

IRSTI 03.29

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NATIONAL IDENTITY PROCESSES IN EUROPE AND KAZAKHSTAN

Abstract. Whether nationalism is a primordial or modern phenomenon is a contested issue and still debated. Scholars of nationalism are divided into different schools with various approaches to studying nations and national identity. The most prominent ones are modernist constructivist, perennial and functionalist approaches. Apart from them, feminist approach and ethnosymbolism are worth mentioning. The course of rewriting the history to maintain a stable national sentiments in the state brings about a question of whether our nation has been there all the time or if nations and nationalism are constructed and, as Benedict Andersen says, imagined. Another question is if national identity is merely a social notion and has nothing to do with politics or not. This paper discusses national identity in Kazakhstan and compares it to the formation of nationalism in Europe.

Key words: primordialism, nationalism, modernist/constructivist approach, perennialism, functionalism, national identity.

Аңдатпа. Ұлтшылдық шын мәнінде заманауи ма, әлде бұрыннан келе жатқан феномен бе екені даулы мәселе болып табылады. Ғалымдар ұлтшылдықты, ұлт және ұлттық бірегейлікті әр түрлі мектептер мен әр түрлі тәсілдер арқылы зерделеп талқылайды. Олардың ішіндегі неғұрлым ірілері-модернизм конструктивизм, примордиализм және функционализм тәсілдері. Олардан басқа, феминистік тәсіл және этносимволизмді айта кету керек. Мемлекетте тұрақты ұлттық көңіл-күй ұстап тұру үшін тарихты қайтадан жазу курсы қазақ ұлтының көнеден бастау алатыны немесе Бенедикт Андерсен айтқандай ойдан шығарылғаны туралы сұрақтар туындатады. Екінші мәселе, егер ұлттық сана-сезім-бұл әлеуметтік түсінік болса,оның саясатқа қатысы бар ма, әлде жоқ па. Мақала Қазақстандағы ұлттық сана-сезімді Еуропадағы ұлтшылдықпен салыстыра отырып зерттейді.

Түйін сөздер: примордиализм, ұлтшылдық, модернизм /конструктивисттік тәсіл, перенниализм, ұлттық бірегейлік.

Аннотация. Вопрос – является ли национализм изначальным или современным явлением? – до сих пор обсуждается и является актуальной и спорной проблемой. Ученые, изучающие вопросы национализма, делятся на разные школы с различными подходами к изучению наций и национальной идентичности. Наиболее распространенными подходами являются модернистские, конструктивистские, перенниальные и функционалистические. Помимо них, стоит упомянуть феминистский подход и этносимволизм. Курс переписывания истории для поддержания стабильных национальных настроений в государстве ставит вопрос о том, существовала ли наша нация всегда, или может быть нации и национализм, как считал Бенедикт Андерсен, воображаемы. Другой вопрос: является ли национальная идентичность просто социальным явлением и не имеет ничего общего с политикой или нет. В статье обсуждается национальная идентичность в Казахстане в сравнении с формированием национализма в Европе.

Ключевые слова: примордиализм, национализм, модернистский, конструктивистский подход, перенниализм, национальная идентичность.

Introduction

One of the most debated issues in social studies is nations and nationalism. Generally, when asked about nationalism one thinks of a common set of beliefs, values and traditions, languages, and a territory that unite a group of people together that form one nation. According to the Oxford Dictionary nationalism is an «identification with one's own nation and support for its interests, especially to the exclusion or detriment of the interests of other nations» or «advocacy of or support for the political independence of a particular nation or people» (Oxford online dictionary). It is of crucial importance to distinguish between what nationalism is and what it is not.

Assuming that nationalism is a modern and constructed social phenomenon, this paper tries to analyze national identity processes in Kazakhstan comparing it to the European. In Europe the first nationalist movements took place starting from the age of Enlightenment. The most prominent nationalist sentiment which led to reconstruction of state borders were French Revolution, unification of Germany and unification of Italy. It is worth mentioning that according to the world history, nationalism waves were first identified in Europe and then in other parts of the world. This leads to a question whether nationalism is a European social construction which spread to other continents or did it appear on its own as a natural process. While the nationalist sentiments rose in Europe in the 18th-19th centuries, this process appeared in Asia only in the 20th century (Kohn 2018).

I begin the report by discussing the existing theories of nationalism, go on to recall what happened in the Europe in terms of nationalism and finish with the case of Kazakhstan.

Theories of nationalism

Starting from the core debates in the study of nationalism, scholars argue about when the first nation appeared. Over the years since nationalism was created and considered of political importance people have argued about its origins whether nation was created first and nationalism second or vice versa. Academics have suggested different explanations and the most debated ones are:

Primordialist approach. According to this approach, nations have always existed and nationality is an essential and natural part of human being as smell, sight or speech. This view is widely accepted and supported by historians, who believe that nations have been there since the very beginning of human existence on Earth. Among the academics with such views, a stark illustration can be Clifford Geertz's and Edward Shils'. In 1993, Eller and Coughlan wrote an article where they summarized these writers' main views: primordial attachments are not sociological but rather natural and even spiritual; primordial sentiments are coercive and overpowering; «primordial identities are different from other types of identities» (187 p). Primordialist school argues that nation is a self-aware community and it should govern its future and territory. It has common language, territory and history.

An opposing position take academics of modernist /constructivist approach. According to them, nation and nationalism is something new, modern and constructed. They believe that nationalism has appeared first and nations invented second. If we take a look at the history from the early 15th to 19th centuries in countries like England and France state always came before nation, and citizens of these states did not have common language but still stayed unified and defended their common territory. This shows that nation has not always been a source of unification and people did not pay that much attention to nationalism as in the 19th century or in modern times where significant efforts are spent on recreating historical greatness of states like in Russia, post-Soviet countries and China. Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner and Miroslav Hroch. Everyone who studies International Relations, history or sociology has at least once come across with Ernest Gellner's book «Nations and Nationalism» (1983). It is one of the most important books in nationalism studies. The very notion of nationalism presupposes that nation and state depend on each other, one is incomplete without the other. However, Gellner argued that in order to be destined to each other they had to emerge at first, and that states emerged without the help of nations, and some nations appeared without the blessing of states. Two men are from the same nation if and only if they believe to be of one nationality, which leads to a conclusion that nation is a mere artefact of human consciousness. The key concepts in Gellner's viewpoint are capitalism and industrialization, which bring about common and compulsory education to all cities (1983). Another modernist constructivist approach is seen in Benedict Andersen's «Imagined community» idea in «The Nation as Imagined Community». He believed that nation is imagined in a

sense that it is both limited and sovereign. It is imagined because every member of one nation will never meet each other personally will not know of every one member of their community, but have the feeling of being similar to each other, the feeling of being one nation and belonging to one group apart from others. It is imagined as limited because members of one nation believe that there is an elastic boundary between their nation and other nations. It is imagined as sovereign because the concept was developed during Enlightenment and Revolution when freedom was everything associated with sovereignty. It is imagined as community because nation is an idea of fraternity, of brotherhood (Andersen, 1983). Andersen in some ways confronts Gellner's ideas that the latter points to the fabrication and falsity of nation, while the former argues that it is rather imagined and created. The key concept in his findings is print capitalism.

The third type of approach to nationalism studies is ethnosymbolism. According to this approach, nations have always been there but in different shapes over the course of the human history. Nations are modern but their origins are old enough. Ethnosymbolism is developed as a theoretical critique of modernist approach. The term puts a great emphasis on myths, symbols, traditions, values and memories in the formation of nationalism. To ethnosymbolists the concept nation cannot be studied alone in the context of nationalism but it rather should be considered in the context of ethnicity roots, which shaped nations. The leading proponent of ethnosymbolism is Anthony Smith. He emphasizes the importance of ethnicity (ethnie as he states) and critiques modernist approach to be Eurocentric since it studies nationalism and nations starting from modern times, 18th-19th centuries (Smith 2002).

Apart from these above mentioned approaches there are lots of different ways of studying nationalism. However, this paper assumes that nationalism emerged first and nations appeared second. It also assumes that nationalism is a modern and constructed phenomenon while studying the case of Kazakhstan.

How it all started in Europe

«Nationalism in Europe which took place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries brought together people with different backgrounds and was a unifying force. The background to this evolution went back to the emergence of the secular state following the decline of the feudal and the rise of the industrial system, when effective power shifted from the unity of Church and State to that of Nation and State. Consequently, ethnic loyalties, which sometimes transcended the boundaries of these states, were seen to be subversive and every attempt was made to suppress them. The dominant ideology became that of nationalism, which idealized the secular state and deprecated the maintenance of any linguistic, religious or other sentiments that might conflict with loyalty to it. Nationalism became synonymous with patriotism» (Richmond, 1988).

In the 19th century nationalism grew as a result of thinking about democracy, freedom and equality for all and subsequent revolutions of Enlightenment that gave rights to voice their opinion to people who had been previously excluded. People began to identify themselves with their nation rather than their king, their kingdom, or their country. Almost all of Europe did not have borders according to the then national groups' boundaries and these new national identities threatened the existing borders. Nationalism would reset the entire map of Europe, if pursued to its pure and logical conclusion (Cleary). The French Revolution had inspired people all over Europe. It generated the spirit of nationalism and spread the ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity.

Napoleon carried forward the revolutionary ideals of equality and nationalism.

National identity in Kazakhstan

A unitary presidential republic with ninth largest territory the Republic of Kazakhstan was once a member-state of the USSR. After the collapse of the Soviet Union new countries had to come up with a plan how to retain national sovereignty of the countries and Kazakhstan is not an exception. With an ethnic Russian majority second to the Kazakhs, the government had to find its place in this tense situation. The establishment of nation states led to the creations of national reforms. However, after the independence ethnic Kazakhs constituted around 40.1% of the population (Dave, 2004, 442p). Given the heterogeneous ethnicity in the state, Kazakhstan's government was unable to apply ethnicity based concept of nationhood management (Kesici).

Even though Kazakhstani identity was introduced promoting no discrimination in racial, ethnic, language and cultural terms, it is still observable that there are unfavorable relations between ethnic Kazakhs and representatives of other ethnicities. The government maintains an internationalist rhetoric naming the country a motherland of more than 130 nationalities and ethnicities. However, some observers argue that despite this rhetoric, unofficial "Kazakhisation campaign" has been going on since independence. They highlight the growing numbers of ethnic Kazakhs who hold almost all the key positions in the government, law agencies, regional administrations, and other sectors. This interpretation fits with the "nationalizing nationalism" theory which holds that ethnic Kazakhs would see themselves as legitimate owners of the land. One of the factors that lead to such situation is the weak role of the Kazakhs while under the Soviet Union control in terms of language, economy and culture (Burkhanov, 2017). Under this framework, the new state uses the titular nation's weak position to justify a new set of policies aimed at promoting ethnic Kazakhs' interests, such as encouraging the migration of ethnic Kazakhs into the Slav-dominated northern regions of Kazakhstan and introducing Kazakh language requirements into public service jobs. Emigration of Russians and Russian-Kazakhstanis from

Kazakhstan combined with internal migration of ethnic Kazakhs, and the Kazakhs higher birth rate has shifted the demographic and power balance throughout the country and especially in the north. Kazakh nationalists argue that programs like this are necessary to compensate the damages caused by the past discrimination and forced Russification (Burkhanov, 2017).

In his article “Exclusivist identities in Central Asia” Dr. Galym Zhussipbek raises concerns about the dangers of a spread of nationalist sentiments across the countries. According to him:

«To simplify their perception of complex phenomena, people resort to categorization. Individuals, groups, objects, and processes get ascribed to pre-formed categories that guide individuals’ judgments and help them make sense of the world. In the context of post-Soviet Central Asia, ethnicity and language have become the primary categorization criteria for people. A hangover of the Soviet time, the primordialist approach to nation and ethnicity that treats them as objective entities with inherent features such as territory, language, and religion continues weighing heavily on nation building processes in the Central Asian region. For instance, the following categorization (identification) patterns became part of life in Central Asia: Russian-speaking vs. native language-speaking, (prosperous) Kazakhs vs. (losers) others; «shala-Kazakh» (who don’t know the language or many of the Kazakh traditions) vs. «nagyz Kazakh» (who speaks the language fluently and is considered to be «authentic» Kazakh)» (Zhussipbek, 2014, p. 131)

In everyday life we can witness illustrations of such exclusivist identities in Kazakhstan. Parent being against their children getting married to people from different nations, races, ethnicities; discrimination in terms of languages and countries of birth, etc. One of the reasons why such perceptions are widespread across Kazakhstan is because of the rewriting of the history. Scholars and academics have contributed to the falsity of the history. It is written in a way that it glorifies one of the nations and downgrades the role of other ethnicities and nations. Dr. Zhussipbek believes that: «this process of rewriting national histories has become the primary mechanism for fostering Central Asian orientalism» (2014). During the Soviet period government’s interference in the science and scientific discoveries was contrary to the academic freedom. However, all the scholars were under strict ideological control. This shows that political elites’ interference is not new to the region. In Central Asia governments see this as a «patronage» over science, while in fact most of the academic works are done under the «state order» (subsidized by state) (Zhussipbek, 2014, p. 134). This form of nationalism may bring about serious damages to the wellbeing of the state. nevertheless, this does not in any way mean that there is no democracy in Kazakhstan. The very fact that people see this differences and can predict such outcomes is a demonstration of freedom to some extent.

Provided that, nationalism is a modern and constructed notion which was first invented in Europe and spread all around the world, Kazakhstan is going through this process, while Europe has already recovered from it. According to head of the Ukrainian Politics fund, historian Konstantin Bondarenko, nationalism is a «mandatory syndrome». Europe has experienced it and the cure was WWII, while post Soviet space is like a child who is going through this illness in order to be immune to it in the future (Mazhitova). If this holds true, it leads to a question whether there need to be a revolution or war like in Europe in order for the post-Soviet space to become immune to nationalism or not.

Conclusion

To sum up, primordialists and perennialists believe that nations have been existing from the time immemorial, modernist constructivists say that it is an invented, imagined or false phenomenon which appeared in the modern times and such factors as print capitalism, industrialization led to the formation of nationalism first and nations second. Ethnosymbolistst argue that nations have always existed and over the time took different shapes.

Nationalism processes in Kazakhstan are mainly primordial and lead to a series of questions how to tackle deriving issues. Nationalism can be used as a political tool to obtain what is needed and in countries where there is a pseudo-democracy this processes can be significantly dangerous. On the one hand, nationalism is a good tool which unites people and make them fight for their common territory and languages. On the other hand, it can lead to extreme forms of national identity like chauvinism and xenophobia.

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