
Political Theory

The Meaning of Anti-Fascism

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Summary

The collapse of the communist regime in Yugoslavia - established in the course of the antifascist freedom fight in World War II - triggered off the disintegration of Yugoslavia as a state. We have witnessed the emergence of national states on the territory of the former Yugoslavia. Hence one of the central theoretical and political problems has been that of the relationship between nationalism and fascism and the interpretation of the meaning of fascism.

Nationalism is a particular type of awareness of community devoid of social and political values. It is a specific belief of a certain group of people that they are one, though it would be difficult to enumerate objective characteristics which make them an efficient entity. The immanent alternative to nationalism, as a form of awareness, is the rule of law or a dictatorship.

Fascism as ideology is a movement and a regime aimed at facilitating dictatorship. The purpose of antifascism is not only warring against the fascist state which started the war. It does not mean crossing swords with fascism due to a rationally inexplicable hatred for other peoples (though it is a major aspect of antifascism). True antifascism means partisanship of political humanism, the rule of law and democracy.

Antifascism is political and moral attitude of the citizens of the nation in which fascist tendencies raises its ugly head, both for the purpose of protecting their own freedom and security and because fascism destroys their nation economically, politically and culturally.

In the region to which Croatia belongs we are witnessing the establishment of *nation-states*. A process is ending here that began in the European west in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and then spread worldwide so that after the First World War the nation-state was recognized as the principle that underpinned the world order. We thus need to discuss the concept of "*nation-state*".

An analysis of entries in various encyclopedias shows a paradox. The definition of "*nation-state*" does not give any indication of the *form* of government. A nation-state can be a republic or a monarchy. It does not indicate the *type* of government. A nation-state can be parliamentary and democratic, but it can also be a dictatorship (military, party, communist, fascist, and so on). A person who champions the establishment of a nation-state can be a liberal, conservative, social democrat, communist or fascist. He can be a republican or a monarchist. "*Nation-State*" indicates

nothing about its *political* nature. The term is almost unusable for any insight into its constitution or the performance of its rulers.

But nations were ready, and they still are, to raise revolutions and wage wars to establish or defend the nation-state. People are ready to sacrifice their lives and property to achieve it, to kill and plunder, without thinking that they are committing crimes. So there is no doubt that the concept of “*nation-state*” is a political phenomenon.

This paradox can only be understood if the two parts of the term “*nation-state*” are discussed.

The extensive scholarly literature about nation and nationalism does not define “*nation*” in a single way. An author’s theoretical model, methodical approach and, of course, his political views determine how he understands and defines “*nation*”. But there are some constants and we must point them out because they have been almost neglected, or deliberately suppressed, in modern political rhetoric.

Although the term and concept “*nation*” originated in classical Rome, it is almost generally accepted in the social sciences that nations originated as the expression and result of the end of feudalism in western Europe. Nations *developed* or, more precisely, *were formed* in the modernization process of the feudal order.¹

Thus the modernization process is the methodical point of departure for every nation theory, and for research into how any nation was formed.

We will not discuss this process in detail here - and despite valuable initial works Croatian historians must still analyze it - but we must indicate some of its properties relevant for the following discussion. The modernization process originated in the European West, and gradually spread worldwide. It did not run simultaneously everywhere, which gave rise to

¹A group of authors in the study “Volk, Nation, Nationalismus, Masse” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe - Lexicon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, Bd. 7.A. 141-433, Stuttgart 1992, exhaustively researched the meaning of the concept of “*nation*” through history. The authors meticulously reconstructed its history primarily in Germany and France, from classical Rome to the present, and showed that processes of *democratization, politization, ideologization and secularization* caused radical structural changes in the meaning of the concept of “*nation*”.

Considering how much has been written about processes of national development since the Second World War, I believe there is no need to show how nations developed, or were created, during history. Since most of this literature treats the process of nation constitution in the “third world”, it should be remarked that the process is still taking place in Europe, as well. In our case the constitution of the Austrian nation is especially interesting. In the 1960s most Austrians still considered themselves Germans. Most recent research at the end of the 1980s, however, shows that today a great majority consider themselves Austrians.

differences in its course and the forms it took in different regions.² One of its basic characteristics is the *separation* of theory and practice, the differentiation between practical and theoretical knowledge. This made it possible for individual aspects of the modernization process to be taken over without taking over the social substratum that had originally produced them. An illustrative example, very important for the problem of the constitution of nations, is the ability to adopt technology and knowhow about technology management without adopting the social and political relations that had produced them. A characteristic consequence of belated modernization is what literature calls “*simultaneity of the unsimultaneous*”. Traditional social relations and power structures continue even after the newest technologies are adopted and their social effects felt. This is one of the crucial reasons why social-science concepts formulated during research into developed societies must be taken over *with great caution*, if they can at all be taken over.

Second, modernization is a *contradictory* process. On the philosophical level it takes the form of enlightened criticism of Christian universalism, and the promotion of a new kind of *universalism* with emphasis on the mind as the level on which every human activity must be verified. Besides a conceptual, the criticism of religion has a political meaning, as well. It challenges the legitimacy of the monarch’s rule by the will of God, demands the abolition of laws founded on religion, and demands laws founded on rationalistic principles. The modernization process takes the form of subjecting absolute royal rule to the law. In western Europe this process was achieved by a strong *middle class*, which furthered market production, the industrialization and rationalization of production, the *security and freedom* of economic activities, and the *right and duty of the individual* to take responsibility for his own life. Thus *individualism* is an essential achievement of the modernization process.

²This fact was used as a point of departure for many interpretations, especially of the “*special path*” in German history, and to examine the reasons why National Socialism appeared and won in Germany. In the very inspiring study *The Belated Nation*, Helmuth Plessner compared forms and ways of modernization in Germany and France, and showed how the different time of the modernization process determined different kinds of national consciousness and different political cultures in these two peoples. French national consciousness was formed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in a struggle against their own monarch, and was co-defined by the *new idea* of the state. German national consciousness, on the contrary, was formed in the nineteenth century on the attempt to establish the unity of the *German nation* under the leadership of one of the German monarchies.

Barrington Moore researched social sources of dictatorial and democratic orders in the twentieth century and tried to show, comparing the development of England, France and India, and Germany, Japan and Russia, that twentieth-century developments were determined by the manner in which agrarian societies were overcome.

In the process of realizing the privacy of confession and economic relations, the freedom of scholarly work and public opinion, Modernism *depleted* the state of its function of ruler over subjected individuals, and reduced it to an *abstract law* as a form of inter-personal relations. The replacement of personal rule by the *rule of law* was one of the basic achievements of the modernization process.

Eighteenth, and especially nineteenth-century philosophers emphasized that the modernization of the feudal order had *decomposed* direct personal relations among individuals. In a society based on market relations, abstract labour, industrialization and private rights, individuals are integrated on the basis of a *generality immanent* to such a society.

The *state*, as an institution that can legitimately apply force if it does so in conformity with the law, is one of the basic forms of integration. Gradually the state achieved a level of neutrality that made possible its impartial intervention in social conflict, and this especially favoured its integrating function. The market, industrialization, urbanization, and so on were also factors of integration. Integration through state and society is one aspect of what took place. Social analysts very soon discovered that the internal logic of this society produced differences, contrasts and conflict. There was not only class conflict, although this was especially strong at the beginning of the modernization process. The German sociologist Ulrich Beck showed in *Die Erfindung des Politischen* that a much deeper contradiction existed, resulting in Modernism-generated Anti-Modernism. Modernism declared that the *individual* has the right and duty to take care of his own life, and determine the framework of his existence, but at the same time a centralized state apparatus was created with the absolute right to apply force against individuals who do not conform. The *universality* of human rights was declared, and at the same time the relevance of these rights was limited to the citizens of a single nation-state.

These specific features of the modernization process throw more light on the meaning of the nation as a modern phenomenon. There is no doubt that state and society were, and still are, a medium of integration. But there is also no doubt that they were not a sufficient medium of integration. The state was not sufficient because it had originally been constituted as a *Machtstaat* (*state governed by force*), and remained one immediately after the deposition of the absolute monarch. It was a long-lasting and difficult process to transform the state governed by force into the *Rechtstaat* (*state governed by law*) and the *Sozialstaat* (*social state*). The development of autonomous social institutions (urbanization, concentration of production, communications and other forms of necessary infrastructure, trade unions, political parties and so on) was very slow, and faced many challenges and much opposition. Another reason is at least as important. The very fact that state and society primarily integrate individuals and groups on the basis of immanent generality makes them insufficient for integration. There is no doubt, and this is substantiated by research into

bourgeois revolutions, that demands for a democratic ruling order, and for the establishment of a republic as a *community* of citizens which guarantees their freedom and the security of their property, motivated individuals to act and made it possible for them to *identify* with the new community. It is enough to remember the exhilaration of republicans in the French Revolution to realize how meaningful these processes were. But all the same, they were not sufficient, primarily because in a state as an abstract community based on law the individual participates as an *abstract citizen*. This is especially true of *society*, which also integrates through abstract labour and abstract law, and at the same time produces contradictions that threaten to destroy the community of citizens. The contradictions between proclaimed universalism and individualism, between society and state, are the roots for the constitution of nations. What is more, as Albert F. Reiterer showed, the nation is a specific *relationship* between the modern society and state. This view of the nation results from comparative research of integration processes in various places.

Today there are many very different scholarly definitions of the concept of nation, but views that define the nation as a *community* prevail. As Ferdinand Tönnies showed, a community is a set of special relations among individuals who experience the entirety of such relations as an organism. The community *unites* and *equalizes* relatively large groups of individuals transforming them into an acting being with a single will. The community is an organism that takes precedence over individuals in time and in logic, rising above them yet making individual survival possible. The individual *is* through the community. Although communities develop because of the activities of individuals, individuals relate to each other, and to the community, as if it was eternal. Tönnies showed these characteristics of the individual-community relationship, and showed that community can be based on *soil, blood and ideology*. The crucial question of every nation theory is: what builds the togetherness of the nation as a community? Let us immediately say: no theories that attempted to base the common spirit of a nation on an *objective* property or criterion (like Stalin's) succeeded. The foundation is not state, because individuals who belong to the same nation may live in different states; it is not society, because society is constituted as a process that transcends all boundaries; it is not religion, because people who have the same religion belong to different nations, and because members of the same nation have different religions; it is not language, because individuals and groups that speak the same language constitute different nations.

We thus find subjective nation theories more plausible, theories that stress the nation as a community is constituted on the basis of the *feeling* of a certain group of people that they are *one* being, feelings that they belong together because they are equal in something, their consciousness that they are willing to act together. Benedict Anderson defines the nation as an *imaginary* community, stressing that this does not mean the nation is not a real community. On the contrary, it is a very real factor in the

self-awareness of every individual. It is a fact that specific, relatively large groups of individuals who do not know each other and will never meet or see each other, individuals who live thousands of kilometres apart and are very often separated by state boundaries, *believe that they are one*, that they are equal because they have something in common that unites them more than their ties with their neighbours or spouse, people who they have known for almost all their lives, but who do not belong to the same nation.

The basic difficulty of these subjective nation theories is to show why and how these feelings and consciousness are formed. In this discussion we cannot give an exhaustive analysis of the various answers to these questions but we must indicate the direction in which the answer can be sought.

Even if we methodically accept the view that the nation is primarily a form of feelings and consciousness, it is not enough to analyze the feelings and consciousness of individuals and groups to answer the question about how nations are constituted. Philosophy and psychology, as disciplines that primarily research the constitution of consciousness, can contribute greatly to explanations of the “nation” phenomenon, but it takes a convincing social theory to explain the origin and constitution of the nation. In places where the nation was first constituted the middle class opposed the absolute rule of the monarch and stressed a new universalism, challenging differentiation among individuals and groups *by birth*. They mobilized the subjects of the absolute monarch and proclaimed *freedom and equality* as their programme, but at the same time they promoted the private nature of science, conscience, education and the economy. The middle class thus simultaneously destroyed traditional *special* communities and *depleted the substance of traditional togetherness*. It proclaimed an order to which *all people should belong*, the order of political humanism. In the beginning this order could not last permanently as an active subject, primarily because integration was not sufficiently developed, so its unity was guaranteed by force. For this reason the new elite had the *need and interest* to develop a *strategy of integration* that would guarantee the unity of the order. The strategy was the nation, and this is one of its basic aspects. The nation was a more general form of integration than the estates had been, as special communities based, among other things, on birth, but it is nevertheless limited enough to turn a group of people into a single acting subject.

The medium for generating this feeling of community is *culture*, in the first place *language* as an immediate expression of the unity and identity of a group of people. Besides an order’s integration through state and society, its integration through nation as a cultural formation gives it *trans-political* unity. In this sense the nation *can be*, and was, a relatively suitable basis for establishing the unity of an order. Because it establishes unity through a consciousness of homogeneity *disregarding* questions of

government, economy or religion, the nation can establish *basic political* consensus underlying the confrontation of different interests within the community. It can make it easier to reach compromise in interest conflict, and it puts off the use of force to resolve differences.

The nation is a *limited* community. Benedict Anderson showed that even the most fervent nationalists, who uphold the might and size of their own nation, do not think that all the people in the world could or should belong to it. National unity and togetherness are not established only by emphasizing and establishing identical characteristics, but also by stressing the *differences* from, and boundaries towards, other identities. The in-out relationship is of fundamental importance for the constitution of the nation and the transformation of a great group of people into a single acting subject.

Finally, the nation is also a suitable medium of integration for the individual. Since the nation exists as a *specific* nation whose *name* differs from other similar communities, it is a suitable medium for the establishment of individual identity. Envisioned as an organism that exists before and after the life of each of its members, it enables the individual to transcend his own existence in the belief that he is continuing the tradition of his *ancestors* and that he will survive in future through his *offspring* who will belong to the same nation. The individual satisfies *his need for transcendence* in identification with the nation.

The individual transcends more than time through the nation. His consciousness that he is part of the nation enables him to overcome other things, too. Although he is not strong, the individual can be proud of the strength of his nation; although he is not successful, he can be proud of the success of his nation, and so on, and believe that this is also his strength, his success.

In a secularized world the nation, as the transpolitical and non-material basis of the order, is perceived as God who makes possible the survival of the order, and the survival of the individual.

These specific features of the nation indicate the properties of *nationalism* as a form of consciousness. Nationalism is a kind of *religion*, so the prominent conservative jurist and politologist Karl Joachim Friedrich denied it is a political ideology. He emphasized that political ideologies are systems of ideas that necessarily include expressions about the *values* of common life, about the ruling order, the constitution of government, justice, and about the strategy to realize those values. Friedrich said that this is not the case in nationalism: "It is primarily a feeling, or a set of feelings, linked with the consciousness specific nations have of self-identity. In its typical form it does not include any views of political order as such,

except insisting that the order must be in harmony with 'national traditions'".³

We need not agree with Friedrich's view that nationalism is not an ideology, which is determined by how he views ideology. However, we must heed his warning that nationalism is expressed in combination with a political ideology. Because of attempts to establish and express togetherness transpolitically, nationalism does not affect the decision to establish a political order. Thus the alternative between *rule of law* and *dictatorship* is immanent to nationalism as a form of consciousness.

Nationalism as consciousness of communal identity is established in various areas of social life. Research into the nationalism of different nations shows that common origin and traditions can be used for this purpose, but so can cooking recipes. It also shows that various means can be used - from true concern for one's own tradition to the fabrication of history and suppressing unpleasant past events of which both the individual and the community would be ashamed. Remembering and forgetting are equally suitable for constituting national consciousness.

National self-consciousness is also constituted, and this is an essential feature, by emphasizing *differences* from other communities. It is formed by *setting boundaries and excluding* those who are different. The history of various nationalisms shows that this does not occur as intellectual debate, but often as very violent attempts to erase or, when this does not work, to destroy differences by encouraging hatred and intolerance of what is different. Thus nationalism, as a form of consciousness and as an order, is marked by *conflict* and a *closed* community. The friend-enemy relationship is also an essential determinant of nationalistic thinking.

At the end of this survey of the special features of nationalism as a form of consciousness, we must emphasize one of the paradoxes of nationalism. On one hand, when national consciousness is being constituted the importance of material interests and conflict based on them are suppressed. On the other hand, the ruling order in the community is at the same time constituted on universal principles. Because of this, national consciousness as community consciousness can survive conflicting internal interests and different world views about the internal order of the community. The paradox of nationalism is that it develops in societies that at the same time proclaim that internal order must be based on general rational principles, so that it *resigns* the idea of organizing the life of a group of individuals based on the nation.

When general legal norms are introduced as a basis for relations among citizens and for the solution of disputes, and when discussion is promoted about the rational legitimacy of a government, then integration

³Cf. K. J. Friedrich, *Prologomena der Politik*, Duncker & Humboldt Verlag, Berlin 1967, p. 95. Benedict Anderson has the same opinion.

processes unfold that are based on economic development, material interests, and rational dialogue about possible solutions, and institutions suitable to carry this out are created. Long-lasting confrontation and experience shows that it is not enough to base the ruling order on a transpolitical foundation, indeed that this leads to conflict with others. Thus the state as a rational community was established. In places where these processes first began, national consciousness is gradually losing its function of underpinning the order. It does not disappear, it does not “wither away”, it becomes “privatized”.

This also indicates the difference between nationalism and fascism. Fascism *is* an ideology. It contains the “*values*” already mentioned, and pronouncements about the ruling order and the arrangement of economic and legal relations. And this is not all. At the moment when modern middle-class ruling orders were in crisis, at a time when it seemed that they were not succeeding either through proclaimed universalism, or on the basis of nationalism reduced to the consciousness of togetherness, the fascist ideology *radicalized* the idea of national unity and tried to materialize it. This process took two forms. First it *internally* divided the community by emphasizing the necessity to establish *one* internal principle and *level* the differences within the nation. In a modern society, divided into separate spheres and groups with conflicting interests, the realization of one principle is necessarily forcible. *Fascism is necessarily a dictatorship*. This is the only thing in which all definitions of fascism agree. It is a specific type of dictatorship, an *ideologically* founded dictatorship, an attempt to realize an ideology. The rule of law and the civil liberties of the members of a nation in which fascism is established as an order are annulled.

Fascism, especially in its national-socialist form, radicalizes differences from other nations to the level of hatred and genocide. What is more, besides forcibly eradicating internal differences within its own nation, fascism attempts to resolve internal social problems by “exporting” conflict and waging wars against other nations. That is why the possibility of war among states is immanent to fascism. The attitude of fascism to other nations, especially the attitude of national socialists to Jews, is an important reason for opposing fascism and one of the reasons for international anti-fascism. But it is not sufficient.

Fascism establishes *monism* as a principle of internal structure by abolishing civil liberties and the rights of members of its own nation, and establishing terror as the basic method of ruling. In this way it *desubjectivizes* the individual turning him into no more than the fragment of a mass. At the same time it makes him *not responsible* for his own actions in the name of the alleged higher goals of the community. Fascism destroys the moral integrity of the individual.

This is where the true meaning of *anti-fascism* lies. It is not only a war against a fascist state that provoked a war. It is not opposition to fascism because of its rationally unfounded hatred for other peoples, al-

though that is an important aspect. True *anti-fascism* is support for political humanism as a principle of government. True anti-fascism is support for the rule of law, as opposed to a dictatorship rationalized in pseudo-religious terms.

Anti-fascism is the moral stand of every individual to preserve the subjectivity of his own person, his freedom and security. Thus anti-fascism is primarily the stand of members of a nation in which there are attempts to establish fascism as an order.

Anti-fascism is also a duty because fascism destroys its own nation. Isolating it from other nations and abrogating the freedom of its members, it limits its creativity and development. It is enough to look at fascist monuments and read its literature to see how justified this statement is. Fascism destroys its own nation by taking it to war against other nations, as well. The fate of Germany, and of the Independent State of Croatia, too, could be educational examples.

What was said about fascism and anti-fascism was primarily for methodical reasons. It should serve to formulate at least some preconditions for discussion about events in contemporary Croatia. I find two especially significant.

The first precondition is that discussions should stop using an ideological vocabulary, they should not be reduced to the sphere of ideology. Discussion must be based on research into the constitution of society and state in Croatia, and not only be occupied with ideology.

Second, Croats must critically face the fact that they are a “late” nation that has realized the modernization process in a specific way because of historical circumstances.

The special attributes of the Croatian historical experience can only be understood through comparative research. They are not specific only because Croats experienced national emancipation within multi-national states, but because their lateness condemned them to adopting ideas that were formulated in other places. The preconditions for and possibilities of adopting ideas must be critically examined.

Only after these preconditions are considered do the problems today facing Croats emerge. They range from the necessity of critical emancipation from ideologized history to an analysis of the power structure in modern Croatia. It is not possible to undertake this analysis here, so we will only make some observations.

The Croatian nation-state was established under very specific circumstances after the collapse of the communist order in Yugoslavia as a

multi-national state. Despite nationalistic propaganda, these are two basically different, but connected, types of crisis. Yugoslavia as a state was in crisis even when it was not communist. Communism also collapsed in multi-national communities. It is necessary to analytically differentiate between these two types of crisis so that the specific features of what happened can be discerned.

Communist rule in former Yugoslavia was established in a war against fascist occupying powers in the Second World War. In Croatia in particular, it was established in a war against an attempt to form a Croatian national state with the help of fascist powers, and modelled on them. It was established because of the outcome of the Second World War, and also because of the fact that there were no social forces in former Yugoslavia, or Croatia, that could effectively oppose attempts to establish either a fascist or a communist order. The communists were anti-fascists. In keeping with their national front strategy, they mobilized the members of all threatened nations - Serbs, Jews, and Croats, too, especially Croats from areas the Ustashas had been forced to cede to other states so as to gain power. Croats who wanted to establish a democratic order in Croatia after the defeat of fascism also participated in anti-fascist resistance. This aspect of Croatian anti-fascism cannot be overlooked and must not be forgotten.

As a party the communists did not support the rule of law and a democratic order in Croatia, or in Yugoslavia. Communism was also an ideology of community.

The communist view of community basically differed from the nationalistic one. Inspired by modern rationalism and political humanism, and by criticism of contradictions in the early bourgeois society, communists propagated an actual, substantial community constituted through the mind. Thus communism as an ideology of community opposed all other ideologies of community. In former Yugoslavia communism eradicated such ideologies and made war among nations impossible.

Historically the communist ideology was not realized. Today the reasons for its collapse are eminent subjects of scholarly research. In Croatia, too, the subject will have to be analyzed, but one thing can already be said. As a movement and as an order, the communists had to implement methods immanent to community ideologies and to attempt establishing an order that effectuates an ideology. Thus communism was a dictatorship. This makes communism kindred to fascism, and from this aspect communism was not real anti-fascism.

Communism did not manage to produce a social stratum that was existentially interested in its preservation, so it collapsed. At a moment when all institutions of the order were in crisis, a new ideology of togetherness was the only alternative.

Yugoslavism as a national ideology could not develop into the ideology of togetherness for two basic reasons. In the Yugoslavia that existed before the Second World War, Yugoslavism was compromised by attempts to realize it as greater-Serbianism. Later the communists promoted Yugoslavia as a state, but they did not promote Yugoslavism as a national ideology that would develop a transpolitical foundation for their order. This role was taken by the communist ideology. Thus the communists treated Yugoslavism, and all national ideologies, instrumentally. When these ideologies threatened them, they attacked them, but when they thought that national ideologies could help them rule, they supported them. The modern nationalisms in Yugoslavia are communist products, as well.

Liberal and democratic nationalism seemed the only true possibility, but what actually happened teaches us that other things were possible, too. The character of nationalism as an ideology, and even more the non-existence of a middle class strong enough to establish a liberal and democratic order, show that alternatives existed that are today expressed in different judgements about what happened in Croatia, and in other places in which the communist order existed. Which of the possibilities that are today offered will be realized is a question to which no answer can be given now, in the first place because the answer essentially depends on world events.

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