State of Nationalism (SoN): Nationalism and Globalization

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Are we witnessing the fall of nationalism to globalization? In his classic *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, Eric Hobsbawm argued that over the course of time nationalism would no longer be a vital political program and the world would become 'largely supranational'.[1] Or do we take Anthony Smith's conclusion in *Nation and Nationalism in the Global Era* (1995) that such predictions are too optimistic and that supranational identities will not replace national culture any time soon? Hobsbawm and Smith's writings reflect the leading approach toward globalization, which was understood to be the dominant force in the post-Cold War years of the 1990s. The rise of nationalism across the world since the 1990s demonstrates that the belief in the triumph of globalization (and liberalism) was probably too optimistic; an increase in globalization processes does not imply the decline of nationalism across all the spheres – the relationship between nationalism and globalization is far more complex. This relationship is a key unresolved issue in the field and this overview looks to highlight some of its central aspects.

Part of the challenge of addressing the relationship between nationalism and globalization is the plurality of perspectives on how to define these concepts. Is globalization separate from the process of modernization?[2] What is the distinction between globalization and Westernization? There

is no attempt here to offer any definitive definition of globalization; rather, this overview follows the functional definition of globalization as a process of 'increasing cross-border flows of goods, services, money, people, information, and culture' that promotes international interconnectedness.[3] According to this definition, globalization constitutes a puzzling process of contradictory effects on many aspects of politics and society due to its multifaceted nature. It should thus be understood as a process or a set of processes which do not follow linear logic or have equal impact on societies across the world.

The key aspect of this definition, however, is its emphasis on the crossing of borders – these can be different kinds of social and political borders. Any adopted definition of nationalism reflects its inherent tensions with globalization, as the key criteria for any such definition is the nation's differentiation from other nations and its continuity over time. The nation is a collective identity rooted in past symbols, memories, and values, as well as a group that projects into the future. It links symbols, memories, and values to a specific territory while distinguishing itself from other nations (Guibernau 2001).[4] Accordingly, it is clear that the nation requires some type of borders while globalization is the process challenging these borders. It is no wonder then that the dominant view in the field is that nationalism and globalization are an inherent contradiction.

Nationalism and Globalization as Contradictions

The influence of globalization on nationalism is subject to dispute.[5] Of the two dominant interpretations – one argues that globalization undermining nationalism while the other is more sceptical, arguing that globalization might, in fact, reinforce nationalism.

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Globalization undermines national identity due to the fact that the cross-border flow of information makes it harder for any single national identity to retain its unique significance and distinguish itself from other national identities. In the global village, the ability to produce and maintain a homogenous national identity is challenged as people become global consumers of goods and information; in a wired world, the government no longer has the exclusive capacity to exert cultural control over its citizens and territory.[6] The effects of globalization on nationalism are not only in the sphere of culture and identity but also in politics and the economy. The increased participation in international organizations and supranational bodies undermine the function of the nation state. Similarly, the increased relevance of international trade and economic interdependencies challenge the functions of the nation state in allocating resources. These processes therefore reduce the nationalist orientations of citizens.

Although the impact of globalization has long been a subject of study in general, theorists of nationalism have only recently begun to investigate its impact.[7] The customary distinction between modernist and primordial theories of nationalism is also reflected in their conflicting interpretations of the influence of globalization on national identity.[8] The modernist approach posits that nationalism is the product of a specific historical period – modernity – rather than constituting a permanent feature of human society. Consequently, the transformation of social, economic, and political aspects of modern society under globalization changes the meaning of nationalism as an instrument of mass identification and mobilization. Hobsbawm (1992) argued that nationalism had become less important and predicted that, over the course of time, it would no longer be a vital political program. Fifteen years later, he reached the same conclusion, claiming that the emergence of national movements and national claims since the 1990s had not

undermined his contention that nationalism's role as the main force shaping politics was decreasing.[9]

The primordial account of nationalism, on the other hand, emphasizes that nations are neither a modern phenomenon nor social constructs created by changing circumstances, as the modernist approach argues. Rather, nationalism represents the importance of identity and belonging that reaches way further back than the modern period (Horowitz 2004).[10] A variation of the primordial account, as develop by Smith, combines the acknowledgement of modernity for national mobilization while asserting that nationalism also embodies pre-existing ethnic traditions;[11] in other words, nationalism has deeper roots in human society than the modern approach would suggest. The transformation of social, economic, and political aspects of human society under globalization does not, therefore, eradicate nationalism. Smith concluded *Nation and Nationalism in the Global Era* by rejecting the modernist approach and suggesting:

> It would be folly to predict an early supersession of nationalism and an imminent transcendence of the nation....For a global culture seems unable to offer the qualities of collective faith, dignity and hope that only a 'religious surrogate' with its promise of a territorial cultural community across the generations can provide.[12]

In a later account, Smith argued not only that global culture cannot replace national culture but that national identity can, in fact, withstand the force of globalization. While the existence of culturally diverse waves of immigrants has, according to Smith, reshaped the meaning of national identity, this process also leads members of the nation to reflect on their national identity and reinforce its meaning and functions for the nation. He therefore maintains that, despite globalization, 'self-reflective and

self-celebrating communities, nations and nationalism are still very much alive'.[13]

Others view the continuation of national identity in a globalized world as a consequence of the necessity to organize public life. According to Calhoun's influential perspective, national identity organizes ordinary people's 'sense of belonging' and globalization makes the sense of belonging even more important than previously.[14]

From the perspective of global history, nationalism is not a simple reaction to globalization nor is it independent from global connectedness. Instead, nationalism has emerged in tandem with globalization. It is not an opposition to the global processes but it is 'inherent element of certain political or social projects to manage global flows'.[15]

Nationalism and Globalization: Differential Effects

Beyond the conclusive perspectives on the contradiction between nationalism and globalization, there are also those that focus on globalization's differential impact, i.e., the way in which it influences different segments of society in different ways. While globalization may thus push some citizens toward cosmopolitanism, other groups develop 'resistance identities' that reinforce national feelings.[16] National identity can serve as a counterforce against the destabilization of people's sense of security induced by globalization, functioning as a set of stories and beliefs that are particular powerful 'because of their ability to convey a picture of security, stability, and simple answers'.[17]

Globalization has created a new conflict between 'winners' and 'losers,' with the former enjoying the benefits created by the opening up of borders and the latter possessing less resources (such as education) to

cope with the impact of globalization on their status in the labor market and their earnings prospects.[18] This distinction between the 'winners' and 'losers' from globalization can be located across economic or cultural spheres. Economic 'losers' are those who find themselves in increasing competition in the labor market with immigrants. Such competition is common among the less educated because migrants tend to search for jobs in similar sectors of the economy. Where there is a lack of welfare protection, there is growing nationalism and increased voting for the far right.[19] Likewise, in the cultural sphere, there is evidence of competition in the face of growing globalization and immigration. This is not a competition over jobs or welfare resources; instead, it is a competition between the dominant national identity and rising diversity. This results in a sort of cultural backlash that causes the 'losers' from globalization to increase their support for populist leaders who promise to make their countries 'great again'.[20] The question of the extent to which economic or cultural factors are responsible for the gaps between the 'winners' and 'losers' from globalization is open to debate. Nevertheless, it is clear that 'the central psychological consequence of globalization is that it results in transformations in identity, that is, in how people think about themselves in relation to the social environment'.[21] It is therefore little wonder that members of this lower social strata view globalization as a threat to their status and their national identity, which, in turn, leads to an increase in nationalistic feelings. This scenario is talked up by the far right as part of their effort to mobilize support – and intensify national sentiment – among those who attribute their (economic and cultural) losses to globalization. According to this perspective, globalization influences people in different ways depending on their status and their nationalist feelings.

Another take on this issue is through the concept of glocalization. Glocalization is, in short, the way in which global processes are transformed according to the local context. As Roudometof argued:

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> If globalization accounts for the cultural uniformity of the formal aspects of nationhood, glocalization is about realizing (and accounting for) the specificity and 'uniqueness' of each national experience. Glocalization is involved in nation formation precisely because the purely formal elements of nationhood are clearly insufficient to differentiate one nation from the other.[22]

The local context can differ between the different segments of society which may have varying reactions toward the process of globalization due to their social status and the extent to which they view themselves as winning or losing from globalization.

The theoretical arguments can thus be seen to support various views of globalization and its effect on national identity. While globalization may reduce the relevance of national identity, it may also create a nationalist backlash which affects people in different ways. Any consideration of the effect of globalization on national identity must therefore consider the multidimensionality of national identity as the well as the complex psychological aspects of identity.[23]

Nationalism and Globalization: Empirical Findings

In addition to the various theoretical views concerning the relationship between nationalism and globalization, there have been growing research efforts to assess the impact of globalization empirically. Given the multidimensionality of both nationalism and globalization, it is not surprising that these studies – whether conducted in a single nation or across several – have produced mixed results. In Germany, for example, a study conducted among German citizens found that people with greater exposure to globalization (in terms of experiences of border crossing and transnational social relations) are more likely to adopt

cosmopolitan attitudes toward foreigners and global governance than those with less exposure.[24] In Britain, the younger generation was found less attached to and less proud of their country than the older generation.[25] While this may be due to greater exposure and a more positive attitude toward globalization, it may also represent a life-cycle effect; in other words, no decline in national identity has actually taken place.[26] In Australia, globalization has been shown to influence both people's conceptions of their national identity and their perceptions of the indigenous population as an integral part of the nation.[27] While such studies support the argument that globalization has an impact on national identity, other studies have suggested that this influence is relatively limited. For example, a longitudinal study of cosmopolitan orientations among Swedish citizens found, conversely, that protectionist attitudes tended to emerge.[28]

Although most studies have focused on single countries or on Europe, some have adopted a more global research design. The availability of cross-national survey data, such as the World Value Survey (WVS) and the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) National Identity Modules and the European Social Survey (ESS) facilitates exploration of the interaction between globalization and national identity across many more countries. Despite reliance on the same set of data, researchers have, nonetheless, reached inconsistent conclusions. Using WVS, Norris and Inglehart found support for the claim that supranational identity and cosmopolitan citizenship rates are on the increase, with the additional result that living in a cosmopolitan society is strongly related to less nationalistic attitudes.[29] Nonetheless, Jung, also using WVS, reached a completely different conclusion: 'It is a myth to expect cosmopolitan attitudes and supranational identities to increase significantly in the current globalizing world'.[30] Likewise, an analysis of elite cosmopolitan orientations using the same set of data drew similar inferences.[31]

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By analyzing quantitative (Eurobarometer) and qualitative data from Western Europe, Antonsich found that national pride had increased, national attachment was exhibiting a stable trend, and the meanings associated with the nation remained 'thick'.[32] Another study combining several cross-national surveys found that while globalization is generally associated with greater support for nationalist attitudes, some countries demonstrated a negative correlation between them. By measuring nationalism as 'national pride,' Bekhuis, Lubbers, and Verkuyten indicated that globalization has virtually no effect on nationalist attitudes among the highly educated but increased nationalist attitudes among the less educated.[33] Such contradictions can be found in other studies. When isolating certain aspects of national identity like national pride or ethnic identity, there are indeed findings that such feelings are less common in the more globalized countries; however, when other aspects, like national chauvinism, are examined, there is no evidence of a connection with globalization.[34]

Immigration, as a key component of globalization, has also been the topic of numerous studies that seek to inspect public attitudes toward immigrants and immigration.[35] Among the many factors that shape such attitudes, national identity was found to be a key component.[36] These studies have indicated that although national identity is multidimensional, there is a clear distinction between nationalism and patriotism: while nationalism is directly related to xenophobic attitudes toward immigrants, this is not always the case for patriotism.[37] Studies on national identity and attitudes toward immigration comprise single country studies as well as cross-national studies that use data sources like the ISSP National Identity Modules[38] or the ESS.[39] Despite the several studies conducted so far, the interplay between national identity, globalization, and attitudes toward immigration seems to raise more questions than provide clear answers.

Empirical findings should not be seen to resolve the historical or the sociological debate on the nature of the relationship between nationalism and globalization. There are inherent caveats, such as the use of cross-sectional studies, which cannot address questions of causal relations or issues regarding the operationalization of national identity and globalization.[40] The only definite conclusions to be drawn from such empirical studies is that relations between nationalism and globalization are indeed complex.

Concluding Remarks

Hobsbawm argued that nationalism is 'past its peak. The owl of Minerva which brings wisdom, said Hegel, flies out at dusk. It is a good sign that it is now circling nation and nationalism'.[41] However, the question remains: is the owl of Minerva flying due to the wind of globalization? This overview attempted to show that the effects of globalization on national identity are widely disputed. While some regard globalization as undermining national identity and increasing cosmopolitanism, others argue that it works in the opposite direction, possibly even reinforcing national feelings in the form of a backlash, or that it impacts different segments in society differently. Given the complex relationship between nationalism and globalization, this debate cannot be resolved either theoretically or empirically using current tools. Perhaps adopting other approaches (e.g. complexity theory[42]) will enable us to better understand this debate.

This review is part of
The State of Nationalism (SoN), a comprehensive guide
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*where it is combined with an annotated bibliography
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Endnotes

[1] E. Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780. Programme, myth, reality* (Cambridge, 1992), 191.

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[4] See M. Guibernau, 'Globalization and the nation-state', in: M. Guibernau & J. Hutchinson (eds.), *Understanding Nationalism* (Cambridge, 2001), 242–268.

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