

NATIONALISM, INTERNET AND GLOCALITY: INDIVIDUALS, IDENTITIES AND NETWORKS IN SPACELESS SPACE

ADAM HORÁLEK

University of Pardubice – Faculty of Arts – Department of Social Sciences

Abstract: *In Ernest Gellner's words, nationalism is understood as an ideology requiring that the state and national borders must be identical. However, if nationalism can boost in the era of new media, including internet, which creates mostly spatially unlimited social networks, is Gellner's requirement still valid? And what that means to us? As nationalism is very much increasing in contemporary world, we should question what its role really is. Can nationalism be understood as international, interconnecting and global or as national, dividing and local? The paper focuses on how nationalism uses the internet to enhance its impact, how this utilization of internet makes local and global glocal, and whether these processes leads to interconnectivity among nationalisms.*

Keywords: *glocality, spacelessness, internet, identity, nationalism.*

JEL classification:

Grant affiliation:

1 Introduction

In recent years we can face a significant increase in nationalism all over the world. On everyday basis we are subjected to “events” which are usually labeled (but often not correctly) as ethnic, national or nationalistic. But do we really understand what these terms mean to us and what they really stand for? Is the contemporary world in the process of nationalization? What is the reason people still use concepts of nation and nationalism to justify and defend the values of their own identity? What is the role of new media in these processes – do they support and help to promote nationalistic thinking and behavior or do they take down the borders and walls between nations? Many scholars try to answer these questions. In the following text I will try to answer the last one in a specific way using discourses of most eminent scholars on nationalism such as Ernest Gellner, Fredrik Barth and Thomas H. Eriksen and examining them on current issues. As a result of the paper I come to the conclusion that nationalism and nations are definitely not death as many scholars expected as a result of new media take-over. The nations did not disappear; they just have become spaceless in

some way – the major discourse has been relocated to the cyberspace. But as the current development even in Europe shows, the space did not diminish completely, it was just reassessed and got a new form and role within current political and social discourse.

2 Glocal nationalism versus spaceless identity and community

According to Ernest Gellner (1983), nationalism is an ideology that demands the compatibility of ethnic and political borders. This definition of what actually nationalism is about sounds very simple to the point when we subject the components to a closer scrutiny. Border is considered a lineal division between two parts. In case of states and their political borders we can assume this concept actually works and it is a prerequisite for the political integrity and the rule of law within state borders.

However, in the case of communities such concept does not work. Already Fredrik Barth in his *Introduction to Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969) pointed out that when considering social borders, we should rather talk about borderlands. From social scientific perspective there is no borderline, but only fuzzy and transcending area of exchanges where one society and culture interferes, contacts, negotiates and struggles with others. We also could apply the core and periphery concept by Wallerstein to some extent. The core is the center of the nation with all its symbols and “pure” culture whereas in the periphery the “purity” of the national culture is fragmented by neighboring cultures. Still, we have two distinct concepts which cannot become identical or compatible by their nature. States can hardly accept the concept of fuzzy borderlands as transiting regions where more laws are in charge and interfere to each other. At the same time the ethnic groups can hardly become so isolated and indifferent so that a clear line between them can be drawn (of course in history and in present we can find some isolated cases such as North Korea).

It follows that nationalism as unification ideology of ethnic and political borders can never be finished and therefore it is everlasting. In other words, the process of creating a nation cannot be finished, it is always and constantly challenged by “disturbing” ethnic and cultural contacts. Moreover, it develops and reproduces from inside simultaneously (e.g. by generational exchange). Therefore, the identification with culture or ethnic group must be understood as individual, fluid, and contextual whereas ideology of nation is rigid, space-based (the homeland symbol), collective (us versus them) and stable (the antiquity of nations). This distinction is mostly visible when contrasting the political and scholarly discourse on the topic. Whereas the first one is definitely primordial, the second is much more into contextuality.

Above that, individual identities are space-independent whereas national ideologies are space-dependent. One can remain being Czech even when not residing in Czechia, especially in present. New media such as Facebook, Twitter, E-mail, and internet as a whole enable us to remain in close contact on day-to-day, audiovisual and intimate basis. Therefore, being Czech is not dependent on the place of residence, citizenship, job etc. Czech emigrants can feel more Czech today, after decades in hosting country, thanks the modern technology which can enrich and nurture their original ethnic identity. However, the same does not apply on state perspective. In order to be in control of territory, taxes, enforceable law, and security, states and their national ideologies very much reject such perspectives and even make such behavior illegal or at least less approachable.

These approaches contrary to each other are the source of what is called glocality of nationalism. Roland Robertson (1995) understands glocalization as a process combining universal and particular values and symbols when global phenomenon gets local variables and local specificity becomes globalized. Glocalization is understood to be the result of predominantly economic activities where the capital is the most fluid and globally universal commodity. Glocalization in the beginning was mostly used to describe the local adaptation of universal products made by trans-national corporations (e.g. McDonald's). With new media this concept was applied also to values, information, and symbols. Such symbols, including those of the EU's free movement of the people and goods, democracy, equality, etc. are shared but at the same time accustomed by each national society. But in global dimension, the nationalism and the idea of modern nation is a similar case.

3 Space-based or space-less nations

Modern nations are usually considered as a result of industrialization of Europe and as predominantly European political program (e.g. Gellner 1983, Eriksen 2007, Hroch 2004). However, as we can see, most of current states in world consider themselves as national. The concept of nation was absorbed by most societies and at the same time it was readjusted to the local needs – glocalized. Through colonization, both by power (e.g. United Kingdom, France) as well as by ideology (e.g. USSR), the concepts of nations became genuinely universal but still there are local differences in content.

Nationalism in its core political program is to form a nation, therefore to distinct the local or regional community from its neighbors. However, at the same time through its ideology it can be said that it is nationalism and idea of nations which creates universal national values, comparable and understandable globally. Internet and other forms of new media were usually considered as a threat to the nationalism and modern nations. Their border-free and spaceless essentiality was seen as the thin end of the wedge of the wane of nations. But it was Eriksen (2007) who pointed out that internet is no enemy of nations and that in contrary it can be utilized for the national benefit.

Let's imagine nationalism and nations as a good on the "world's stocks exchange". Being national is a great label, trade mark and globally marketable logo. Being national company, nation's biggest producer, inter-national trusts, sponsors of national events and so on is a way of generate huge incomes, support and security either by making more profits or becoming "too national to fail". It is obvious that many trans-national companies create specific national strategies through sponsorships, glocalized assortment of products (national brands) or by using the inter-national differences in taxes, laws and restrictions. Despite the fact most liberal economists consider states as an obstacle for genuine global free market, I rather argue that it is the nation which creates a huge and prosperous environment for global trade – not only of goods, but also of values, ideas, information.

There is no better way to address such huge audiences as nations than by internet and new media. Even rigid traditional national institutions like royal households use Facebook, Instagram, Twitter. As Kubátová (2012) points out, new media contribute to the historical rearrangement of global society. Internet became the international spaceless space for addressing and communization of nations, religious groups, political parties, and even terrorists. It became a genuine international "battlefield" of values where each and every national symbols can be challenged and diminished or strengthened and improved. In any case, the internet took the role of the border – the space of interaction. And the nation in the cyberspace of internet became both the dividing and the unifying ideology. We are

subjected to enormous and unprecedented advertisement of nationalism through private companies, political parties, NGOs and media. Just imagine how many information we get every day are presented in the nationalistic rhetoric – from the threat of terrorism to the genuinely national car industry (owned by foreign transnational corporation), national hockey team (where often only few members really were born in the national state), national TV channel (serving more foreign news and movies than the home one) etc. When considering these objects as national we simultaneously accept their content as national as well. By doing so we automatically reshape the meaning and content of the national and make the national more international, globally understandable and comparable, still glocally different.

4 Conclusion

Nations and nationalism are still very powerful. They can address a vast audience, have emotional content and are easy to reach (at least for in-born members). To manage their societies, nations create borders to protect their territory, values and symbols. On the other hand, nations create an inter-national environment, especially in virtual space. The internet became a new spaceless border where nations interact and meet on day-to-day basis. Nation's values and symbols became marketable, transferable and border-free. In conclusion, nationalism is both, diving and interconnecting. Nationalism and internet use each other to strengthen their positions. The cyberspace became the space where territory lost its importance but at the same time the cyberspace became the borderland where nations interact to each other. The rise of nationalism in present is not in contradiction with the rise of new media and nationalism became more a trademark rather than an ideology in the space of new media.

Literature:

Barth, F. (ed.) (1969). *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Bergen, Oslo, London: Universitets Forlaget.

Eriksen, T. H. (2007). Nationalism and the Internet. *Nations and Nationalism*, 13(1), 1-17.

Gellner, E. (1983). *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Hroch, M. (2004). From ethnic group toward the modern nation: the Czech case. *Nations and Nationalism*, 10(1-2), 95-107.

Kubátová, J. (2012). Facebook - fenomén současné znalostní ekonomiky. In P. Slavíčková (Ed.), *Znalosti pro tržní praxi 2012: Význam znalostí v aktuální fázi ekonomického cyklu* (pp. 237-234). Olomouc: Societas Scientiarum Olomucensis II.

Robertson, R. (1995). Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity. In M. Featherstone et al. (eds.), *Global Modernity* (pp. 25-44). London: Sage Publications.

Contact:

PhDr. Adam Horálek, Ph.D.
Department of Social Sciences, Faculty of Arts, University of Pardubice
Studentská 97
Pardubice 532 10
The Czech republic
adam.horalek@upce.cz
www.upol.academia.edu/AdamHorálek/Papers

Brief information about the author:

Adam Horálek got his Ph.D in ethnology at Charles University, Prague in 2011. Currently he is a head of the Department of Social Sciences, University of Pardubice. His main areas of research include Chinese ethnic minorities, ethnicity and nationalism, Aging of China and Chinese Diaspora. He is a coauthor of a book ‚Selected Chapters on Geography of Contemporary China‘ (with Pavel Ptáček, 2013).