

Discourse of Nationalism Revisited: Some Considerations on a Social Constructionist Approach

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Abstract

This paper attempts to reread the theory of nationalism with a specific focus on its discursive formation. It does this by reconsidering the arguments by Stuart Hall and Craig Calhoun, both of whom examine national identity and nationalism from a social constructionist viewpoint. Theories of nationalism have long debated the genesis of nations with a variety of definitions and analytical scopes. First, it shows a brief sketch of the literature of nationalism, which is categorised into primordialism, modernism, ethnosymbolism and new approaches. Discourse of nationalism can provide fruitful insights to make sense of varieties of nations and nationalism beyond these different perspectives. Then it presents a general understanding of ‘discourse’ in Michael Foucault’s sense and its application to the study of ethnicity and nationalism. Finally, it addresses a post-national interpretation of national identities characterised by acts of identification. It is suggested that identities are subject to transformation depending on the situation. Based on this, national identities are socially constructed through a large network of social or cultural communities.

1. Introduction:

Studies of nationalism came of age over three decades ago as a response to the eruption of violence caused by ethno-religious or racial discrimination and the waves of political struggles for autonomy or self-determination within nation-states. Political unrest or ethnic conflicts largely stem from the aggravated fractures within modern nation-states caused by state-seeking nationalist projects: the establishment of a homogenous nation welded by aesthetic national discourses on modernity. The nationalist drive to establish a political system in which all people are awarded citizenship is the primary cause of post-national fractures.

While theories of nations and nationalism have largely been established chiefly through the endeavours of prominent generations of social scientists, nationalistic phenomena in the post-national world have still remained relatively unexplored. The recent development of theorising nations and nationalism from ordinary perspectives is critical in reconsidering the state-centred modes of nation building. This is because a question may have been raised about how people can become national, or

be nationalised in the process of nationalist projects.

The aim of this paper is not to answer the key questions of nationalism, nor does it present a new analytical scope or methodology for further refining given expertise. My aim here is more moderate. Rather than through a direct investigation of each case, this paper will explore common ground to examine a variety of nations and nationalism for future research. Owing to the vast and rich accumulation of knowledge explaining the nature of nations, a comprehensive overview is challenging and even impossible for a single article. My concern is to provide a means of grasping the conceptual basis of pursuing the complex phenomena of nationalism.

I shall then focus on the discursive nature of nationalism, investigating what is described regarding the ‘discourse of nationalism’ presented by two perceptive thinkers, Stuart Hall and Craig Calhoun. Hall, a Marxist thinker and cultural theorist, offers a pathbreaking interpretation of identity in relation to the discourse of ‘otherness’. Calhoun, a prominent social scientist, explains nationalism from a discursive or imaginary point of view, questioning the objectivity of the nation. Both of them explain national identity and nationalism from a social constructionist perspective. Fruitful ideas presented by these two thinkers bear a meaningful synergy to make sense of nations and nationalism.

This paper begins with a brief overview of the development of nationalism schools: primordialism, modernism, ethno-symbolism and new approaches. Whereas the first three schools have long debated the historical origin and definition of nation and nationalism, those who take various new approaches explore the rise of nations across epochal differences. Next, the discursive features of nationalism and its significance are discussed with a focus on the arguments by Hall and Calhoun. Neither of them had specifically written about nation nor nationalism in their early works but theirs were gradually cited by scholars of nationalism as more attention has been being paid to the concept of ‘ethnicity’ in the post-established nation-states. Finally, the post-national understanding of nations and nationalism is addressed through an elaboration on both thinkers’ discourse on ethnicity and its association with nations. This article offers a way to expound on the discursive formation of nations and nationalism as a basis for future empirical studies from a sociological perspective.

2. Theories of Nations and Nationalism

Primordialism

If broadly defined, primordialism tends to trace national identity to various premodern ethnic characteristics, placing an emphasis on an innate sense of belonging to an ancient group or progeny (or kinship) in a certain place. For primordialists, this deep attachment is naturally embedded in the human species. They take ethnic and national identities for granted, and their ‘essential’ natures are ‘fixed’, or ‘static’. The understanding of this perspective has been counterposed to social constructionists,

who insist that ethnicity and nations are constructed and chosen by individuals under various circumstances (Özkirimli 2010 [2000]: 60–1).

Edward Shils (1957) is considered the first to use the term ‘primordial’ to refer to a certain bond each family member builds. Although his article does not specifically describe the process of nations and nationalism, the term has been widely employed in the theoretical analysis of the area. Shils criticises the grand sociological concept of a shift from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, a transformation from an intimate solidarity or personal relationship to a social or functional solidarity built into an impersonal relationship (see Tönnies 2001). Shils denies *Gesellschaft* in which most people are thought to have a forged ‘civil sense’ by group interests or cohesive forces, arguing an ‘infinity of personal attachments’ or the ‘tie of blood’ plays an integral role in instituting a modern society (Shils 1957: 131, 142).

One variation of primordialism has been explored from a sociobiological perspective. Pierre van den Berghe (1978) observes that a gene mechanism unconsciously selects genetically related kin over others. Influenced by ‘nepotism’ or ‘inclusive fitness’, people strategically extend their gene pool to a wider ethnic kin network in which common cultural symbols such as language, religion, or colour are shared (Smith 2010 [2001]: 56).

Another prominent version of the primordial approach has more cultural orientation. Using the term in his debates on a specific sentiment leading to a nation, Clifford Geertz (1973) maintains that ethnic and national identities stem from primordial sentiments, the assumed ‘givens’ of social existence: a particular religion, language, or social practices that individuals share in a certain community. Geertz gives some examples of the predominance of these ‘primordial attachments’ over the civic ties promoted along with modern civil politics. In modernising societies, where civic sentiments are weak, primordial bonds are of greater importance than ‘civil political communities’ (Geertz 1973: 259–60).

Modernism

In contrast to primordialism, modernism theorists are concerned about the socio-political framework on which nations emerge. The classic modernist work on nations and nationalism assumes that nationalism is a ‘political principle’, and a ‘political and cultural unit should be congruent’ (Gellner 1983: 1).

Modernist scholars tend to view the historical origins of nationalism as the products of modernity. Modern forms of states and industries were fully developed through the modern processes of industrialisation, capitalism, and urbanisation. While modernism has been the centre of understanding the rise of nations and nationalism, it seems difficult to find agreement on their theories, except for the above belief. Since the aim of this paper is not to describe each thinker’s point of view, a partial outline will be provided along with the economic and political focus.

Ernest Gellner’s perhaps most prominent theory is on the importance of understanding nationalism

in the context of the social-economic transformation from an agrarian to an industrial society (Gellner 1964). While people in the pre-industrial era relied heavily on hunting, gathering, and agriculture to survive in a closed community where family ties served as the foundation, those in an industrial society characterised by mobility were required to communicate with people from different communities with different social practices. To be understood across community boundaries in a common language, this change in social structure requires standardised language, and a certain level of literacy acquired through formal education. This is possible if a national government is established (Gellner 1983).

Tom Nairn (1981 [1977]), a neo-Marxist who draws heavily from Gellner, identifies the cause of nationalism as the rise of capitalism. He views nationalism within the framework of historical materialism. The Enlightenment projects in the Western world were supposed to spread the equal distribution of capital, but paradoxically resulted in uneven development. This world system invoked a wave of nationalism all over the world (for the relationship between Marxism and Nairn's argument, see Özkirimli 2010 [2000]: 76–7).

In a similar vein, Michael Hechter (1999) takes this uneven economic development as the root cause of the upsurge of nationalism in the 'Celtic fringe' such as Scotland, Wales, or Northern Ireland. In stark contrast to the central states, Britain's free market economic policy promoted economic inferiority in such regions (Hechter 1999: xiv).

For politically oriented theorists, the rise of nationalism is largely associated with the modern bureaucratic states. Through a detailed chronological analysis of European society, Breuilly concedes that nationalism is a political movement with the aim of establishing political states that wield power regarding the action of the state (Breuilly 1993 [1982]). Breuilly characterises his argument as 'state-oriented and modernist', and urges us to 'treat the nation as a modern political and ideological formation which developed in close conjunction with the emergence of the modern, territorial, sovereign, and participatory state' (Breuilly 2001: 32).

Paul Brass is one of the so-called instrumentalist thinkers, who posits that ethnic identity or nationalism is fostered by elite groups. Brass thinks of the study of nationalism as 'politically-induced cultural change'. Political elites use some pieces of their cultures as symbols with newly added value and meaning to mobilise the masses (Brass 1991: 75). For Brass, culture is a means of interacting with a large mass of people with the aim of state-seeking nationalism. Later generations regard culture as a critical reflection of the politically centred interpretation of nationalism.

Ethnosymbolism

Ethnosymbolism questions the relevance of modernism with its emphasis on the ethnic continuity of the nation based on its common myth, memory, cultural symbols, or tradition. John Armstrong argues that the advent of nationalism is connected to ethnic identities formed long before the period of

nationalism. Symbolic culture in each ethnic group clarifies the boundaries between other ethnic groups (Armstrong 1982).

In a similar vein, Anthony D. Smith, the leading scholar of this idea, defines the term, *ethnie*, the ethnic community that originated in early times, as the key to understanding the roots of the modern nation continued from the past into the present. What he calls 'ethnosymbolism' is an approach to clarifying the relationships between various sorts of collective cultural identity with a specific focus on cultural elements such as myth, memory, value, symbol, and tradition which transform slowly over time (Smith 2004: 196). Ethnosymbolic analysis focuses more on the cultural practices that each ethnic group has acted upon. Smith's theoretical grounds stem from a critical engagement with the modernist understanding of the nation, in that modernists fail to take the historical importance of ethnic ties upon which modern nations are built (Smith 1988).

For Smith, the development of modern nations can be fully explained if we consider cultural symbols that characterise the premodern ethnic community. Smith concedes that ethnic bases such as 'dim memories', or 'elements of culture and alleged ancestry' even though they are not salient, play an integral role in building modern nation-states (Smith 1986: 17).

New Approaches

A relatively new framework in nationalism study places more value on how people are made 'national' than on the genesis of nations. While leading social scientists have pegged away at elucidating the definition of nation and its origin, social constructionist approaches have come to the fore in the interrogation of nations and nationalism. This approach can be seen as methodologically new in two ways: a focus on the way in which nations are constructed and how nations are reproduced after the modern nation states have been established.

Benedict Anderson's seminal work, *Imagined Communities* is a pioneering study of this kind from a discursive point of view. His main contention is that a nation is 'imagined political communities' (Anderson 1991: 6). This can become possible when people view others as part of a group. The creation of nations is largely attributed to the invention of the printing press, and the rise of print capitalism, which make ordinary people feel a sense of nation through reading the daily newspaper and sharing common frames of reference. Therefore, people consider the unknown others as an 'imagined' nation. Although Anderson is not a scholar of theories of nationalism, the methodological impact of this book remains salient.

Similarly, a post-national perspective of investigating nation is presented by a scholar outside nationalism study. *Banal Nationalism* is a groundbreaking book written by a social psychologist, Michael Billig. His focus is on the pervasive nature of nationalism once the nation was established in the Western world. Shifting attention away from the 'hot' forms of political nationalism, which mobilise

the would-be nations for national struggles, Billig examines visible but unnoticeable, thus ‘banal’, forms of reproduction of nations (Billig 1995).

Billig employs a discursive approach to elucidating how established nations are narrated in ordinary life in which several deixis such as ‘we’, ‘our’, ‘here’ are used. Billig argues the words used in daily news or weather reports, all of which we often read, watch or hear, imply a sense of nation is persisting and prevailing in the everyday context. Billig’s tenets of nationalism have become the centre of scholars’ attention in exploring banal perspectives in various modes.

Based on the banal ways of formulating a nation, Edensor examines cultural aspects grounded in everyday life. National identity is (re)produced through ‘performing everyday routines, habits and duties’ (Edensor 2002: 69). Everyday brands of nationalism shed light on apathy or indifference in something related to the commitment or attachment to putative national culture in everyday contexts. These quotidian realms have rarely been explored in conventional study of nationalism.

3. Nationalism as Discursive Formation

As Gergen argues, ‘language and all other forms of representation gain their meaning from the ways in which they are used within relationship’. This is also true of identity formation. It is not the product of the individual mind itself. It is done through ‘co-ordinations among persons–agreements, negotiations, affirmations’ (Gergen 1999: 48). A social constructionist approach provides us with relational understandings of identity formation in various patterns of practices. Amongst others, Calhoun and Hall employ the discursive approach.

While admitting the difficulty of defining diverse phenomena of nationalism by a unified explanatory category, Calhoun sees nationalism as discursive formation. This idea has been well-quoted in various studies of nations and nationalism, whereas the detailed analysis of his theses still remained for exploration. As mentioned above, the classical debates on nationalism are largely concerned about the origin and definition of nations, all of which have been investigated from different fields of disciplines. The discursive approach, however, has common ground of what nations and nationalism are, whether they inherit primordial, modern, or ethno-symbolic nature.

National Discourse

Nations or nationhood can be seen as a product of nationalism based on one’s distinctive national identity. As the classical theories of nationalism posit, political processes can be used to construct a sense of nation or nationhood. In these processes, nations are mainly built through struggles or endeavours by members of the states-in-progress. In other words, nationalist discourse makes people nationalistic. Calhoun suggests the following epistemological aspects of creating a nation:

‘Nation’, is a particular way of thinking about what it means to be a people, and how the people thus defined might fit into a broader world system. The nationalist way of thinking and speaking helps to make nations. There is no objective way to determine what is a nation. There are no indicators that are adequate independent of the claims made on behalf of putative nations, and the political processes by which they are made good or fail to be made good (Calhoun 1997: 99).

The study of nations and nationalism should not be limited to those of political doctrines or physical movements, such as the eruptions of severe military struggles, street violence or drastic national reform of socio-economic structures for the sake of one nation’s interest. This is because any sort of nationalists would not act beyond their own way of thinking, so their actions would likely be determined by their perceptions of their nation. Similarly, ordinary people perceive a sense of attachment to the world in which they live by thinking about, speaking about, and listening to a nation. Each member of a community understands themselves and their surrounding world through the ‘discursive framework of national identity’ (*ibid.*). In this way, the nation is constructed or forged in everyday life.

A clear boundary can be drawn between nationalism and the micro-level of subjective feelings of identities based on unchangeable features such as kinship, language, or religion when we focus on the discursive feature of nationalism. Rather than considering the ideas of a nation as essentialised, one could instead see that nations are constructed according to continual practices and ways of performing. Therefore, nationalism can be conceptualised if it is considered as a ‘form of “discourse”, or as a *particular way of seeing and interpreting the world, a frame of reference that helps us make sense of and structure the reality that surrounds us*’ (Özkirimli 2005: 163; italics in original).

Calhoun indicates the difficulty in defining commonalities of diverse forms of nation and nationalism by a single frame of reference. However, the dissemination of the discourse regarding nationalism contributes to constituting each event or action related to nations by way of ‘cultural framing’ (Calhoun 1997: 22). Nationhood not only determines how ordinary people talk about nations, but it is also ‘defined by their talk’ (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008: 539). It seems worth exploring what roles discourses play in social construction of identities.

Power of Discourse

Calhoun appreciates the pervasive nature of discourse across political and cultural boundaries. Hall views the coercive power of discourse through a reference to relational understanding of the difference between the ‘self’ and ‘others’.

What is spoken or written about can produce the meaning which constructs a particular topic. The literary meaning of discourse is a collection of speech or writing about a particular topic, but what Hall means by discourse is a ‘group of statements which provide a language for talking about’. To put

it simply, it is a ‘particular kind of knowledge about a topic’ (Hall 1996b: 201). Discourse is not composed of a single statement or a piece of writing, but of several statements or enunciations. Discourse has some ‘institutionalised force’ and exercises a ‘profound influence’ on how people think and act (Mills 1997: 55). Owing much to the French philosopher, Michael Foucault, Hall interprets a body of statements that involves similar content or functions as ‘discursive formation’ as every single statement implies a ‘relation to all the others’ (Hall 1996b: 201). Once something is spoken out by someone, and is repeatedly used by others, it will have a common meaning to express the same object. Hall summarises the nature of discourse as follows:

Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But it is itself produced by a practice: “discursive practice”– the practice of producing meaning. Since all social practices entail meaning, all practices have a discursive aspect. So discourse enters into and influences all social practices (*ibid.*: 201–2; italics in original).

Following Foucault, Hall highly evaluates the power of discourses, defining them as ‘ways of talking, thinking, or representing a particular subject or topic’, which ‘produce meaningful knowledge about that subject’. When the discourse pervades societies, it will exercise influence over ‘social practices’ and ‘has real consequences and effects’ (*ibid.*: 205).

Once any individuals touch upon a national discourse in various contexts, each discourse constructs positions from which it has a specific meaning. Once a discourse is employed by a speaker, he or she positions oneself as the subject, and consequently, from being exposed to the discourse multiple times, they come to be influenced by it from their subjective position. The integrity or coherence of a discourse relies on various institutional settings or speakers (*ibid.*: 202). This set of meaning-making processes winds up holding a powerful influence on social practices and representation.

Hal contextualises the discursive formation in ‘black’ politics in Britain in the 1990s. It was a watershed when the representation of race was being changed, even though it did not completely replace the predominant perception of ‘black’. This shift is concerned with a ‘politics of representation’ about image and its imagination.

Hall regards a problematic concept of representation as a way of picturing a reality which is situated outside the means of depicting someone or something. This can be possible through constituting meanings by narration. It follows that:

events, relations, structures do have conditions of existence and real effects, outside the sphere of the discursive; but that only within the discursive, and subject to its specific conditions, limits and modalities, do they have or can they be constructed within meaning. Thus, while not wanting to

expand the territorial claims of the discursive infinitely, how things are represented and the 'machineries' and regimes of representation in a culture do play a constitutive, and not merely a reflexive, after-the-event, role (Hall 1992a: 253–4; italics in original).

For Hall, the racial category of 'black' is not an essential subject grounded in unchangeable characteristics. Rather it can be recognised as the consequence of identity politics. The black subject is politically and culturally constructed, thus it is composed of the 'extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the category "black"' (*ibid.*: 254). The naturalised notion of 'black' in Western discourse is ignorant of 'diversity and differentiation of the historical and cultural experiences of black subjects'. Consequently, the idea of essentialised 'race' is fading (*ibid.*). Ethnicity is being shaped by cultural practice. The shift of black cultural politics turned his attention to culture and national identities.

Nationalism is the burst of national feeling or national identities created through the representation of national culture. Hall attributes national identities to a creation of national culture:

National cultures are composed not only of cultural institutions, but of symbols and representations. A national culture is a *discourse*—a way of constructing meanings which influences and organizes both our actions and our conception of ourselves...National cultures construct identities by producing meanings about 'the nation' with which we can *identify*; these are contained in the stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, and images which are constructed of it (Hall 1992b: 292–3; italics in original).

Hall understands discourse as national culture. What is talked about is national culture continued from the past to the present. It suggests the need to elucidate the content of the discourse and its context if you are to understand the profound meaning and implication of national discourse.

4. The Varieties of Nations

Hall presents three different pillars of investigating identity: 'Enlightenment subject', 'sociological subject', and 'post-modern subject' (Hall 1992b: 275). These different conceptions are key to fully understanding the complexity, multiplicity and plasticity of the identities upon which Hall's ideas are constituted. I shall elaborate on these conceptions, attending to the continuity between these distinguished subjects with reference to his other seminal work.

Enlightenment Subject–Individualism

The term “Enlightenment” shapes the figure of a new way of thinking about modern Western society that emerged in the eighteenth century, and the root of the ideas can be traced back to sixteenth and seventeenth century intellectuals. The characteristics of the “Enlightenment” ideals appear to be inconsistent but some features are agreed upon among a number of philosophers. It is worth examining some key concepts regarding Hall’s central ideas of identity formation, which are ‘reason’, ‘individualism’, ‘freedom’, and ‘uniformity of human nature’ (Hamilton 1996: 23). In modern times, humans are thought to be endowed with the abilities of reason and rationality when it comes to organising thoughts based on ‘clear, innate ideas independent of experience’ (*ibid.*). People released their thoughts and behaviours from medieval constraints imposed by a higher authority, leading to the freedom of individual thoughts and actions, the sum of which compose a society. Therefore, the main features of human nature were always unified in the concept of Enlightenment (*ibid.*).

Hall examines the individualist idea of identity, amongst others. The ‘Enlightenment subject’ is considered to be the one whose basis is the human ‘as a fully centred’ and ‘unified individual’, who was born with an ‘inner core’. It remains essentially the same or ‘identical with itself’ as long as it exists. Its ‘essential centre of the self’ constitutes a ‘person’s identity’ (Hall 1992b: 275).

Hall, however, does not converge his idea of identity with rampant individualism. Instead, he develops a relational, or sociological, understanding of identity. He is attentive to the changeability of personal identity. As Layder argues, personal identity transforms gradually and incrementally, although its change is less obvious (Layder 2004: 5).

Sociological Subject–Self and Other Relationship

Following the classic sociological knowledge of symbolic interactionism, Hall explains that identity is created in relation to the surrounding environment. Similar to the aforementioned Western value of individualism, each subject has an ‘inner core’, ‘the real me’, but is neither ‘autonomous’ nor ‘self-sufficient’. The inner core of the individual is, therefore, formed through the interaction with ‘significant others’, who shape the values, meanings or symbols in the world where the subject exists (Hall 1992b: 275–6).

Symbolic interactionists such as G.H. Mead and C.H. Cooley, who consider self as the product of social processes, create a sense of self through mutual interactions with others. This act of connecting oneself with others is to generate the symbolic world in which individual behaviours are shaped (for a classic work of symbolic interactionism, see Mead 1934).

Hall focuses on the interdependency of the individual, stating that the sociological way of thinking is helpful in filling the gap between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ or ‘the personal’ and ‘the public worlds’, leading to the alignment of ‘subjective feelings’ of ourselves with the ‘objective places we occupy in

the social and cultural world' (Hall 1992b: 276). In this way, it is taken for granted that unchangeability of identity, in other words, a stable identity is subject to fragmentation.

The self is not fixed but is always in the process of being developed. Hall further developed his arguments on this sociological premise. Hall presents the question of 'identification', explaining the need to shift from the essentialist idea of fixed identity. The question at stake is an attempt to 'rearticulate the relationship between subjects and discursive practices' (Hall 1996a: 2). Hall explains:

identification is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation. In contrast with the 'naturalism' of this definition, the discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed—always 'in process'. It is not determined in the sense that it can always be 'won' or 'lost', sustained or abandoned. Though not without its determinate conditions of existence, including the material and symbolic resources required to sustain it, identification is in the end conditional, lodged in contingency. Once secured, it does not obliterate difference (*ibid.*: 2–3).

Hall grasps the question of identity as 'identification'. It refers to an act of 'becoming' in a socialising process when the self recognises the 'other', whether the 'others' are those who are hated or those who are adored (*ibid.*: 3). What he asserts here is that the concept of identity is not concerned about an 'essentialist one', which never changes for life, rather a 'strategic and positional one', which is repeatedly subject to change in relation to how the self represents the other and vice versa. There is neither 'stable core of the self', nor the 'bit of the self which remains always-already "the same", identical to itself across time' (*ibid.*). Thus, identity formation is never settled as long as we live on. We constantly change into a new 'self' in a dialectical relationship with the 'others'.

Post-Modern Subject

The term "postmodernism" commonly refers to epochal transformations in cultural spheres such as literature, arts or architecture. Beyond these academic spheres, it has been used so broadly across humanities or social science explaining new terrains to overcome "modernity" that it might be difficult to define in a single frame. Instead of outlining the definition of the term in each field, I will simply focus on relevant aspects of postmodernism to questions of nations and nationalism. One of the distinguishing characteristics of a postmodern era is the 'loss of rational and social coherence in favor of cultural images and social forms and identities marked by fragmentation, multiplicity, plurality, and indeterminacy' (Thompson 1996: 566). What postmodernism literally suggests is "after" a modern age, in other words, the end of the "Enlightenment project" on the basis of which modernity developed.

From his own experience as a British Jamaican, who was born in Jamaica and educated in England, he turned his attention to theorising race and ethnicity from a postmodern perspective. Hall's idea of "new ethnicity" was developed under the situation in the 1980s marked by Thatcherism where the hegemonic conception of aesthetic white identity of "Englishness" is opposed to the essentialist homogenous black identity.

The category of "black" is constructed by selecting dominant features and eliminating small differences among people who have African heritage. In a dominantly white presence in British society, people such as these are displaced and marginalised as the 'unspoken and invisible "other"'. Under these circumstances, 'blacks have typically been the objects, but rarely the subjects, of the practices of representation' (Hall 1992a: 252). This marginalisation and oversimplification of the Black British experience caused Hall to reconsider identity politics in British society.

Hall casts doubt on the essentialist idea of identity, instead offering the concept of identification. Especially in the late modern age, which is characterised as globalisation, 'identities are never unified' but even more 'fragmented' and 'fractured'. They are 'never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices, and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and constantly in the process of change and transformation' (Hall 1996a: 4).

Hall explains the process through which identities are formulated by referring to the historical past. It follows that:

actually, identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation (*ibid.*).

For Hall, identities are the 'processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be "spoken"'. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us' (*ibid.*: 5-6).

According to Hall, the position from which identities are situated and narrated should be considered, problematising the validity of a given concept of identity as a fixed and never-changing characteristic. He argues as follows:

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation (Hall 1990: 222).

Identity is constructed by perceiving others and feeling the difference between inner self and others. As Cohen (1994) argues, ethnicity has come to be interpreted as a 'mode of action and of representations: it refers to a decision people make to depict themselves or others symbolically as the bearers of a certain cultural identity' (Cohen 1994: 51).

If we think of identity as a result of identification, multifaceted identities can be constructed by interacting with those from different communities in various socio-cultural contexts. As Guibernau and Rex put it, 'acceptance of multiple identifications at a collective level does not mean a loss of identity at an individual and psychological level. It is simply a fact of human existence that human beings live within, and identify with, a multiplicity of groups according to occasion, without becoming individually psychologically disturbed' (Guibernau and Rex 2010: 4).

Hall's thesis can be generally read as one of the postmodern analyses of nations and nationalism, although it is difficult to distinctively categorise him as a prominent postmodernist as his argument is highly influenced by various theories from the late modern to post-modern thinkers beyond a single discipline. Hearn mentions his thoughts 'hover on the margins of post modernism'. This is because he denies the postmodernist explanation of the 'absolute impossibility and indeterminacy of identity', whereas he admits that the manner of identification underwent a historical shift, leading to the transformation of the relationship with other identities (Hearn 2006: 244).

The question of identity was a cultural conundrum; thus, relatively little knowledge had been accumulated in the field of social science, let alone in studies of nations and nationalism until the 1990s. This paucity made him explore the complex issue of identity. Hall's argument with regard to modern identities, which are 'being de-centred', are, as he admits, still 'provisional and open to contestation' (Hall 1992b: 274). However, Hall offers unexpected insights for further exploration of the question of identity and nationalism in the contemporary world.

Nations and Social Solidarity

Calhoun sheds light on what social solidarities ought to be in the post-national world. In the process of building modern nation-states, ethnic, cultural and other differences among people were ignored. Nations have been described as homogenous entities across lines of these characteristics in order to promote social inclusion. Calhoun's concern is with a critical re-reading of the post-national world and the transformation of nationalism. Cosmopolitanism, in a broader sense, makes all of the people in the world global citizens. Calhoun examines the aspiring project of cosmopolitanism to be achieved by human civilisation.

Calhoun understands the prevailing concept of cosmopolitanism as a new form of liberalism whose theoretical ground is the ethical obligation to embrace individual privilege across the national boundary (Calhoun 2012). Cosmopolitan ideals are to enlarge these universalistic obligations and

rights across the state boundaries. It means transformation from the idea of a citizenship in specific nation-states to that of a global one on the premise that all of the people in the world can strengthen social bonds to live without conflict.

Calhoun suggests that most cosmopolitan thoughts place an undue emphasis on individualism to the extent that the significance of social relationships and culture can become obscure (Calhoun 2007: 25). As a critique of theories of liberalism, cosmopolitan liberals in particular, Calhoun claims that their discourse lacks accounts of social conditions in which cosmopolitan projects are pursued. This perceived flaw makes liberal thinkers do no more than offer an ‘abstract normative structure’ under the cause of the cosmopolitan ideal (Calhoun 2003: 532). Liberalism was largely reinforced as modern Western nation states were built. A state grants individuals the fundamental human rights of being a part of its state, building a sound relationship between the state and its citizens.

In the process of nation-building, this relationship was attributed to the construction of particular feelings about a state, a special attachment to the state. Modern nation-building can be, therefore, understood as a process of ‘nationalising’ the people by governing them in a particular territory under a unified sovereign system of government. Cosmopolitanism has been reduced to the extension of the similar ideals of nation-states in a global context.

For Calhoun, liberals, for the most part, have been indifferent to the ‘sources or nature of solidarity’, overemphasising the relationships or allegiances to states generated by way of the benefits of citizenship (*ibid.*: 533). Postmodern society is, however, characterized by the rapid progress of globalisation, capitalist market, culture, or social relations that influence across the border of nation-states. Nation-states can no longer control their citizen’s behaviors on a global scale. Dominant liberal thoughts with a focus on the privilege of an individual as an essential unit are required to be reconsidered.

Instead, Calhoun underscores a sense of belongings built in social relationships as ‘individuals exist only in cultural milieux-even if usually in several at the same time’ (*ibid.*: 535). In social reality, people cannot evade belonging to social groups, social relations, or culture. Individuals do not autonomously identify themselves as a specific entity, rather their choice of identification varies from ‘particular webs of belonging, with access to particular others but not to humanity in general’ (*ibid.*: 536). In this way, Calhoun suggests the ‘omnipresence of ascription (and discrimination) as determinations of social identities’. Once individuals belong to a different organisation or enter into different webs of network, their social solidarity will surely change (*ibid.*: 536–7). Nationalism tends to trivialise the sectional solidarity. Amongst various social identities, Calhoun is appreciative of ethnicity as a decisive determinant of national sentiments.

Ethnicity and Nationalism

The dominant interpretation of the literature presupposes that nationalism is a modern phenomenon.

The advent of industrialisation and new modes of transportation and communication could help to construct a collective consciousness. However, this is not the only way to formulate national identity. Calhoun points out that distinctive elements such as kinship, ethnicity and nationality resonate with each other in certain situations. They tend to overlap, articulate with each other, or mutually reinforce in order to give birth to 'national' solidarities. Calhoun's main thrust is how these are reproduced through an interactive interpersonal relationship or through impersonal agencies of 'cultural standardization' and 'social organization' (Calhoun 1997: 29–30).

Kinship or descent indicates historical linkage through marriage or having offspring, and this lineage is passed down to the next generation either in the maternal or paternal line. While kinship or family relationships were of importance in early times, or in some other traditional societies, they play much less part in modern Western societies (*ibid.*: 37). When it comes to working in industrial societies, people find jobs in urban centres, leaving where their family is based. Therefore, kinship still remains relevant but is much less pervasive in the collective consciousness.

On the other hand, nationality can be seen as a larger categorical identity which contains smaller ones such as tribes or ethnic groups. Nationalists seek to mobilise the masses embracing all categories of people as if there was no internal differentiation. The nationalist rhetoric of kinship and descent composes society as a 'conglomeration of multiple and overlapping memberships of different segments' (*ibid.*: 39).

Calhoun interprets ethnicity as the positions of mediation between kinship and nationality. Ethnicity is particularly important when multiple groups exist in a common place. It helps to widely develop economic networks beyond the local level, as well as internally associate peoples with each other and with the state (*ibid.*: 40). Ethnicity acts as a bridge between kinship and other social categories in constructing multiple identities. Calhoun summarises the features of ethnicity as follows:

Ethnicity is thus not simply an extension of kinship, but the way in which collective identity gets constituted when kinship loyalties, traditions, and other means of passing on common culture confront a border arena in which most interaction is not organized by the same kinship and culture as within the group (*ibid.*).

Although relationships such as family ties or ethnic bonds can be instrumental in generating solidarity in some settings, they cannot work without their attachments to social relationships:

The discourse of nationalism...not only encourages seeing identity as inscribed in and conterminous with the individual body; it also encourages seeing individuals as linked through their membership of a set of abstract equivalents rather than their participation in webs of concrete interpersonal

relationships. It promotes categorical identities over relational ones, partly because nationalist discourse addresses large-scale collectivities in which most people could not conceivably enter into face-to-face relationships with most others (*ibid.*: 46).

The social constructionist way of thinking is depicted, in that people imagine the abstract entity of a nation and perceive themselves as a member of a nation. This can become possible not through direct interaction with others but through the national imaginary.

5. Conclusion

Most students of nationalism have long debated the historical development of nations and nationalism from political or socio-cultural perspectives with different definitions of nation. To put it otherwise, theories of nationalism have been refined by an ever-lasting critical engagement with those of other schools, whether primordialism, modernism, ethnosymbolism or other brands of approaches. It seems difficult to establish a unified grand theory in this field, as each thinker conceptualises nations and nationalism with their own definition.

This paper focuses on the discursive formation of nationalism which wields influence over individuals in constructing a sense of nation. Although the discursive approach is not brand new in linguistics or social psychology, it has rarely been employed in the study of nationalism (for a notable exception, see Özkirimli 2005). Whether nation is a product of political projects, socio-economic transformation, or long-existing symbolic culture, the discursive nature of nationalism can produce nations. Rather than specifically focusing on empirical case studies, this paper presents some guiding perspectives for understanding national identities from the social constructionist point of view.

As we have seen, Calhoun describes nationalism as what Foucault called ‘discursive formation’, which refers to a ‘way of speaking that shapes our consciousness’ (Calhoun 1997: 3). Nationalist discourse makes people ‘national’, becoming a member of a real community. Hall presents a relational understanding of identity formation, arguing the discourse of ‘others’ can constitute ‘self’. This implies that identities are not essential but always being produced, and never complete.

Calhoun, meanwhile, presents various elements of composing a nation, one of which is social solidarity that exists in such groups as family or ethnic communities. These elements are overlaid with national sentiments conjured through a national discourse. The common thread of their arguments is identity is socially constructed through relationships with others, whether or not they directly interact with each other. Nations cannot exist ‘objectively’ unless they exist discursively (Calhoun 2007: 27). It seems that the powerful influence of discourse can make the construction of identity possible.

If nation and nationalism are discursively defined, it might be relevant to understanding how

nationalist ideas are formed and disseminated in order to create a nation as well as how people perceive the national discourse. The attempt to analyse the nationalist discourse in each case study is an issue to be addressed in future studies of nationalism. It also helps to further elaborate on the theoretical and empirical study of nationalism. It is difficult to explain diverse forms of the nation by employing a single explanatory variable. Thus, much remains to be investigated beyond a discursive formation of nations and nationalism. The discourse analytical approach is, however, one of the relevant starting points to make sense of the complex process of constructing nations.

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