, legitimacy of a single unifying leader and the prominence of a common language or language group. Emphasis on industrial production has become highly apparent in this study, in that such has become a strong trigger that urged people to reconsider the leadership bestowed by the ruler or religion they once recognized as their source of political organization. Organizing labor in industrial production could not progress without the imposing presence of a charismatic form of leadership, which in turn could enforce the idea of nationalism once the leader therein successfully widens his support base. For someone to become a well-supported leader with consolidated power over a nation, he has to have key political ideas on legal rights and procedures that would best serve the interest of industrial production. Such would only become possible through a modern society. A traditional society that bases political legitimacy on a ruler or religion rather than the idea of national unity could not stand to become adaptive to nationalism, for people would not be able unite with one another through identifying themselves in relation to their perceived countrymen - a necessary requisite of nationalist consciousness.

Modernism recognizes that people have eclectic preferences in terms of religion and political ideologies, hence its departure from traditions that become highly impractical in the long term. Nevertheless, modernism supports nationalism in that the latter emphasizes the importance of coming to political agreements via a covenant that would lead to the formation of national identity and unity. With that, it is highly amenable to agree on the premise that nationalism is a modernist concept. Tradition could simply not adjust to the practical needs of a nation, although it could also unite people over particular national concerns. Although symbolically unifying in nature, tradition could not always stand to fit with the practical demands of the modern times greatly characterized by industrial production. Not all people adhere to tradition to the extent that they do not even treat it as a factor for national unity. What prevails as the more important aspect in nationalism is the agreement of the people to a covenant marking their identity as one people. Through anti-colonialist, civic and ethnic concerns, among many others, that have characterized nationalism, there is considerable proof that the emergence of nationalist thought did not require any specific restrictions to make national unity possible. The requirement of modernism - support for industrial production, the existence of a formidable leader and the prominence of a common medium of communication, is perhaps the only matter that counts in order to make nationalist movements practical and feasible.

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