

GLOBALIZATION, NATIONALISM AND EUROPE: THE NEED FOR TRANS-NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES IN EDUCATION

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Abstract: The article is divided into five parts that take readers through a historical and sociological analysis of the birth of European nationalism and concludes by emphasizing the need to overcome nationalism. In the first three parts, the author provides readers with detailed arguments on the historical background of nationalism. These show that the ideas of nationalism provided modern society with an important type of social bond. However, the article also focuses on why this type of social bond became the source of serious trouble in central Europe. It has produced many disastrous events, such as wars, the holocaust, and ethnic-cleansing. Moreover, it has brought about a style of thinking that is too rigid and out of date in our globalizing world. The fourth part shows that nationalism operates through nationalist identity-myths. In the final part of the article, the author demonstrates how this new type of nationalism type has influenced the philosophy of education, teaching and national curricula and suggests a few maxims that should govern the transition from nationalist to trans-nationalist perspectives (not only) in education.

Keywords: curricula, education; identity; modernity; nationalism; myth; pragmatism.

These days, the attribute ‘national’ insinuates that something that should go right goes wrong.

Sándor Márai (1947/2008, 206)

Introductory notes

In this paper, I will focus on the role of nationalism in European national lives and its impact on educational policies. I would like to discuss the gap between our contemporary needs and our contemporary practices.

I am obliged to provide the philosophical background to my thinking here. As a pragmatist, I believe—in contrast to my colleagues from the realist camp—that we cannot grasp the Real Structure of the World. Nevertheless, this does not mean that people cannot live an intelligent life, because from the Deweyan point of view, a sign of intelligence is

the ability of an organism to live a flourishing life.¹ Therefore, we live an intelligent life if, once we have learnt that there is a disparity between how we live and quality of life, we can change either our practices or the environment or both.

If we cannot understand the structures of the Real World, the fate of humans lies in gaining a global understanding of relationality, the main sign of the world. That means that everything a human being can find out about his/herself and his/her environment is deeply influenced and shaped by time and place, in short by context. This is a type of non-militant anti-Platonism. This is very important for my argument that we should, as soon as possible, transform education and curricula from their nationalist forms into transnational ones. It does not mean that nationalism as such is a terrible thing, but that our European history and present-day challenges inform us that we have to change our thinking and lives.

Modernity and nationalism

Immediately after the Second World War, there were a few thinkers who found the courage to turn our attention away from the fact that the war had been a consequence of the Great Depression and the actions of terrible people like Il Duce or the Führer. The next generation of historians, sociologists, and philosophers started belatedly to show us that there is deep structural link between the commencement of the fascist and nationalist horror of both World Wars on the one hand and modernity and national revivals on the other. In this respect, we can mention a most provocative monograph—Zygmunt Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Bauman, 2004).

Here, I am going to highlight the historical connection between the transition from traditional society to the modern one and nationalism. If we simplify the diachronic model of history with its many exceptions and peculiarities, we can say that nationalism provided the people of the 19th century with a new type of social bond capable of lacing together society after it had been rendered asunder following the disappearance of traditional society. It provided them with a new type of solidarity acceptable to rich and poor, the lower classes, and the bourgeoisie and aristocracy. Let me offer some facts in support of this idea.

Someone who was born in the Middle Ages and lived in early modern towns and later in modern society was completely different from the typical inhabitant of traditional society (cf. Cherubini, 1999, pp. 101-21; van Dülmen, 2006, pp. 61-121; Rossiaud, 1999, pp. 123-156). S/he was thrust out of a closed community, forced to cooperate with many groups, and—in this process—no group could claim to represent the whole of that person (cf. Simmel, 1997, pp. 7-33; Keller, 2004, pp. 338-343). The process of individualization, however, gendered conflicts and it was necessary to find a means to successfully overcome these divisions. There were three main ways of doing this: the flow of money in a national market (see e.g. Simmel, 1997, pp. 7-33), general ways of disciplining citizens (see e.g. Foucault, 2000), and ways of creating new social bonds—liberalist ideas on the one hand and nationalism on the other (Gellner, 1997, 2003).

¹ For detailed information on the relation between reality, intelligence and action in pragmatist Deweyan philosophy see Hickman (1998, pp. 166-186; Shook, 2000).

If we focus on the 19th century and early 20th century, we find two different solutions to a crisis caused by the arrival of modernity. The first approach was embodied in the attitudes associated with the Enlightenment, and the second in the attitudes associated with Romanticism. The first was characterized by cosmopolitan ideas and emotions, which led people to republican thinking. This emphasized law and the hypothetical equality of all human beings and was legitimated by the ideology of “Human Nature” or “Reason”.

The second was characterized by a deep longing for roots that was followed by a great search for “giants” in that particular community’s history. Of course, where no mythical giant could be found, one was fabricated complete with mythical history and a narrow-minded emphasis on blood and land. These giants led to a manufactured “common history”, and a “shared” (i.e. normalized) language, and communities declaring themselves to be the only guarantor of a new, special type of equality—national equality. According to this approach, only a nation could guarantee law, state, and market. These two approaches competed with each other.²

Unfortunately, the 19th century Czech nationalist, or Austrian or German one, could not understand cosmopolitan Jews from Prague or Vienna or Berlin. The Jews, whose predecessors had struggled against their rootlessness since around 500 BC, knew very well because of their Wandering Jew identity that if a national principle were to triumph, they would be driven behind the walls of the ghetto again. People were confronted with nationalism for the first time and, with desperate angst, the fact that they would have to live in a world without close bonds. The horror of the vision was so terrifying that they chose the second option, binding society together with nationalism. This was disastrous for central Europe and it is still a sign of creeping malady in our central European experience.

We can explain the intricacies of central Europe with the help of Ernst Gellner’s theory. In his books on nationalism (Gellner, 1997, pp. 99-103; Gellner, 2003, pp. 47-52, 67-75), Gellner divides Europe into four zones from West to East. Each characterizes a specific relation between the state and existing ethnic cultures. In the first zone, there were strong cultures and stable and traditional states and, during the 19th century, these two components created a trouble-free alliance: of which Portugal, Spain, France, and Great Britain (of course, with the disconcerting exceptions of Ireland or the Basque country) are examples. In the second zone, there were powerful cultures waiting for a strong, national state: this was the case in Italy and Germany. In the fourth zone, i.e. in the sphere of Soviet Russian influence, later the Soviet Union, the ideology of Marxism-Leninism successfully suppressed nationalism. The most complicated situation was in Central Europe, which corresponds to Gellner’s third zone. In most of this area, there were neither clearly distinguishable national cultures nor conditions for the creation of nation-states. Under these conditions, there were to operate the inner logic of need for unification. If unit of the modern European state should be, in terms of nation or ethnicity, compact and homogenous, we should, willy-nilly, use means—assimilations, exclusions and killing—that effectively help in the process of

² Michel Foucault (2005) in his *Society must be defended* demonstrates how the mechanism of political romanticism molded European nationalism in France with emotions and “scientific features”. Erazim Kohák’s (2010) superb *Hearth and Horizons* explains how the first and second approaches compete and how the second gradually triumphed in the Czech milieu.

unification. All of the mentioned means have been successfully applied, especially in the territory of Central Europe, but, of course, not only there (cf. Gellner, 1997, p. 101).

From this point of view, it is much more apparent that the rise of Mussolini, Hitler, and other strange and dangerous people—such as as Radola Gajda in Czechoslovakia or Ferenc Szálasi in Hungary—was just one of the consequences of this nationalist milieu. The disaster had begun earlier. We can see it clearly if we consider what the new national states had to do in order to consolidate in the aftermath of the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. During that period, there were many territorial claims and enforced agreements—for instance, the Treaty of Trianon. Nationalist strategies reduced the good will of many politicians who had at first wanted to adopt a “humanistic” and open policy towards their neighbors. As a result, this relatively small region descended into quarrels and misapprehensions that had been lying under the surface of political life for a long time. For example, there was mutual distrust between the Czechs and the Slovaks because of continued Slovak demands for autonomy, which culminated in the declaration of an independent Slovakia after negotiations with Hitler in 1939.

We could take this Czech-Slovak story as a paradigmatic model of the entire European nationalist phase. Since there had not been room for a non-nationalist emancipation, at the end of the Second World War, the Czech representation had only had the nationalist card to play. That is why, during the war, Masaryk started to fantasize about the existence of a Czecho-Slovak nation that could finally gain its statehood and thus express its will for independent life. However, Czechoslovakia was not a one-nation-state, but a small-scale Austrian monarchy. When the Slovaks sought the autonomy promised to them, the government had no intelligent way of accommodating this demand, because then the Germans, the Hungarians, the Poles, and the Ruthenians could make the same demands. Against this nationalist problem-solving background, satisfying these desires was not conceivable because the state had been defined as a one-nation unit. If this condition was not adhered to, the survival of the state could easily be questioned.³ In short, the politics of the whole of Europe was trapped within nationalist structured thinking.

There was no suitable solution and Western Europe had to wait until the end of the Second World War for this nationalist structure to collapse, and the idea of close cooperation and integration between European states could emerge. The nationalism of the states within the Eastern communist bloc was artificially suppressed by communist ideology until the bloc collapsed. However, since its disintegration, the old nationalist maladies have revived themselves. Ironically, but not by chance, relations between the Czechs and the Slovaks started to improve after the break-up of Czechoslovakia in 1993, only eleven years before the two countries joined the EU. At present, the EU—despite all the dangers inherent in the lack of democracy, standardization, formalization—symbolizes the only intelligent way to survive in the new political and social environment of late modernity.

³ Here I concentrate on Czech history and mention the failures of Czech politicians. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that nationalist thinking and problem-solving infected the whole of Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries. For example, I could mention the improvident and insensitive policy of Hungarian politicians in Slovakia—then Upper Hungary—following the Austro-Hungarian Compromise. This behaviour was criticized by some Hungarian historians and journalist—for instance by Francois Fejtő (see Soubigou, 2004, p. 142; Fejtő, 1998, pp. 78-85).

Late modernity is characterized fittingly by Ulrich Beck's metaphor of the "risk society" (Beck, 2004), which shows us that now—far more so than 50 years ago—there is no room for the conception of a nation-state hegemony and independence. The relationality of our social, environmental, and political realms is the reason. This does not mean that this feature of the world—relationality—came somehow out of the blue. The only difference is that nation states cannot so easily take control over relationality in late modernity as they could 100 or 50 years ago. Security, environmental, economic risks urge us to interconnect within transnational formations with closely shared ideas on common security and defense, energy security, economic coordination, and common environmental laws. That is why Ulrich Beck declares in his interview for the Goethe-Institute that "he who plays the nationalist card loses" and argues that if we want to save Europe we have to fundamentally disjoin the state from its nationalist background in the same way that Europe dealt with religion and saved itself after the Thirty Years' War (Beck, 2010). This highlights the fact that we have to set aside our old, thrilling-yet-unintelligent and dangerous fantasies about our great national history that we still project into our future—fantasies like that of a great peaceful Czechoslovakia in 1918–1938 or fantasies of a Greater Hungary.

This cooperation is not new. The only difference is that now this hybridization must be conducted on a much more conscious level than it was historically. However, cultures in Europe have refined themselves through hybridization for many years. It is difficult to decide, for example, which culture Kafka's or Musil's or Rilke's or Weiner's books represent. In the cases of Kafka, Werfel and Weiner, is it a German culture or a Jewish one or a Czech or even a Prague culture? In the cases of Musil and Rilke, is it a German culture or an Austrian or a Czech or even a "European" one? Europe came to be Europe because of its ability to open itself up to differences, to accept them and adjust its own experiences to them. In addition, and most importantly, in spite of the frequent wars they fought each other in, European "nations" have always been capable of sharing information, experiences and responsibilities. From this point of view, the nationalist period of Europe should be seen as the dark side of Atlantic civilization.

National myths, evasive moves, and petrified identity

I am not sure if there will be agreement on my next proclamation, but the historical and sociological analysis I presented above has convinced me that we need transnational thinking and feelings. What should we do if we want to meet this need? What should we do if we want to solve the situation intelligently? Let me be more specific: what should we change in our education, in our curricula, in our educational techniques to bring our reality nearer to the ideal of a transnational European society?

To answer this, we have to focus on the question of why we do not understand each other, why the Czechs could not understand the Sudeten Germans' attitude to the cleansing of the Czech borderland after the Second World War and *vice versa*, why the Slovaks could not understand the Hungarian dream of pre-Trianon Hungary and why the Hungarians could not understand the Slovak fear of Magyarization instilled in their minds during the 19th century and regularly revived by both Slovak and Hungarian nationalism. It is not so hard to find the answer—we live life through our national fairy tales—myths that are passed from generation

to generation. These myths construct our identity (e.g. “we are Czechs, not Germans”) and these identities construct our understanding of the world (for example: “the Germans began the Second World War, so nobody can blame us—the Czechs—for the expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia after the war”). These features and understandings so deeply penetrate our identities that we become angry if somebody challenges these consolatory national fairy tales.

The myths are fairy tales in the respect that they do not correspond to the facts established through historical research. The main features of all myths are that they are selective and tendentious. These features of myths are not bad in themselves. We would not be able to create identity without fairy tales and their functions that they tendentiously select and choose information. However, the process of selection has to be altered once we learn that under new circumstances, myths become venomous weapons. For instance, people in the Czech Republic speak about the role of *Sokol*⁴ after the Second World War in two different ways. If they want to emphasize our national toughness, they talk about how its members were prepared to take up arms and fight the enemy, as they in fact did after 1918 when the Hungarians and the Poles made threats about “our” new borders. If they want to propagate the myth that the Czechs are a peace-loving nation, they keep quiet about the military aspects of the movement.

Furthermore, I can think of a similar example of selectiveness or an evasive move: the reaction of my former dissertation supervisor, whom I regard highly in other respects. He does not want to recognize the facts that have recently emerged from the Czech archives: 1) that our president Beneš was regularly informed about the wild⁵ expulsion of Germans immediately after the Second World War; 2) that for a long time Beneš and the government delayed the Potsdam Agreement from being implemented; the result of which was that there was no central governmental ruling on how the expulsions were to be implemented until the end of 1946, a year and a half after the Agreement had been signed and after the majority of the German population had been expelled.⁶ When my ex-supervisor is confronted with these facts he usually embarks on a long evasive speech about the propensity of some Czechs to masochistic and unhealthy reactions. As another example of this selectiveness, I could look abroad and mention a response made by my Hungarian friend, whom I like for his personality and admire for his philosophical competence. The response I am referring to was made in answer to my question as to why the Hungarians still feel so frustrated about the Treaty of Trianon, one hundred years later and as members of the EU. I was stunned when he replied: “Because they⁷ behaved like louts. They treated us as if we were scum; they completely

⁴ The Czech gymnastic movement established in the 19th century as the Czech national version of the German Turnverein.

⁵ Here “wild” is a euphemism for the unlawful actions that were probably secretly planned or, at least, supported by some Czech government and army officials.

⁶ This information came from Adrian von Arburg’s public lecture “Displacement of the Germans and the Changes in the Czech border area” delivered at the Moravian Library in Brno, the Czech Republic, on June 2, 2011. Adrian von Arburg is leader of a group of Czech historians partly from the Department of History, Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University. The group provided an overview of the historical documents on the Sudetenland from the time Czechoslovakia was created up to the 1970s.

⁷ He meant the others—the French, the British, the Czechs, the Slovaks, the Serbians etc.

forgot or wanted to forget that we had been defending Europe against the Turks for hundreds of years.”

All these reactions are startling, though understandable. If Czech identity was constructed alongside the historically unfounded assertion that the Czechs were “dovish” in nature in contrast to the violence of the Germans or Hungarians, Czechs will, of course, keep quiet about the paramilitary actions of *Sokol* or about the active role of the Czech army during the “wild” expulsion of the Sudeten Germans. Similarly, if Hungarian identity was constructed alongside a historically oversimplified belief that the Hungarians were the only barrier against the Turkish conquest of Europe—that means they are silent, in this context, about the other nations (the Romanians, the Serbians, and the Slovaks) who fought together with the Hungarian soldiers against the Turks, i.e. about nations whose territorial claims were satisfied after the Treaty of Trianon.

Our fathers’ generation did not have a suitable opportunity to dislodge the nationalist crust that has petrified our conception of nationality. Today in Europe, we have lost this option because if we play the nationalist card, the result will ultimately be a loss for our cultures. But, how can we change our identities? How can we de-traumatize our feelings?

I have referred to relationality as a basic characteristic of human existence. This strange, yet increasingly visible feature could help us to see how we should solve the problem of different identities. Throughout the history of the West, the majority of intellectuals have stubbornly sought solid, frozen, unchangeable components of the world that can form the foundation of our knowledge. Pragmatists challenge this approach. They believe we should treat identity the same way as knowledge; that is, as a tool that helps us act intelligently in a complex and fluid environment. All identities emerge from experience as second-order constructions of the practices and intelligence that make life more workable and they have to be altered and revised if and when they create more obstructions in our lives than they avoid. So we could answer the first of our last two questions in this way: we must keep in mind that our identities are fluid and that we can mold them in more intelligent ways. Today, the intelligent approach can mean only one thing—a European, transnational horizon.

Education fostering transnational knowledge and feelings

To answer the second of the last two questions is more complicated, because how can we change national feelings and emotions that lie deep in our identity structure? The difficulty of the situation resides in our belief that what we feel is nearer to the true core of our selves. Nonetheless, what we think to be “true” is constructed by our knowledge, our experience, and our desires and fears, as well as what we think to be “false”. When H. O. Mounce seeks to explain James-Lange’s theory of emotions, he starts with a critique of a primitive materialist interpretation, which is to assert that tears (tears have represented here the material side of the lives) produce appropriated feelings (i.e. mental state). Then Mounce shows that—regardless of the obscure dichotomy of physical versus mental or even spiritual—our feelings are intimately interconnected with beliefs and convictions. We can stop crying if we realize that we need not be sad about something which made us sad before (Mounce, 1997, pp. 79-80).

We could apply the same idea to the identity constructions that produce our emotions and feelings. If we consider what it must have felt like to be driven from Brno to the Austrian

border in 1945 under the conditions in which the expelled were driven⁸, and if we accept the long-hidden truths dug out of the archives, it would be much easier to suppress our evasive moves and the historical blindness of our nationalist myths. Moreover, time is on our side because, in contrast to our fathers, we have no direct experience of the cruel Nazi Germans that wanted to exterminate the Czechs and simultaneously we face the fact that globalization has made European nations too small to deal with global dangers. Nevertheless, to be able to steer our children in this direction we have to markedly change our education. The goal is apparent—a culturally different, yet politically solid and intellectually vivid European society. However, identifying the instruments of change is not so easy.

Here I would like to offer some principles that, in my opinion, should be followed.

Principles

Our curricula are still heavily influenced by nationalist ideologies. To weaken these ideologies and then change curricula, we need to accept and incorporate the following principles into practice.

The aim of our life is not to live a true national life, but to live a fuller and more thoughtful life. Previously a “fuller and more thoughtful life” might have meant “a life within a national framework”, however, this was just the past, and it is now outdated. A “fuller and more thoughtful life” means “a life within a transnational framework”. This framework requires us to change our old identity, make it more fluid, accept more than one myth, and to base our identity more on similarities than differences. This will involve substantial changes to our curricula, especially in the areas of literature, civics, and history. In these subjects, we have to stop our insatiate need to affirm our putative national “uniqueness”, since, after all, our true uniqueness could only have emerged through inspiring and creative and non-violent clashes with others.

1. In terms of literature, we have to put an end to the national lyricism that means that student literary readers are full of passages from third-rate works just because they are “national”. To be more specific, a third of all the writing in Czech readers on the Czech national revival may only be important for a few historians, literary scientists and philologists specializing in the period, and therefore are of little use (informative or aesthetic) to high school students. The readers should be re-compiled to include good translations of more contemporary and more interesting authors—for example Sándor Márai, Czesław Miłosz or William Gibson. Moreover, this shift to choosing a canon based not on the national perspective, but on one guided by quality will help us refrain from exercising our embarrassing habit of quarreling over whether Kundera (or Kafka, or Musil) is or is not a Czech, French, Jewish, or Austrian writer.

⁸ At the end of May 1945, around 20,000 German inhabitants of Brno were rounded up and then driven out of Brno and made to walk to the Austrian border. They were mostly old, women or children, because the men were in the Czech labor camp. According to an official Czech report, on the “trip” 1,961 of them died, having succumbed to dysentery and exhaustion or had been killed by the organizers of the wild march. However, there is speculation about the number of dead. Some historians calculate that around 5,000 people died. The truth probably lies somewhere in the middle.

2. Where civics are concerned, our textbooks must emphasize what is common to our nations, our common heritages (shared ideas and values, heroes, scientists, etc.), both in a positive and negative sense. Nationalist madness is our common heritage and so is the centuries-old, constructed conception of individuality with its rights and duties. Awful and lying regimes are just as much part of our heritage as are periods ruled by kings, and periods with democratic highpoints. We have to use this heritage to assemble a new, vivid axiological structure that will help us to avoid the disintegration threatening us.

3. In terms of history, textbooks should shift from a positivistic emphasis on dates to one on the history of daily life—with all the pains and joys experienced by ordinary people. Moreover, we must blur the distinction between good and evil nations and ethnicities instilled in our minds by our previous upbringing. This is not to pretend that we have always been friends together; instead we must show that when we started fighting each other, we ended up with hardship, economic depression and personal catastrophes. On the other hand, we have to start discussing the periods and areas where many ethnicities have lived together without violence, without pogroms, and without displacement or expulsion, enriching each other with their cultures, songs, arts, lifestyles, and foods. A nice example of this practice is a textbook written by Alena and Desideriu Gecse, *The History and Tradition of the Czech Minority in Romania*, where textbook authors are urged to choose historical periods acceptable to Czechs, Romanians and Hungarians. However, the intention is not to whitewash reality, but to build a bridge between people who have to live alongside each other. And the authors do this very intelligently (see Gecse & Gecse, 2010). We have to appreciate perspectives from outside our nationalist quarrels, where a new language and new vantage point can be found and from which we can overlook our nationalist fairy tales. A great example of this is Adrian von Arburg, already mentioned above, the leader of a group of Czech and German colleagues that successfully demolished the nationalist myths of the Czechs, and also of the Germans. Being Swiss, he cannot be accused of having hidden revisionist interests.

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