

Nation and nationalism in the 21st century

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Origins

NATION, in a socio-anthropological sense, is a community endowed with a culture of its own, obeying a single leadership and, with rare exceptions, inhabiting the same territory. In this sense, nations have existed since the Neolithic.

In the medieval university, the name “nation” was given to the linguistic groups into which the students fell, forming such nations as the French, Germanic, etc.

The modern sense of nation emerged in incipient form in Europe during the Italian Renaissance, with its differentiation between Florentines, Milanese, Neapolitans, etc. However, in the full sociopolitical sense of the term, the European nations arose in the 16th Century with the formation and consolidation of the Nation States of France, England, Castile and Portugal.

The Nation State would have a long life ahead of it, acquiring its modern form in the 18th Century and becoming fully-fledged in the latter half of the 19th, with the unifications of Germany and Italy. From that point on, this modality of Statehood spread across the globe.

Challenges

From the end of the Middle Ages, the fledgling European nations had to weather serious external challenges, such as the Hundred Years War between France and Great Britain, or conflicts like that between Portuguese Independentism and Castile Imperialism. In the 19th Century, having come through the expansionist adventure of Napoleonic France, the European nations found themselves facing British imperialism and its capacity to interfere in other nations. The unified Germany would twice become – once under Bismarck in the 15th Century and again under Hitler in the 20th - a grave threat to the European countries, occupying parts of French territory on both occasions.

More recently, the super-competitiveness of Japan posed a serious economic threat to all and sundry, including the powerful United States. The latter, with the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991, would eventually become a sole superpower basking in undisputed global supremacy.

The current process of globalization has come to exert a diversified pressure upon the majority of Nation States that combines economic factors

with cultural and informational aspects. Multinational corporations have come to dominate most global markets. International information is controlled by a handful of North-American agencies; and something similar has been happening with television and cinema. Globalization has economically and culturally unified the world as per North-American standards and under the decisive influence of its culture and the English language.

Faced with these challenges, many Nation States have become little more than formal structures, preserving national anthems while their flags and armies lie still, but effectively constituting, especially in their economic and cultural dimensions, mere provinces of an “American Empire”. This empire, unlike its historical precedents, such as those of Rome and Britain, does not directly involve political domination through a “proconsul” or “viceroy” backed up by the Homeland’s military and bureaucratic might. Rather this empire is a “field”, analogous to a “magnetic” or “gravitational field”.

The prevalence of the American Empire is secured by irresistible conditioning factors, whether economic/financial, cultural, informational, political or, in some cases, military. These conditioning factors compel local ruling classes to toe the American line on essential issues, whether they like it or not. The Imperial “provinces” are conditioned by two key determinants: the international financial market and everything related to information, and the divulgence of images through TV and cinema.

The insertion of the provincial nations of the American Empire in the international financial market, domestically incorporating its procedures and on an open channel of exchange with the Imperial seat, especially when it comes to maintaining conditions favorable to foreign investments, has turned these countries into satellites of this market, which is itself wholly dominated and directed by large North-American corporations. Financial capital is to the American Empire what her legions were to Rome, with the added support of a de facto monopoly on information and visuality.

Reactions

This international panorama has provoked different reactions from nations intent on preserving their authentic cultural, economic and political autonomy. These reactions vary within two main groups: countries of continental proportions and successful regional integrations.

The most significant case of successful autonomy among the continental nations is China. Over the last thirty years, since Deng Xiaoping, China has sustained an annual growth rate in the order of 10% of GDP. Hence a nation with a population of 1.3 billion has gone from being one of the poorest economies in the world to the third-largest on the globe, behind only the United States and Japan. Everything indicates that China will continue to enjoy high annual growth rates, probably not quite in the 10% of GDP bracket, but almost certainly no lower than 6% per annum, which will make it, in the not too distant future, the

largest economy in the world. In parallel, China has been modernizing fast in all relevant spheres, which, in turn, ought to make it a second superpower by mid century. One of the effects of this likely condition will be the institution of a new bipolarity, with all the dangers that go with it.

Under Vladimir Putin, Russia, another semi-continental nation, has been striving to recover its former superpower status, something it may well achieve by mid century if it can keep the present pace. Likewise, India has been modernizing at full throttle and occupying growing space on the international scene.

In contrast to what has been happening in other countries, the European Union has swelled its ranks to 27 member states. Though this expansion may boost Europe's economic potential in the short to medium term, in the long run it will merely postpone any real hope of attaining satisfactory political unity in foreign policy. In the form of the EU the contrast between the economic giant and political dwarf is likely to live on into the long-term future.

On a more modest scale, the Mercosul, which has enjoyed some success over the last sixteen years, has presented itself, despite countless setbacks, as the hard core of a South-American integrationist project toward which the Community of South-American Nations, still in declaration phase, is a first step.

New nationalism

What is at play in this current American monopolism and likely Sino-American bipolarity, still in the making, is the degree to which it will be possible to constitute consistent pockets of domestic and international autonomy in the rest of the world.

Without prejudice against other factors, only the Nation State has the capacity to fulfill this role, given its regulatory action and possible direct initiative. However, as previously mentioned, globalization has in many ways been corroding this regulatory capacity. The practical monopoly North-American agencies have over information and image production submits all of the world's cultures – and more so the more open they are - to the American influence, which even operates from behind their own national borders.

The international financial market, of which domestic markets are a part, imposes its procedures upon the national money markets in such a manner as they have no capacity to resist. Thus the Ministers of Finance and Central Bank Presidents, regardless of their preferences, serve as agents of the internationalization of national economies, sending them into orbit around the international financial market. So how can Nation States oppose these trends?

The eminent Argentine economist Aldo Ferrer has shown in various studies that the regulatory capacity of many Nation States is far greater than the internationalizing theories would suggest. In fact, the effective contribution of foreign investment internationally is in the order of 5%, which means nations are still dependent on national capital for growth. Nation States could significantly reduce the satellitization of their domestic financial markets to the international

market by shaking off the dependentist complex and adopting selective measures against merely speculative capital, which tends to be the predominant kind. It is not policies of unrestricted openness to foreign capital that generates investment opportunities, but policies capable of providing a powerful stimulus to domestic reserves.

Hence a new nationalism is not only possible, but necessary, one that is no mere national pride or bigoted xenophobia, but rather an intelligent understanding of the domestic and international realities. Likewise possible and necessary is to compensate for deregulated forms of globalization with the formation of efficient regionalisms. This was the solution successfully adopted by Europe, and, through the expansion and consolidation of the Mercosul, this could be the solution for Brazil and other South-American countries on a course toward the general integration of South America. The conversion of the Community of South-American Nations from the current blueprint to a truly operational entity would vastly enhance the economic and technological capacity of the region's nations, generating a system endowed with robust international power of negotiation and a high level of autonomy.

The answer to the downside of globalization is not passive acceptance, but the adoption of a new nationalism adjusted to the conditions of the 21st Century; a protectively regulatory nationalism as a source of strong new initiatives, conceived, in the case of a nation like Brazil, within the kernel of an intelligent South-American integrationism that serves the interests of all of its participants.

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ABSTRACT - In spite of the globalization process, the National State still represents the deciding agent in countries with satisfactory autonomy conditions. Regional integrations such as European Union and Mercosur have become necessary conditions to sustain this autonomy.

KEYWORDS - National State, Autonomy, Regional integration.

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