

Nationalism and Globalism

Nations and Nationalism in Global Era, by Anthony D. Smith. Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press. 1995. Pp.211. ISBN 0-7456-1018.8.

The author, Anthony Smith, is a senior professor of Sociology at the London School of Economics and Political Science, who has produced several studies on nationalism. The work under review is an elaboration of the ideas expressed by the author in an earlier work. The specific aim of this study is to assess "the ways in which the resurgence of nationalism today has been analysed." The author attempts to provide a solution to what he calls a paradox: fragmentation in the globalizing era, on the one hand, and the regrouping of several states into closer economic and political forums, on the other.

The author begins by examining some of the views which have been offered by other scholars in the West about the political developments in Europe in the post-Cold War era. The first view maintains that contemporary nations and nationalism are the "epigoni" of their illustrious predecessors and survivals from an earlier epoch which are going to fade away once they have run their course in each part of the world. The second view contends that nations and nationalism are inevitable "products and producers" of modernity. However, nationalism is bound to disappear once the nations are fully modernized and have created an affluent and stable society on the western model. The third view argues that nations and nationalism are perennial. As such, contemporary nation-states will not be superseded by different forms of political systems as a result of modernity.

According to Smith, none of the above-mentioned views has properly addressed the issue. Therefore, they have failed to explain the paradox of growing global interdependence and modern resurgent nationalism. According to the author, nationalism and nations should be studied in their ethnic and territorial contexts. Moreover, scholars should study nationalism as a part of a long historical process. The author is critical of the recent tendency among western scholars to study nationalism by examining the period following World War II, which is destined to be "shallow and misleading." The flaw in this approach lies in its failure to trace nationalism to its "historical embeddedness." It is bound to lead to erroneous conclusions.

In chapter 4, "The Crisis of the National State," the author argues that nationalism has provided the state system, which emerged in Europe after

1648, with cultural and historical legitimacy. Besides, nationalism tends to secure the assent of the inhabitants of a political territorial unit to be governed, by creating a sense of collective identity. Since, Smith contends, there is hardly any tangible sign that the competition of nation-states even in western Europe is being superseded by a different political order, nations remain the *raison d'être* for the state (p.154). Moreover, national identity, as opposed to other sorts of collective identity, is "pre-eminently" functional for modernity: it creates institutions, symbols, myths, and ceremonies, which provide a rallying point for social cohesion and political organization as modern societies (p.155). Thus nationalism and the nation-state remain a political necessity and are functional for modernity.

In chapter 6, "In Defense of Nationalism," the author tries in vain to refute charges of fanaticism, divisiveness, exclusionism, expansionism and racism which are often directed against nationalism. In this regard, the author notes that the core doctrine of nationalism affords no more than a basic framework for the socio-political order which is in existence. This basic framework needs to be filled with other belief systems such as liberalism and socialism. It is the latter belief-systems which account for the ills of nationalism (p.150). However, a survey of modern history reveals that there is no humane nationalism. Even those who were victims of nationalism begin to oppress others once they have their own state. The worst atrocities were committed under the banner of preserving national glory.

Anthony Smith's study is a convincing refutation of the modernization theory. He has rightly pointed out that traditional values, especially religious ones, have contributed in no insignificant degree to the re-emergence of nationalism in modernized and affluent societies of the West. Quebecois nationalism in Canada and Catalonian separatism in Spain are cases in point (p.44). However, the author has not succeeded in providing an adequate answer to the paradox of fragmentation as well as the increased interdependence. It seems that this is due in large measure to the author's Euro-centric approach. Just as Francis Fukuyama mistook the collapse of Soviet Empire for the triumph of liberal capitalism, so too Anthony Smith considers the events in Europe to portray the nation-state as the final and eternal form of political administration for humanity. Not only is nationalism a modern European phenomenon, it also has no comparable equivalent in the Muslim world. Furthermore, in substantiating his arguments about nationalism, the author depends heavily on European nationalism and events in Europe

and makes only passing reference to non-European nationalism. Therefore, his findings cannot be generalized to countries outside the European continent.

Anthony Smith can also be faulted for making selective use of the history of Europe, considering mainly the period when nationalism and nation states have emerged. If his colleagues had erred in selecting the fall of the Berlin Wall, or the post-World War II era as points of departure in their studies of nationalism, Smith too has erred in arbitrarily selecting the French revolution as a point of departure for the study of European history. This led him to conclude that the project of the European Union has no future as it lacks a common European culture, myths, symbols, and shared experience (see chapter 5). This argument could be questioned on two grounds. Firstly, it ignores ten centuries of Europe's being wholly or partially united under the Holy Roman Empire and its successor states up to 1648. The legacy of these long centuries could provide some basis for a common European culture. Secondly, the author undermines the power of the modern revolution in communications media, and the growing interdependence to create a common European culture, symbols, and vision needed to forge a union. Also, in his criticism of the European project, the author has completely ignored the results of the plebiscites which were recently held in western Europe about the European Union. Although some of these were only in favour of a united Europe by the end of this century by a narrow margin, the results of the plebiscites in all countries were in favour of the European Union.

The book, on the whole, can still be recommended as a standard text on modern European nationalism. Specialists and University students alike would certainly benefit from it. It is a daring defense of nationalism at a time when most scholars consider it dying.

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Islam in Africa

Islam in Africa: Proceedings of the Islam in Africa Conference, edited by Nura Alkali, Adamu Adamu, Awwal Yadudu, Rashid Moten and Haruna Salihi. Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books, 1993. Pp. 454. ISBN: 978-246-123-7.