

Globalisation and its effects on nationalism

As the word assumes, globalization affects people and states all around the world. It characterises a world that becomes more and more interdependent, not only economically, but politically and culturally as well. Clare Short, a British Labour Party politician, once said: “People have accused me of being in favour of globalisation. This is equivalent to accusing me of being in favour of the sun rising in the morning.”¹ This quote indicates quite well the inevitability of the process of globalisation.

The following paper will examine the extent to which globalisation fosters and erodes the political ideology of nationalism. This ideology has no clear coherent set of beliefs and values, but in general it is regarded as a “consciousness manifested by members of a group that they belong to a particular nation”². A common heritage and culture therefore creates a national identity and the feeling of a community.

The paper will firstly focus on eroding effects that threaten classical nationalism and will later on examine arguments that strengthen the ideology of nationalism in times of globalisation.

The rise of International Organisations such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the European Union (EU) took away some amount of decision-making from nation-states. Membership in intergovernmental organisations always requires states to give away some of their sovereignty³. Within the EU there are tendencies towards a supranational character of the organisation. With a parliament elected every 5 years by the citizens of the EU member states a standing supranational assembly has been created, uniting delegates from the nation-states to discuss and pass legislation on a level which is above the nation⁴. This development erodes nationalist ideology in all member states and to bring it even further, in some ways it even creates cross-national identities. Some EU states allow citizens to vote in national elections even if they are only residents and have no citizenship⁵. In Scotland for example students from Germany are allowed to cast their votes not only in elections to the European Parliament, but are also entitled to participate in elections to the Scottish Parliament.

¹ http://thinkexist.com/quotes/clare_short/

² Jay, R. (2004) *Political Ideologies an introduction*, 2nd edition, London: Routledge, London, p.153

³ Heywood, A. (2007) *Political ideologies, an introduction*, 4th edition, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.172

⁴ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament.do?language=en>

⁵ Hall, J.A. (2000) ‘Globalization and Nationalism’, *Thesis Eleven*, 63; 63, p. 67

National identities seem to be blurred in this context and the idea of a “United States of Europe” similar to the US feels omnipresent. With the introduction of the Euro as new currency for Europe in 1999 and integrative number plates for cars within the EU, nationalist thinking is being actively eroded by promoting a homogenous Europe. A more recent idea, which has yet to be applied, is the notion of similar driving licenses for all member states⁶.

Another important factor that needs to be taken into account is an interdependent global economy. Economic nationalism today is widely seen as obsolete and in many cases only causes harm to the state that practices it⁷. The economic fate of one state seems to be deeply linked to the fate of other states. The advent of Transnational Corporations (TNC's), which act globally, a rise in exports and imports of countries and an increasing amount of foreign direct investments (FDI's) also play their role in establishing one global market⁸. The autarchic national economy made way for a new form of national economy which is interdependent with other states' economies. The most recent example is the so called “Credit Crunch” that not only affected the United States' economy, but led lots of other, particularly European economies, into recession. As this example clearly shows, nationalist ideology towards the economy has been eroded.

A global market also erodes nationalist thinking in a different way. A look onto shelves in supermarkets underlines this point. Products from other countries can be purchased and contribute to a change in national cultures. Cooking with fruits and vegetables imported from nations at the other end of the world or playing games on electrical entertainment devices from Japan change a nation's culture in the long term. A couple of years ago, the game “Pokémon” started infiltrating the lives of young people all around the world and led to a global hype⁹. Although the game contents was translated into the respective language, it still, at least to some extent, contained parts of Japanese attitudes and general culture. Later on, even a TV series about the “Pokémon” had been made and shown in countries across the world. Nationalist ideology is eroded subliminally and affected by a different culture.

⁶ http://www.workpermit.com/news/2006_12_18/eu/european_driving_license.htm

⁷ Levitt, T. (1984) ‘The globalisation of markets’, p. 17

⁸ Carkovic, M. and Levine, R. (2002) ‘Does foreign direct investment accelerate economic growth?’, p.195

⁹ Tobin, J. (2002) ‘Pikachu's global adventure’, p.53

The development of new technologies, primarily the internet, also poses a threat to nationalism. People from different countries are now able to interact in a “virtual world without borders”¹⁰ and chat to people they otherwise might never have got to know. The World Wide Web creates a social space through social networking pages such as “facebook” or millions of different forums where people with similar interests can share their ideas, beliefs or fears. Although there are tendencies of some of these forums to use languages not spoken by the majority of the world’s population, the general language of the internet is indeed English. As most people have to learn this language at school nowadays, English can be seen as the universal language of interaction.

The internet gives people the chance to learn about and to understand other cultures and it is likely to weaken xenophobic tendencies towards people from a different historical and cultural background. Marshall McLuhan’s idea of the world as a “global village”¹¹ dates back to the 1960’s but today is more valid than ever before. The online world has the ability to create a new form of community; one that is not limited to national boundaries, history or culture. The development of a global community challenges and undermines nationalist thinking.

Apart from the internet, there are other forms of media that challenge and influence national cultures and attitudes. Books and their translations into multiple languages are only one example. The famous “Harry Potter” books are now available in 60 different languages¹² and fascinated over three hundred million readers worldwide. Even music can have an influence on people’s attitudes. Songs with a political message like Green Day’s “Working Class Hero”, which focuses on the current situation in Darfur, have the ability to make people from other nations think about global issues and not only national problems. With statements like “My father was killed in front of me.” by people from the shattered region of Sudan the song aims to create sympathy with these people.

Specifically the film industry is another crucial factor that erodes nationalism. Series like “Friends” from the US promote a Western viewpoint of social relations and interactions with other people. Members of other cultures who get confronted with this series on TV will probably adapt similar behaviour over time. The same is valid for cinema movies made in

¹⁰ Van Alstyne, M., and Brynjolfsson, E. (1996) ‘Electronic Communities: Global village or Cyberbalkans?’, p.3

¹¹ http://archives.cbc.ca/arts_entertainment/media/topics/342-1814/

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Potter_in_translation

Hollywood or the emerging Indian counterpart “Bollywood”¹³. In a way, national cultures are permeated and extended by foreign media and attitudes might be changing¹⁴.

Globalisation is also the cause for the greatest of all threats towards nationalism. In today’s world people have more mobility than they ever had before. As a consequence of this, migration dramatically increased¹⁵. Air travel in particular allows people to get from one point of the world to another one thousands of miles away within only hours. The causes for migration are manifold. While tourists usually only travel to other countries for a short period of time, economic migrants, asylum seekers and refugees usually plan to leave their country behind at least for a couple of years if not for ever. This development brings together people from different cultural backgrounds and over time will inevitably lead to the mixture of them. A so called multicultural community is likely to emerge within nation states. The United States are a good example for that. Often called the “melting pot”, which describes the development of a multicultural state that eventually will turn into a state with one single culture emerged out of multiple different ones. There also is a chance for a global culture or one world society. However, as Umut Özkirimli pointed out, these cultures are of a hybrid nature¹⁶. Developments into the direction of multiculturalist states pose a big threat to nationalist ideology, as continuous migration erodes the belief in a nation-state and challenges the importance of a common cultural heritage.

Although there are various threats to nationalism in a globalised world, there are also multiple arguments that globalisation can foster nationalist ideology. The following section will examine the most important ones.

In times of mass migration and global terrorism it is likely for xenophobia to increase. Gerard Delanty goes as far to even talk about an “age of anxiety”¹⁷ People might fear persons with a

¹³ Sarkar, B. (2008) ‘The Melodramas of Globalisation’, *Cultural Dynamics*, 20;31, p.33

¹⁴ Heywood, A. (2007) *Political ideologies, an introduction*, 4th edition, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.172

¹⁵ Pringle, D.G. (1998), ‘Globalisation, Reterritorialisation and National Identity’, *Geopolitics and International Boundaries*, vol.3, no.3, p.2f

¹⁶ Özkirimli, U. (2005) *Contemporary Debates on Nationalism, A critical engagement*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.132

¹⁷ Delanty, G. (2008) ‘Fear of Others: Social Exclusion and the European crisis of solidarity’, *Social Policy and Administration*, vol. 42, no.6, p.676

different culture or ethnicity just because they do not know or understand them. They have more trust in people they do know as well as in people who can speak their language. Nationalist thinkers fear the loss of their culture altogether through the influence of foreign “exotic” cultures¹⁸. Samuel Huntington’s idea of a “Clash of Civilisations”, as it seems to take place in a way at the moment between the Western and the Arabic civilization, also supports this thesis. The fear of strangers or foreigners to intervene and possibly change a state’s culture leads to the renaissance of a broadly supported view, that for example immigration should be restricted and therefore fosters nationalist ideas.

However, it is not only xenophobia that fosters nationalism. People might also fear to lose their national culture altogether during the process of globalisation. Tomlinson sees the fear of losing cultures as the main concern of protestors against globalisation¹⁹. This includes the loss of language as it can be witnessed for example in Estonia today. Russian poses a big threat to Estonian and it now is an official government policy to “maintain and develop” Estonian language and culture²⁰. Nationalists fear the loss of their cultural heritage or a decrease in its importance to the people living in their state. Emigration and immigration also fosters this belief, as people from the same cultural background move away and are “replaced” by humans with a different heritage.

If the boundaries of the nation do not match the boundaries of the state, for example as it is with the United Kingdom and the Scottish nation, in times of globalisation, new movements towards national independence could arise. According to a recent poll, the number of people in Scotland that support independence has risen notably.²¹ The Scottish National Party (SNP) argues that an independent Scotland could be self-sufficient through the export of oil and even become a rich state like the Scandinavian countries. Radically fostering nationalist thinking, separatist movements like this can be found all over the world. The Basque region in Spain, South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia and the successful establishment of the state of Kosovo in February 2008 are only a few examples.²²

¹⁸ Shore, C. (1997) ‘Ethnicity, Xenophobia and the boundaries of Europe’, *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, vol. 4, issue 3-4, p.256

¹⁹ Tomlinson, cited in Natrajan, B. (2003) ‘Masking and Veiling Protests: Culture and Ideology in Representing Globalisation’, *Cultural Dynamics*, 15, 213, p.226

²⁰ <http://www.valitsus.ee/?id=6581>

²¹ <http://snp.org/node/14456>

²² <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/7662149.stm>

The presence of transnational corporations also in a way fosters nationalist thinking. Although these firms are capable of moving their headquarters to the country, which has legislation that most favours their actions, TNC's are still bound by national jurisdictions for example worker's rights²³. They also need the state to secure their properties which creates a symbiosis of interests that both TNC's and states share. This development and also inter-state relations and participation in international organisations such as the UN fosters the importance of nation-states and therefore nationalist thinking, as the state always acts according to self-interest; the interests of its people. In terms of TNC's this means to attract companies to build their headquarters in their country to provide employment.

In a globalised world with lots of different cultural influences nationalists might feel overwhelmed. The notion of a newly emerging universal culture more or less implies the loss of national culture. The search for identity seems to be one of the greater tasks for people in today's world. This fosters nationalist thinking, as humans tend to turn towards things they know and they understand. In opposition to a universal culture, national cultures have a common and coherent heritage. In general, people who speak the same language and have identical values do less alienate other people and it is easier to find a common ground for relations of any kind. Even though there might be loyalties towards both, the universal and the national culture, the attachment to the latter one is more deeply rooted in people²⁴.

Patriotism, especially, but not only in the United States, is another important factor in this matter. In a globalised world nationalists tend to be proud of the achievements their country had made. Globalisation in their opinion is a competition between nation-states and it is fairly obvious, that this notion clearly accounts for a rise in nationalist thinking.

Multicultural societies can also foster nationalism in a different way. As the majority of people living in a state will still be ethnic nationals, people from other cultural backgrounds account for one great or more specific, many small minorities. While it might be hard for the majority to see or even understand the point of the minorities, this can lead to tensions between cultures. Nationalists fear a far too great influence of people from other cultures towards the political decision-making process. However, in most liberal-democratic countries, minorities are protected by the law and their opinion needs to be taken into account when making a decision. In the worst case, two completely opposed opinions of majority and

²³ Özkirimli, U. (2005) *Contemporary Debates on Nationalism, A critical engagement*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.133

²⁴Ibidem, p.109

minority might clash together. A consensus can hardly be achieved without leaving the majority dissatisfied and with a taste of other cultures dominating their own culture and state respectively. A typical consequence will be calls for greater restrictions towards immigration policy and other more nationalist policies.

As recently witnessed, globalisation does not only stand for an ever growing international economy, but can cause recessions as well. The “credit crunch” and its consequences will foster nationalism in states all around the world. A good, but exaggerated example is the British National Party’s response to the recession of the British economy. On their webpage they claim that a BNP government would enact a policy of economic nationalism in the country²⁵.

In politically or economically hard times people generally turn towards their own country and culture. Solutions for problems are trying to be found within the borders of a state. A recession for example means a rise in unemployment and a political consequence is the restriction of immigration. Tax cuts might be made, but the money which will be lost by the government through this measure needs to be found somewhere else, for example by cutting welfare services.

As the people who are in government are usually part of the majority culture of a nation-state, nationals have greater trust into them than into any other kind of political organisation like the EU. The notion of “it is one of us, who governs us” might not be a very nationalistic one on the first sight, but it definitely plays a role in an attitude inside a country that increasingly becomes nationalist. Economically and politically hard times therefore foster nationalist ideology in order to turn away harm from the “own” people.

In conclusion one could argue that there are a lot of existing threats globalisation poses towards nationalism. Participation in international organisations and the loss of parts of a state’s sovereignty over its own territory, as well as regional integration erode nationalist ideology. A global market that links all economies with one another and the availability of products from far away countries also account for social linkages and changes in cultures. Technologies like the internet and other forms of media, be it music, films, books or television transport and export national cultures into even the remotest parts of the world and

²⁵ <http://bnp.org.uk/2008/10/the-global-financial-crisis-and-the-vindication-of-economic-nationalism/>

are capable of significantly changing cultures. However, the most important feature of globalisation is migration. The movement of people and their culture accounts for a more and more heterogeneous becoming hybrid culture or multiculturalism that eventually can lead to a world culture.

On the other side, in a globalised world, many features of nationalism seem to have a revival. Increasing migration movements fosters xenophobia among people. Mixing cultures and newly emerging hybrid cultures make it hard for people to find their identity and let them turn towards their own culture. Nationalism clearly accounts for secession movements around the world, especially in Eastern Europe. External extinctive pressures towards cultures like in Estonia also foster nationalism with the aim to preserve the culture. Problem solving and political decision-making in multicultural societies can also foster nationalist thinking if the majority culture feels left out or underrepresented by the government. As history tells us, globalisation can also cause the economy to slow down or even to fall into recession. During these times, people mainly focus on their own culture and its well-being. As their expectations towards the global economy have not been matched, they turn towards their state as the last resort of help. They have greater trust and higher loyalty towards people with a similar cultural background.

Some people argue that nationalist ideology has been superseded by other political ideologies. In a globalised world this is only half of the truth. There are other, probably more accurate ideologies to explain political behaviour in a globalised world, nonetheless nationalism is still existent. It will become harder to uphold in the future, but it is not foreseeable that this ideology is about to vanish from the political stage in the next decades.

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