

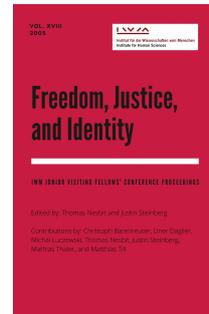
# What Remains for Nationalism Studies?

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IWM Junior Visiting Fellows' Conference Proceedings, Vol. XVIII © 2005 by the author

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After decades of unprecedented development in both nationalisms and nationalism studies, nationalists surprisingly have many more reasons to be satisfied than researchers. While nations and nationalism flourish, scholars seem analytically more and more confused. Although there are more articles, books, and journals on nations and nationalism than ever before, there is a growing sense of disappointment in the field. Looking at the subject's literature from the last quarter century, one could get the impression that researchers have been going in circles, referring to the same names, using the same examples. The crisis must indeed be serious, since one of the most eminent sociologists of nations claims that the sociology of nations does not exist (Szacki 2004: 13). The disillusionment is so deep that the most influential scholars repeat that we have not moved far beyond conclusions known fifty years ago (Connor 2004) and the discipline itself got stuck between contemporary scientific fads and common-sense theories (Brubaker & Cooper 2000: 11).

In this paper I will try to (a) describe this crisis, and point to its (b) symptoms, (c) sources as well as (d) possible ways out.

## **1. Theoretical chaos**

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The progress of any discipline depends on asking questions that guide further theoretical and empirical investigations. For more than a century, the following questions have informed the field of the nationalism studies:

- (a) What is the nation?
- (b) Why does the nation exist?
- (c) When is the nation formed?
- (d) How does the nation spread and develop?

(e) What does the nation do?

It is precisely the unsatisfying plethora of answers to these questions that brought about the discipline's crisis. The most obvious symptoms are that we arrived at the point where every imaginable answer to the great questions has been imagined, every thinkable theory has been thought, every conceivable idea has been conceived. The field of nationalism studies has been deluged and overwhelmed with innumerable contradictory theories and cannot find its way out of the ensuing chaos.

Today we can say that the nation is of a cultural nature (Znaniiecki 1952, Kloskowska 2001) as easily as of a political nature (Kilias 2004). Analogously, we can maintain that it develops naturally or is constructed, that it satisfies the needs of the masses (Smith 1998, Anderson 2000) or that it manipulates them (Gellner 1983, Hobsbawm & Ranger 1992). Regarding the nation's genesis, we can equally argue that it took place in antiquity (Armstrong 1982) or the Middle Ages (Hastings 1997),<sup>[1]</sup> in sixteenth century England (Greenfeld 1992) or eighteenth century South America (Anderson 2000: 47-66), in the wake of the Partitions of Poland (Szporluk 2003, Connor 1994: 5) or the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars (Breuille 2004), before (Weber 1979) or during the First World War (Simmel 1917). In particular cases, we can move the birth of the nation to the Second World War, as in the case of Poland (epkowski 1989), to December 2004, as one could argue for Ukraine, or to the distant future, as with Belarus (Snyder 2003). Similarly divided are views on the origins of nations. It is claimed that they developed out of pre-existing ethno-religious ties (Smith 1998) or because of capitalism and industrialization (Gellner 1983), that it took place in the course of modern wars and competition between groups (Mann 1993, Greenfeld 1992) or during the development of the bureaucratic state (Hechter 1999). Yet we might argue as well that capitalism and industrialization are not the causes but the effects of the emergence of nations (Greenfeld 2001), that for wars to be waged and states to be built, nations must already exist. We may even posit that ethnic groups are nothing but the products of nations projected onto a pre-national past (Wallerstein & Balibar 1992). Thus, we have every reason to think that all reasonable positions have been taken. To the growing despair of scholars, original fruit is a delicacy beyond our reach. Scientific acclaim can no longer come from inventing new "ground-breaking" and "provocative" theories. None remain.

## 2. Solutions

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One can imagine two basic ways out of this troubling situation: on the one hand, we can disregard theories and ignore the great questions they answer; on the other, we can face the questions head-on and look for sound responses. Both ways have their own additional ramifications, as seen in Table A. In next paragraphs, I will consecutively deal with each of these options.

*Table A:*

Now, let us focus on the first strategy, which is employed by positivist and normative approaches.

Positivists sidestep the questions by focusing on an idiographic description of reality. They are not interested in abstract issues – the what, when, and how's of the nation – but in pure facts, how it really was. Though most historical and often valuable researches are conducted in this vein, this approach is ultimately unpromising, as it is impossible to write about facts without a theory about them. Some theory concerning the nation's nature enters explicitly or implicitly in every interpretation.

Normative considerations are, in turn, the growing currents in sociology and philosophy. In one stroke, this strategy gets rid of two ungrateful tasks: it dismisses not only questions and theories, but also laborious empirical researches so characteristic of positivism. Instead of pondering on the nature of the nation or doing fieldwork, it moralizes on what the nation should or should not be. Unfortunately, since such analyses usually tell us more about their authors than morals, they are not strong foundations for future work.

In surmounting the crisis, both of these strategies appear to be ineffective. Furthermore, in the long run, they do not help us avoid theoretical problems because they eventually have to answer the great questions anyway. One simply cannot research into national phenomena and theorize about their normative undertones without defining what they are actually dealing with. In other words, one can neither write about a given German

nationalist of the nineteenth century (positivism) nor condemn nationalism for being exclusive (normative theorizing) without defining, even if only between the lines, what the nation is, when it emerges, what are its effects, and so on.

For these reasons, it is more reasonable to self-consciously confront the great questions and give clear and direct responses. Recently, this road has been taken by now dominant approaches commonly subsumed under the broad label of “postmodernism.” Even though so-called modernist theories (nations=constructs of capitalism and the modern state) were still “the principal orthodoxy” in nationalism studies as early as the mid-1990s (cf. Hastings 1997: 2), within only one decade they have given way to various postmodern approaches.[2] We can distinguish their two basic versions: standard (or folk, as I prefer) and radical.

Whereas they both draw on constructivist intuitions of the modernist canon, proponents of the first emphasize the nation’s contingency, its “fluid,” “blurred,” “free-floating,” “situational,” “contextual,” “processual,” “interactional,” “plastic,” “dynamic,” “shifting,” “ever-changing,” “protean,” “constructed,” “imagined,” “unfixed,” “ambivalent,” “polymorphous,” and “ambiguous” character. Advocates of the radical reading, however, go as far as to undermine very existence of the nation. The standard version of postmodernism asks and answers questions concerning the nature of the nation; the radical one asks and then dismisses them.

Yet proponents of both of these stances, as I will show, do not support their case consistently. In the following paragraphs, I first demonstrate that arguments supporting the fluidity of the nation are not sound enough and, then, I show there are no compelling reasons to strike out the category of “nation” from the scientific vocabulary.

### 3. Nations in flux?

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Let us take one typical example of the standard – “nation is fluid” – version of a postmodern stand: “The Multicultural Riddle” (1999) by Gerd Baumann, otherwise the author of excellent studies based on extensive fieldwork (1996). In his book, Baumann sets out to prove that nation (resp. ethnicity and religion) is always situational, contextual, and so forth. He provides moral, theoretical, and empirical reasons for that claim:

(a) essentialism redivivus. For the purpose of his argument, Baumann revives long-dead claims that nations are natural immutable groups. No wonder that in the next step he criticizes it strongly, because it reifies and essentializes phenomena that are the effects of human actions, because – in other words – it creates the world which succumbs to “an Apartheid logic of ethnicity, as if some god had created different colors, each with their own culture, on different days of the Creation Week” (Baumann 1999: 60). He then implies that this absurd view of national phenomena is the only possible one. In doing so, he fails to challenge more balanced positions;

(b) either-or alternative. Further, Baumann presents us with the alternative: Either essentialism (=Apartheid), or postmodernism (=multiculturalism). He suggests that either you believe in eternal groups that are products of some inhuman forces, or you believe that groups are infinitely situational, contextual, and so on. *Tertium non datur*. As the former is sheer nonsense, you have to adopt the latter stance, and if you still hesitate, you are a racist. Yet if we reject Apartheid logic, we do not necessarily have to embrace the postmodern perspective; rejecting postmodernist premises does not invariably lead to Apartheid;

(c) examples I. The author provides empirical researches that are to render all essentialistic views obsolete, demonstrating namely that seemingly natural barriers between nations and ethnicities can be transcended. We are thus informed that in Pakistan a Pathan can become recognized as a Baluch, in Sudan a Fur can assume the identity of a Baggara, and in Southeast Asia a Chinese can turn Yao and so on (pp.58-59). He believes that once we find one single exception, essentialism is ultimately refuted. But this is not the case. Scholars who see groups to be more resilient phenomena, which can exist through many contexts and situations, are not taken aback by exceptions, for such examples can demonstrate, for instance, that there are some objective conditions under which national (resp. ethnical and religious) conversions are possible.[3] More importantly, however, they can still point to many more cases when conversions do not or cannot occur at all;

(d) examples II. Furthermore, Baumann credits that his examples render his own position valid. He supposes that his cases rebut all rival views, but it seems that cases countering his own theory do not change his views in the least. This practice is as old as sociology, taking us back to those pioneering times when August Comte supported his law of the three stages of history that unfold naturally “by carefully selecting only those facts that would demonstrate it” (Pickering 2000: 49). Though it would be difficult to find more disparate currents than positivism (Comte) and postmodernism (Baumann), it becomes clear that in their practice, they remain akin. We should, however, be already aware that even though we find a case that corroborates our assumptions, it does not mean they are definitely verified;

(e) naturalism à rebours. Last but not least, Baumann’s work is informed by the conviction that “[t]he problematic cases are no longer those where ethnicities are socially plastic, but those where they are not” (p.60). He appears to believe that we always find chaos, conflict, and ambiguity at the root of things. Any rules, constraints, any semblance of order all seem to violate this preordained nature of social life. At this point, naturalism quite unexpectedly enters Baumann’s argument through the backdoor. There is no reason, however, why we should treat the degree of plasticity as an index of an issue being problematic or not. For scientists everything is problematic, nothing is natural. And to be sure, the state of constant flux is not any more natural than the opposite one. Both should be scientifically examined and none should be taken for granted.

All in all, Baumann believes to give the final answer concerning the nature of the nation: it is processual, contextual, and so forth. Nevertheless, his reasoning, as I have tried to elucidate, is far from convincing. He suggests, first, that only the most absurd theories of

nation and nationalism are possible; second, he maintains that the only viable alternative to them is postmodernism; third, he gives examples that he hopes will falsify rival views and support his own; finally, he grounds his position in the metaphysical idea that, at bottom, everything is fluid. So at the end of the day, it turns out that his version of postmodernism that so vehemently fights against essentialistic fallacies, remains at least equally empirically ungrounded.

## 4. Why nations?

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Though the radical version of postmodern approaches shares a similarly critical view of contemporary theories of nations and nationalism, the solution it suggests is by far more revolutionary. It is not sufficient to redefine the concept “nation” in processual terms – we have to expel it from social sciences altogether. Since, in so doing, this elaborate view challenges the very core of the nationalism studies, I have to focus on it at length.

In his classic book of essays, “Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe” (1997), Rogers Brubaker, the most eminent exponent of this stance, presents three groups of reasons why we should rid ourselves of the concept: (a) epistemological; (b) ideological; and (c) methodological.

First, in accord with folk postmodernism, he suggests that the term “nation” reifies reality, falsely suggesting the existence of a clearly defined group. Thus in describing national phenomena, we should better replace “nation” with more processual and evocative equivalents as, for example, “nationalizing state.” This notion indeed invokes more dynamic images of social reality. Though the author allows for momentarily crystallizations of a given nation, he underscores that such a state cannot last over longer spans of time. In his view, nations may happen, but not exist.

When it comes to Europe, however, the term “nation,” for all its reifying connotations, does not seem completely inappropriate, as reality is to a large extent *reified*. It is not because nationalizing states have given up their policies; rather, it is because, for most of our continent, they became so successful that nations finally came to exist. As Jeremy King argues with regard to East Central Europe, already as early as about 1910 nationhood has triumphed, generically if not specifically. For a time thereafter, some individuals still could choose among options, but those options were almost all national (King 2001: 123). Even distinct ethnical “groups,” such as Rusyns, found themselves at that time under the growing pressure of powerful adjacent nationalisms that eventually led to their gradual dissolution (Hann 1995: 107-116). If it was already clear at the beginning of the twentieth century that an “educated person was German or Dutch, Slovene or Croatian; [because] national education, the national language, marked off from each other the most closely related persons” (see Stargardt 1995: 98), it is even more so nowadays, after almost one century of mass-education. Emigration and deviant cases notwithstanding, the reproduction of national identity takes place unceasingly with each new generation socialized to the nation (see, for example, Billig 1995). Indeed, in the last one hundred years, surprisingly little has changed in this regard. Contrarily, Brubaker’s

conceptual propositions can make us think there is nothing stable about nations; we deal with free-floating social constructs, not a social reality that sometimes changes very slowly and is considered objective by social agents.

All in all, it might seem that the concept of “nationalizing state” might adequately describe processes of nation-formation; still, when nations are formed (=the bulk of people acquire national identification) we can reasonably employ the term “nation.” Otherwise, we may fall prey to a tendency of “pastism,” analogous to presentism, and project *past* blurred images of the nation onto the present, which is relatively fixed and stable.

On the other hand, however, it seems that in Brubaker’s most recent essays, there appears to be an incipient tension that may bring about significant reformulations of his theoretical perspective. He namely recognizes the scientific value of primordialist approaches and agrees that it is social agents “who are the real primordialists, treating ethnicity as naturally given and immutable” (Brubaker et al 2004: 49) and their “primordial attachments stem from [...] blood-ties, religion, shared language, and customs” (p.49), if sometimes only putative or imagined. In this, he moves beyond his radical approach, replaces the rhetoric of momentary national crystallizations, and agrees that time and again people may share deep, durable cultural affinities and common definitions.

A second group of reasons underlying the decision to reject the concept of “nation” concerns ideology. According to this view, using the term “nation” in the social sciences turns us automatically from representatives of critical and rational thinking to nationalists. We fall prey not only to a nationalist ideology, but we also unconsciously petrify it in the field of science that is supposed to be *wertfrei*. This argument is not articulated directly in Brubaker’s work, though I believe his reasoning certainly may lead to this type of an interpretation.

It is hard to defend oneself against such criticism on empirical grounds, for in the manner of masters of suspicion, it can always be claimed that all counterarguments are ideologically-leadened and cover vested interests. In response, however, one could argue, first, that the burden of proof is on the critics who should demonstrate (not only assure) that actually there are not any nations and thus the term cannot be employed in the strictly descriptive sense. Second, one can suggest that as the use of the term “class” in the scientific discourse does not make us socialists or communists, then, analogously, the term “nation” should not be any more dangerous. Third, we can give counterexamples of liberal researchers who use the term “nation” and, at the same time, are critical of nationalist discourse. In the first place, one could name here Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, Miroslav Hroch, Jerzy Szacki and Andrzej Walicki. Of course, it can always be argued that they combat nationalism with nationalist paraphernalia and therefore do not cut the vicious circle of self-grounding nationalist discourse. But why should science cut anything, provided it describes reality correctly? Fourth and most importantly, resigning from the term “nation” is not necessarily ideologically neutral as well. To the contrary, it might reflect deep ideological engagement, for example, on the side of multiculturalism. We can find this ideology more appealing than nationalism, but it certainly is not more scientific whatsoever.

The third and final group of reasons pertains to methodology. It is claimed that the word “nation” should not be employed in scientific discourse because it proves to be a powerful *category of practice*, but a flimsy *category of analysis*. Brubaker’s critique (Brubaker & Cooper 2000: 34) of the notion of “identity” as “riddled with ambiguity, riven with contradictory meanings, and encumbered by reifying connotations” arguably counts for “nation” as well. There are, however, several serious objections to this claim.

First, this argument can be taken to an extreme by claiming that we should also replace all other folk concepts that happened to be used in social sciences. This strategy would be, in fact, self-defeating, for social sciences, at least for the most part, rely on concepts drawn from everyday life.

Second, we would be at great pains to argue coherently why we reject one common term while applying another. So while Brubaker explains why we have to dismiss the term “nation,” he still employs such terms as “anti-Semitism” that do not seem much more scientific and carry the same risk of reification as “nation.”

Third, even if the new conceptual coinage successfully replaced “nation” in the social sciences, it would be simultaneously subject to abuses: the better concept, the wider use, the greater risk of abuse, then, a new replacement will have to be found, etc. Notions are used, abused, and ill-defined, but it is not their “fault.” Rather, it is careless scientific usage that should be blamed for this situation (cf. Calhoun 2003: 562).

Thus, it would be a fatal misconception to think that by simply replacing the term “nation” with putatively more appropriate equivalents, we dispose ourselves of terminological ambiguities and avoid the risk of equivocation.

Fourth, the most important objection to Brubaker’s claim, inspired by humanistic sociology, underscores the indispensability of the category “nation” as giving justice to the self-understanding of human agents. Almost one hundred years ago, Florian Znaniecki faced something similar to Brubaker’s dilemma. Though his point of departure made an identical distinction between *categories of practical reality* and *categories of thought* about *practical reality*, he drew reverse conclusions. He held that in social sciences we should use exactly such *categories* that are simultaneously *categories of practice* as well as *analysis*. Only such concepts can tie theoretical and practical reality. Only such categories are appropriate in understanding and explaining human actions (Znaniecki 1912: 8, 30). Using solely scientific equivalents bears the risk that we will create an artificial language without any bearing on social reality.

This problem is manifested in all its sharpness once we undertake fieldwork. We would face great difficulties convincing our respondents against their deepest convictions, that they are not members of the nation (since it does not exist) and, instead, they merely undergo the constant pressure of a “nationalizing state.” When we realize that nation is, in the first place, about people who identify themselves as nationals, that it is about their *consciousness*, then we cannot simply bracket their self-understanding, because in doing so we are bracketing the very nature of the nation. It would be exactly this one step too far in sociological reductionism that makes us lose sight of the issue we wanted to deal with.

Admitting that nations are not necessarily groups with common cultural features, joined by a special kind of solidarity, we can still employ the term “nation” with reference to people who identify themselves with the nation.

Yet we do not have to embrace the position of humanistic sociology to still find the term “nation” useful. Here I would like to point to two more possible options.

First, we can use the term “nation” as an ideal type, to which given communities could more or less approximate. I believe that most of the definitions of nation would be both more useful and convincing when understood as an ideal model. Polish historian Marek Waldenberg represents this standpoint: “Having in mind – he specifies – that the category of “nation” came to world in Europe, such a model could be built after an analysis of all European collectivities considering themselves to be nations, without arbitrarily omitting any of them” (1992: 15). From his viewpoint, such a model should contain at least the following elements: (a) common language, (b) homeland territory, (c) cultural heritage, (d) national culture, (e) rich national symbolism, (f) common sentiments and thoughts, (g) conviction of common origins, (h) inter-class solidarity, (i) consciousness of one’s distinctiveness as a nation, (j) (will for) state sovereignty (pp.16-17).

Second, the nation can be conceptualized in Bourdieuan terms as habitus. This was the way taken by Norbert Elias (1992) and most recently by Ruth Wodak. In her analysis of Austrian national identity, she claims that “die Nationale Identitaet [...] ist ein im Zuge der Sozialisation internalisierter Komplex von gemeinsamen oder aehnlichen Ueberzeugungen und Meinungen [...], von gemeinsamen oder aehnlichen emotionalen Einstellungen und Haltungen [...], sowie von gemeinsamen oder aehnlichen Verhaltensdispositionen.” (1998: 68-69). This perspective would be truly refreshing, for it could allow us to speak of *nations without nationalisms*, that is nations whose national consciousness have been replaced by, for example, a European or cosmopolitan one without changing their national habitus.

Concluding, we should be clearly aware of the epistemological, ideological, and methodological entanglement of concepts we use, but it does not mean that in all doubtful cases we should reject them off-handedly. Rather, we should employ them carefully with analytic self-consciousness. Such a practice is part and parcel of the sociological craft. Sociologists should always cultivate awareness of assumptions that enter their work; they should always ask whose experiences are being interpreted, and whose vocabulary – whose “reality” – informs the interpretive scheme in use (Rogers 1983: 141). By attacking the most robust common-sense and scientific convictions concerning the nature of nations, postmodernism helps us achieve this. But appreciating its refreshing destructive force does not entail accepting its positive propositions. Brubaker’s radical solution does not save us from the specter haunting folk postmodernism: it is still empirically ungrounded and brings further serious methodological problems.

## 5. Sources

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As we have seen, the paths that were supposed to lead us out of the discipline’s theoretical chaos do not seem promising. Positivists and normative theorists avoid the great questions; postmodernists do not give great answers. I hypothesize that today’s most prevalent – i.e., postmodern – solutions to the crisis are flawed, because they are grounded in an inadequate recognition of the sources of the crisis. According to postmodernism, the root of all evil in the discipline is the omnipresent inclination to reify. Once we get rid of it, the crisis will pass. But is this diagnosis accurate? Although postmodernism is free of reifications, it does not seem that we have jumped out of the crisis to a kingdom of scientific accuracy.

As I tried to show, the reifying inclination of modern theorizing is not out of necessity wrong, and the processual view is not necessarily right. We have to conduct empirical research to know which is the case. Thus, the most serious problem of nationalism studies is not theoretical claims, but a dearth of rigorous empirical work that puts these claims to the test.

If this is so, postmodernism only exacerbates this critical situation in nationalism studies, for it seeks a way out of the theoretical chaos on theoretical grounds only. As such, it remains just as arbitrary as all rival views, following the familiar recipe: “Invent theory, manufacture facts.” In consequence, it petrifies the situation, in which arbitrary cases support arbitrary theories. Nations do not exist? We give examples of national conversions, blurred national boundaries, and ambiguous identities. Nations in antiquity? Here: The Greeks. Nations in the Middle Ages? Consider Britain. And so on and so forth. Such an arbitrary strategy of constructing and supporting theories seems to be the most important source of the crisis in the discipline, yet there are still some other negative phenomena that add to this unsatisfying situation.

First, different theories unconsciously refer simply to different phenomena hidden under the umbrella-term “nation.” Whilst they all speak of nation, they have in mind its different visions. The most customary and popular typologies of theories of nation and nationalism (Oezkirimli 2000, Smith 2001) usually do not take this into account and they divide theories according to the question, “When is the nation?,” judging whether it is ancient (perennialism) or modern (modernism), whether it is both (ethnosymbolism) or none (postmodernism), implicitly assuming that they speak of the same nation (see table B).

*Table B: Standard typology of theories of nation and nationalism*

<p>Primordialism</p> <p>Nations are eternal groups and national identity is a primary identification found in all eras and societies.</p>	<p>Modernism</p> <p>Nations are inherently modern constructs that emerge only when modern state, capitalism, and political elites appear.</p>
<p>Postmodernism</p> <p>Nations do not exist; there is only nationalistic discourse, ideology, cognition, and self-identification.</p>	<p>Ethnosymbolism</p> <p>Nations are modern constructs but have deep, sometimes ancient, roots in pre-existing ethno-religious ties.</p>

Such a principle of division is spurious and misleading, for answers to the question regarding a nation’s birth are directly bound with a more basic question: “What is the nation?” Under closer scrutiny, it turns out that the answers to the latter question given by various theories are arguably different. In a very schematic way, we can say that primordial approaches perceive nations above all as durable groups with objective characteristics (culture, language, religion, and so on) and pay particular attention to their emotional side. Postmodernism, on the contrary, perceives national phenomena as confined to subjective spheres and underscores their cognitive dimension. Ethnosymbolism emphasizes emotions and subjectivity; modernism, for its part, focuses on cognitions and objective characteristics (see Table C.).

*Table C: Typology reframed*

	Cognitions	Emotions
Subjectivity	Postmodernism	Ethnosymbolism
Objective characteristics	Modernism	Primordialism

Although all these theoretical stances claim to describe and explain nation and nationalism *in toto*, they in fact, however, focus on different phenomena. In a more extensive analysis, we should integrate all these aspects into one coherent whole. Nation is not only about cognitions or emotions, not only about subjectivity and objectivity, but about them all.

Second, theories as a rule stop halfway. They usually speak in general terms, forgoing details. But it is these details that make a difference. To say, for instance, that the nation is a product of capitalism is definitely a far too sweeping claim. People do not think that since capitalism has come, it is high time they became nationals; they do not convert to nationality the moment they enter a free market. To gloss over this problem, scholars jump from such a macro-level of analyses to a micro one. From capitalism, state, elites, and so forth, they go on to individual national experiences, giving the impression that there is some sort of relation between them. There is not, however, any attempt to describe and explain in-depth the details of this relation. So we can only agree that there are elites, states, capitalism, and so on, that masses identify with the nation, but any further reaching claims have to be substantiated. This, however, is never done.

Third, the other side of nationalism studies being too general is that they do not analyze the most basic national phenomena and leave out of focus, for instance, the *varieties of national experience*. It is taken for granted that nations are experienced, but this phenomenon is not researched in detail. Let us take two instructive examples from two opposite poles of the theoretical spectrum. Whereas ethnosymbolists, as opposed to modernists, underscore that the nation is not only an abstraction and invention, but also a concrete community, felt, and felt passionately as something very real (Smith 2001: 140), postmodernists maintain that national categories structure and make sense of the flow of experience, turning it into distinct and interpretable objects, attributes, and events

(Brubaker 2002: 38). Yet such claims are put forward without any justification. We cannot simply know beforehand, without detailed empirical researches, that the nation is experienced passionately or that there is a flow of national experience.

Finally, the last seemingly minor point: Theories constructed remain arbitrary, for they rely not only on dubious historical illustrations, but also on the life experiences of their authors. Scholars in principle are unconsciously inclined to define national phenomena in terms of their own biography. Leading for the most part mobile and cosmopolitan lives, they are thus prone to underemphasize the relative fixedness and stability of mass national identifications. There are, it seems, also important regional differences in this regard. In the manner of sociology of knowledge, it is often hypothesized that scholars coming from the United States are more inclined to think of the nation as more fluid in terms of rational choice, whereas the nation is a question of emotional destiny for East Europeans (Walicki 1999).

To recapitulate, the theoretical chaos in the discipline comes from at least five facts. First, theories without rigorous tests remain arbitrary; second, they often explain different things, though they claim to explain the same subject, namely, the nation in its totality; third, they are too general, assuming micro-macro links without showing them in detail; fourth, they overlook the most basic national phenomena; and finally, they are unconsciously driven by scholars' biographical experiences.

## 6. Conclusions

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In this summary, let us turn to this paper's title-question and give some positive answers. So far we have spoken about what was not done in nationalism studies; now I would like to argue what should be done in future. I hope it is clear by now that the progress of the discipline relies on compensating for the deficiencies described above. Scholars should therefore construct theories that consciously address the great questions; their work should be extensive, dealing with national phenomena in all their varieties, integrating emotions, cognitions, both the subjective and objective dimensions into one picture. These studies should be detailed and go into social reality as deeply as possible, linking the macro dimension with micro one; they should take into consideration the most basic national phenomena. Such works should be independent of the academic's subjective experience and, finally and most importantly, their constructed theories should be tested against empirical evidence.

By way of conclusion, I want to accomplish two more tasks: 1) demonstrate a tentative analogy that could guide further the nationalism studies; and 2) suggest the most promising method that could help overcome the above-mentioned deficiencies.

In researching national phenomena, we could definitely profit from the experience of more advanced religious studies, as nationalism is arguably in form, if not in content, closer to religion than any political doctrine. Accordingly, we can point to deep affinities between nations and religions (see also Szacki 1999):

(a) genetic: The origins of nations may be traced back to religious roots;

(b) structural. They both deeply affect human emotions, resort to the similar values, symbols, myths, and traditions, while using analogous ceremonies and paraphernalia;

(c) functional: Nationalism – like religion before – may (de)legitimize the contemporary political order and simultaneously serve as a kind of secular healer of mundane anxieties, satisfying our search for immortality, dignity, and togetherness;

(d) processual: In their development, nations and religions follow similar patterns; processes of religious (de)secularization have their counterparts in the (de)nationalization of states and publics.

Given these manifold similarities between religion and nation, it is striking that nationalism studies have not made use of the scientific achievements offered thus far by the sociology of religion. Specifically, it is amazing we still have to wait for a similar revolution to what William James (1997) and Emile Durkheim (1995) made one hundred years ago in religious studies. Judging from our current perspective, their works appear to be a true turn in so far as they studied religion by means of an empirical examination of *religious experiences* both in their collective (Durkheim) as well as individual variety (James). They definitively departed from earlier purely abstract and speculative considerations (Joas 1998). By the same token, what we now need is to come down from the heaven of general theories to the solid basis of national experience as the basic datum of analysis. Travestying the celebrated Gustave le Bon's (1899: 340) passage, we can say that "experience is the only book that researchers can learn from. Unfortunately the reading of this book has always cost them terribly dear." Of course, scientific neglect of nationalism studies in this regard can easily be compensated. Fortunately, national experience does not need theories to exist; it survives without scholarly description. Much more important than this are practitioners who "feel" the nation and leave future researchers with personal documents witnessing their inner experience.

Among the methods that could make up for the flaws of past research, the most comprehensive one is arguably a monograph. The monographic method can reveal the realm of national experience as well as the varieties of national phenomena most fully; it can show mechanisms translating macro-processes into the micro-processes of socialization, procedures that make, for example, concrete peasants experience Polishness. The method is interdisciplinary, additionally combining synchronic with diachronic perspectives, ethnographic field-work with general sociological considerations; it integrates manifold research techniques: individual and family interviews, focus groups, archival research, experiments, participant and non-participant observation, and so on. This together helps investigate social reality in a way unachievable by any other means. As such, it seems ideal to scrutinize general theoretical claims. Its usefulness in testing bold hypotheses has been decisively proved by many generations of scholars. To name but a few classic examples, James C. Scott (1985) demonstrated in one detailed case study that subordinate classes not only do not have false consciousness, but are also well aware of their exploitation and employ various strategies of resistance; Paul Lazarsfeld (2002) and his collaborators showed in a Mariental monograph that unemployment leads rather to despair and passivity than to revolution; William Whyte (1961), in turn, in his urban ethnography of "Corneville", undermined theories claiming that poor, slum communities

are out of necessity disorganized. Having such a rich and venerable methodological tradition at hand, there is every possibility that analogous monographs would be equally effective in testing theories of nation and nationalism.

So our future investigations should move consecutively from the micro level through more and more general steps to the macro one. On the one hand, we should investigate the process of primary and secondary socialization to the nation; in other words, we should answer the great questions on the individual level: why, when, and how national identification emerges and develops in the concrete social agent. On the other hand, we should research relations between nationalized individuals, nationalizing agents and institutions, national culture, as well as economic and political processes.

Is there, then, anything left to do in nationalism studies? I think so.

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## Notes:

1. Also compare the multitude of divergent opinions offered by medieval historians (Marc Bloch, George Coulton, Sydney Herbert, Johan Huizinga, Dorothy Kirkland) cited by Walker Connor in his illuminating essay "When is a nation?" (1994: 210-226)

2. The following example is most indicative of changes in nationalism studies: Whereas one of the milestones paving the way for postmodern approaches, "The Invention of Tradition" (1983) co-edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, has been much-celebrated and widely-cited, the recent repudiation of its most sweeping claims by Terence Ranger himself (1993) has passed unnoticed. As for postmodern uses of modernist theories see Walicki (1999), who shows how certain motifs of Gellner's theory were accentuated while others ignored, and Smith (2001: 142), who demonstrates similar practices with regard to Anderson's theory.

See, for instance, analyses of national conversions conducted by Antonina Kłoskowska (2001) within the framework of culturalism (=essentialism) or Jerzy Smolicz's investigations (2002) into core values of respective national cultures that foster or hamper cultural assimilation.

*Preferred citation:* Luczewski, Michał. 2005. What Remains for Nationalism Studies? In Freedom, Justice, and Identity, ed. T. Nesbit and J. Steinberg, Vienna: IWM Junior Visiting Fellows' Conference Proceedings, Vol. 18.