Some Basic Definitions and Observations regarding Nationalism

notes by Denis Bašić
• **PATRIOTISM** - love for or devotion to one’s country
• **NATIONALISM** - loyalty and devotion to a nation; especially: a sense of national consciousness exalting one nation above all others and placing primary emphasis on promotion of its culture and interests as opposed to those of other nations or supranational groups.
• **CHAUVINISM** - excessive or blind patriotism, undue partiality or attachment to a group or place to which one belongs or has belonged, an attitude of superiority toward members of other ethnicities, races, nations, or of the opposite sex.
• **JINGOISM** - extreme chauvinism or nationalism marked especially by a belligerent foreign policy.
• **FASCISM** - a political philosophy, movement, or regime (as that of the Fascisti - WWII Italy) that exalts nation and often race above the individual and that stands for a centralized autocratic government headed by a dictatorial leader, severe economic and social regimentation, and forcible suppression of opposition.
• **NAZISM** - the body of political and economic doctrines held and put into effect by the Nazis in Germany from 1933 to 1945 including the totalitarian principle of government, predominance of especially Germanic groups assumed to be racially superior, and supremacy of the führer.
• **IMPERIALISM** - the policy, practice, or advocacy of extending the power and dominion of a nation especially by direct territorial acquisitions or by gaining indirect control over the political or economic life of other areas; broadly: the extension or imposition of power, authority, or influence.
• **COLONIALISM** - the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically.
Definitions: Forms of Government

- **AUTOCRACY** - a system of government by one person with absolute power. (Also, **MONARCHY**).
- **ARISTOCRACY** - a form of government in which power is held by the nobility. (Also, **OLIGARCHY**).
- **DEMOCRACY** - a system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives.
- **ETHNOCRACY** - a form of government where representatives of a particular ethnic group advance the position of their ethnic group to the detriment of others.
- **THEOCRACY** - a system of government in which priests rule in the name of God or god.
- **BUREAUCRACY** - a system of government in which most of the important decisions are made by state officials rather than by elected representatives.
- **TECHNOCRACY** - the government or control of society or industry by an elite of technical experts.
- **PLUTOCRACY** - government by the wealthy.
- **ANARCHISM** - belief in the abolition of all government and the organization of society on a voluntary, cooperative basis without recourse to force or compulsion.
Getting history wrong is part of being a nation.

Ernest Renan (1823-1892)
French Philosopher

• In our time, Renan is most famous for the definition of a nation given in his 1882 discourse *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* ("What is a Nation?"). Whereas German writers like Johann Gottlieb Fichte had defined the nation by objective criteria such as a "race" or an "ethnic group" (das Volk) sharing common characteristics (language, etc.), Renan defined it by the willfulness to live together. Writing in the midst of the dispute concerning the Alsace-Lorraine region, he declared that the existence of a nation was based on a "daily referendum" (un plébiscite de tous les jours).
All nationalists believe that ...

- humanity is naturally divided into smaller units or nations.

- nations can be identified by certain characteristics that all its citizens hold in common (race, language, dynasty, religion, culture, or history.)

- peoples have a special relationship to some particular piece of land in which their ancestors first emerged as a distinct group and flourished.

- nations possess something called “common (national) interest” and it is the role of state to promote it.

- the only form of government that can assure the common interest of the nation is self-government.
All nationalist movements ...

- take one or more linguistic, religious, or ethnic attributes of a given group of people and claim that the attributes they have highlighted make that group a nation and entitle it to political independence in its ancestral homeland.

- have creeds that are rooted in a common set of assumptions; therefore, it is relatively easy for people to switch from one to another as circumstances demand.

- succeed or fail not because they represent true or false identities and aspirations, but because of the often unpredictable circumstances in which nationalist movements find themselves.

- arise in opposition to some internal or external nemesis.

- are defined by what they oppose.
The ideology of nationalism...

• deals with assumptions about the organization of state and society; therefore, its advent in any given territory represents a truly revolutionary departure for the inhabitants of that territory.

• transforms subjects into citizens, and citizens into cogs of a machine grinding away for something called “the common good” (or common wealth.)

• a subject becomes a citizen with the Constitution that acknowledges his/her right to vote
The ideology of nationalism...

- puts nation above the citizen and requires sacrifices for the nation, (interestingly, Fascism has the same attitude)

- My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country. JFK

- If we have to use force, it is because we are America. We are the indispensable nation. We stand tall. We see further into the future. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on NBC's Today Show (February 19, 1998)

- emerged with the modern state and gave modern state legitimacy and purpose by defining a group of people as a nation deserving a state of their own, by endowing that group of people with a common identity and common interest, and by making the state for advancing that common interest.
All nationalisms resemble **religious movements** in the sense that...

- they are based on a set of **myths** and **beliefs** (rather than rational analyses),
- they require from their **adherents**
  - to be absolutely loyal to the **higher cause**,
  - to **venerate** their national **iconography** (flag, anthem)
  - to participate in national **rituals** (parades)
  - to respect the **cult** of a national hero/leader (vs. saints), and
  - to **sacrifice** themselves for the **abstract entity** called nation.
Nationalism & Culture

- It is often claimed that some political behavior is determined by the national culture, (national role conceptions, national psyche), in other words, a commonly accepted point of view, which seems to be self-evident.

- The question, however, is what shapes that national culture, national psyche, and national conceptions, whether they are stagnant and unchangeable or whether they are political constructs and as such can be changed. The Social Learning Theory would guide us to the conclusion that our culture is shaped by our educational system, which is in turn shaped by politics.

- Just think of slavery as a part of the political and economic system of the Western world. Slavery was commonly accepted as a part of our daily life, culture, even as a God-given phenomenon and as such was justified through the Bible. For a great many churches for a long time being a Christian meant accepting slavery.

  - See Genesis 9:25-27 “Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers... May Canaan be the slave of Shem... and may Canaan be the slave of Japheth.”

- Nowadays, it is commonly accepted that the Bible is a subject to interpretation and a wast majority of Christian Churches do not promote slavery.
Nationalism & Historiography

- On the note of identity politics and change, Renan believes in science and education and that the true knowledge of history would eventually dispel the national(ist) mythology.

- Renan: **Forgetting**, I would even go so far as to say, **historical error** is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality.” (source: Ernest Renan, “What is a nation?,” in Becoming National: A Reader, ed. by Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny, translated by Martin Thom, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 45)

- What is forgotten and what is not will make the collective memory of a people, which will serve as a base for national identity formation.

- According to modernists and constructionists, what is forgotten and what is not is decided by the elites who shape the educational system based on their political visions and interests.

- Hence, nation is primarily based on the plebiscite/political agreement of the elites. Other factors are a subject to interpretation and manipulation.
Nationalism as a State Religion

• Watch this documentary by Abby Martin of the TeleSUR TV station

• America’s Unofficial Religion