

Discussion on the Familiar Contrast Between Civic and Ethnic Nationalism

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Abstract

According to Yack (1996), “I am sceptical about this familiar contrast between civic and ethnic nationalism”. Indeed, as time goes by, there are discrepancies. In this article, I would discuss this frequently employed distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism. Kohn’s theory of the distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism will be analysed. Similar arguments by Alter and Smith are going to be discussed as well. Next Brubaker’s theory of the distinction will be employed to demonstrate that Kohn’s theory might be a distinction for an analytical purpose. Then I will be looking at real circumstances from exclusiveness in civic nation and inclusiveness in ethnic nation and myths and symbols in civic nation and alternative framework.

Key words: Civic nationalism; Ethnic nationalism; Exclusiveness; Inclusiveness; Myths; Symbols

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1. INTRODUCTION

According to McCrone (1998, p.8), there has been many debates about differences between civic nationalism (good) and ethnic nationalism (bad). However, the most applied one is from Kohn’s well-known dichotomy in his *The Ideal of Nationalism* in 1944. It has been argued by him (1945, p.330) that civic nationalism was based on

territory and it was political, whereas ethnic nationalism was based on myths and symbols and kinship. Some other debates were concerning critique of the distinction of civic and ethnic nationalism. For example, Yack (1996, p.105) mentioned, “I am sceptical about this familiar contrast between civic and ethnic nationalism.”

In this article, I would argue that I am dubious about this frequently employed distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism. I will start by putting forward Kohn’s theory of the distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism. Meanwhile, other people’s similar arguments are going to be used such as Alter and Smith. Next Brubaker’s theory of the distinction will be employed to demonstrate that Kohn’s theory might be a distinction for an analytical purpose. Then I will be looking at real circumstances from exclusiveness in civic nation and inclusiveness in ethnic nation and myths and symbols in civic nation and alternative framework. Finally, there is going to be a conclusion to summarize the main points.

2. KOHN’S THEORY OF THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN CIVIC AND ETHNIC NATIONALISM

2.1 Differences Between “Rational Cosmopolitanism” and “Inferiority Complex”

To begin with, it has been pointed out by Kuzio (2010, p.2) that the description of Eastern nationalism and nation-states being inferior to Western nationalism has been embedded deeply in Western politics, academia and news industry. Kohn’s theory of the distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism is a representative of this tradition. The first difference would be between “rational cosmopolitanism” and “inferiority complex”. As the emergence of civic and ethnic nationalism was in different time accordingly. He (1945, p.329) has argued in his *The Ideal of Nationalism* that the rising nationalism in the United Kingdom, France, Netherlands and Switzerland and the United States (ibid., 1956) was mainly about

the fact that these countries were created out of political purposes, as the future national state was built after the rising nationalism. However, nationalism came out later in Central and Eastern Europe and in Asia in a more left-behind position of social and political progress: a current state could not satisfy the increasing nationality; whereas protest resulted in rising nationalism battled against current state order—to meet ethnographic requirement by altering the political border instead of changing it into a people's state (Kohn 1945, p.330). Therefore, it could be argued that Eastern and Western nationalism developed in two different and maybe contrary ways. As Kohn (1945, p.330) put it, Eastern nationalism did not have much confidence and it relied on and disagreed with Western nationalism and it was not built upon social and political foundation. He (ibid., p.330) continued, “its inferiority complex was often compensated by over-emphasis and overconfidence, their own nationalism appearing to nationalist in Germany, Russia, or India as something infinitely deeper than the nationalism of the West, and therefore richer in problems and potentials.” It can be seen from his argument that Kohn put Eastern nationalism in an inferior position which was very dependent upon the Western nationalism. Nevertheless, it has been argued by him (ibid., p.330) that originally Western nationalism was associated with personal liberty and rational cosmopolitan.

2.2 Myths and Symbols

The second major distinction presented by Kohn is concerning myths and symbols. Western nationalism, according to Kohn (1945: p. 330), striving for creating a nation due to political reality, emerged with little emotion for the past; while Eastern nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe was based on past legends and the hopes of the future without connection with the present. It can be argued that this distinction might have something to do with the different time of emergence of nationalism in the West and East. The Eastern nationalism had a first say in cultural in that it had rearwards development in politics and society (Kohn 1945, p.329). According to him (ibid., p.329), “It was at the beginning the dream and hope of scholars and poets, unsupported by public opinion—which did not exist, and which the scholars and poets tried to create—a venture in education and propaganda rather than in policy-shaping and government.” Hence, it might be argued that having myths and symbols differentiate ethnic nationalism from civic nationalism.

2.3 Kinship

Besides, kinship is also another distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism in Kohn's theory. It has been mentioned by Kohn (1945, p.331) that social and political factors resulted in a nationality which laid the foundation of Western nationalism; there was no rational societal perception but innate fact of a community in German nationalism. This community was not built on people's free will or legal bond, ties based on blood and kinship.

2.4 Other Similar Thoughts

In addition, there are some other scholars sharing similar ideas with Kohn about the distinction between ethnic and civic nationalism. According to Smith (1991, p.12), ancient territory, organizations and legislation, individuals sharing equal rights and shared sense of value gave birth to civic or Western nationalism, while in his idea of ethnic or Eastern nationalism which founded on blood. Individuals in ethnic nation regarded this blood-based nation as imagined big family and native cultures including languages and traditions play important roles in ethnic nation (ibid., p.12). Similarly, Ignatieff (1993, pp.6-7,9) argued that civic nation was a “community of equal, rights-bearing citizens, united in patriotic attachment to a shared set of political practices and values”. However, he (1993, pp.6-7) contended that German national solidarity originated from “people's pre-existing ethnic characteristics: their language, religion, customs, and traditions” instead of “the cold contrivance of shared rights”.

3. OVERLAPPING CHARACTERISTICS OF CIVIC NATIONALISM AND ETHNIC NATIONALISM

Although Kohn's theory and others' similar theory about the distinction seems convincing, I would doubt that it might be an idealized theory and it might be used solely for analytical purpose. It is claimed that the characteristics of civic nationalism and ethnic nationalism may overlap in each other. Usually, France has been seen as a typical civic nation, while Germany is regarded as a typical ethnic nation. It has been argued by Brubaker (1992, p.13) that “French and German understandings of nationhood have not been fixed and immutable. They have been more fluid, plastic, and internally contested than I have suggested.” It can be seen that although both of them dealt with the same topic about the distinction between ethnic and civic nationalism Brubaker has more different and flexible ideas regarding to this. Compared to Brubaker's theory, Kohn's theory might look more absolute and ideal because once a nation is exclusive to non-citizen it will be categorized in ethnic nation automatically. However, according to Kuzio (2010, p.6), Kohn ignored embodiment of democracy and civic nationalism in the East. So the contrast of the civic and ethnic nationalism might not be that sharp.

Meanwhile, it is claimed that Kohn's definition of Western nation may include ethnic countries in the West region. As Kuzio (ibid., p.6) pointed out that Ireland, Greece, Spain, Germany, and Belgium geographically belonged to the Western Europe region but their national characteristics might be involved with Kohn's theory of Eastern nationalism characteristics. Thus, he might contradict his own argument and his distinction between Western nationalism and Eastern nationalism probably is not very valid.

Beside Brubaker, many other scholars challenged the familiar distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism. For example, according to Smith (1991, p.13), “every nationalism contains civic and ethnic elements in varying degrees and different forms. Sometimes civic and territorial elements predominate; at other times it is the ethnic and vernacular components that are emphasized”. Calhoun (1997, p.89) also argued that the international discourse of nationalism containing ethnic assertion and “civic projects of popular political participation” influenced France, Germany and the rest of West and Eastern Europe. It has been claimed by Nieguth (1999) that such dichotomy should be removed as it regarded kinship, land, tradition as systematic different foundation for national citizenship.

Even Kohn (1945, p.329) himself pointed out that nation’s characters were not decided previously in biological way and they changed gradually as time went by; they resulted from social and intellectual development and from numerous gradual change of how people behaved and reacted. If characters of one nation can be changed, it might not maintain the differences that it originally had from other nations. This applies to Kohn’s theory of the distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism, as the contrast may be blurred.

In summary, characters of either civic or ethnic nationalism from Kohn’s theory might be overlapped, as these are immutable and interchangeable. As Brubaker does not share the exact idea with Kohn on the distinction and his idea seems more realistic and rational, it makes Kohn’s theory ideal. Additionally, Kohn concluded “civic west” as civic nationalism, while some western countries like Germany may belong to ethnic national according to theory. Therefore, Kohn’s theory may not be that convincing.

4. DISTINCTION IN PRACTICE

It has been argued by McCrone (1988, p.7), “while the analytical value of the civic/ethnic distinction has been put to good use by both Gellner and Brubaker, it does lend itself to ethnocentric caricature—why can’t they be more like us? It is also a distinction which can be criticised on analytical grounds. Is it, for example, possible to maintain such a distinction in practice?” However, in practice, it is claimed that the most employed distinction might not be matched. This will be manifested in three aspects in practice which are exclusiveness, myths and symbols, and alternative framework.

From exclusiveness perspective, it is claimed that civic nation may be exclusive to non-citizens, whereas ethnic nation is probably not exclusive to non-citizens. It could be argued by Lecours (2000, p.153) that an individual definition connected with civic nationalism and political nation neglected the standard of sharing same language, religion and ethnicity and pursue the individual freedom. However, there is an incident which contradicts the familiar character of civic nation. According to Quinn

(2016) put it: “Photographs have emerged of armed French police confronting a woman on a beach and making her remove some of her clothing as part of a controversial ban on the burkini. Authorities in several French towns have been implemented bans on the burkini, which covers the body and head, citing concerns about religious clothing in the wake of recent terrorist killings in the country.” According to Kohn (1945), France was categorized as political and civic nation. As previously Lecours (2000, p.153) mentioned, civic nation did not require its people to share the same religion. Nonetheless, what French policemen did was not accorded with the character of civic nationalism which is inclusive to non-citizen. It seems that they share ethnic nationalism feature which is more about kinship and blood.

4.1 Ethnocentrism in Civic Nation France

Additionally, Yack (1996, pp.195-6) has made a good and reasonable point here: “The civic/ethnic dichotomy parallels a series of other contrasts that should set off alarm bells: not only Western/ Eastern, but rational/ emotive, voluntary/inherited, good/bad, ours/theirs! Designed to protect us from the dangers of ethnocentric politics, the civic/ethnic distinction itself reflects a considerable dose of ethnocentrism ...” Ethnocentrism was reflected in the French policemen’s behaviour, as they did not regard her scarf as “an outfit respecting good morals and secularism (Quinn, 2016)”. However, if a civic nation is open, this incident disobeyed their openness.

Another example of this civic nation’s not being very civic primarily is from Brubaker’s *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (1992, pp.91-92):

“The Civil Code defined persons born in France of foreign parents as potential citizens, and authorized them to claim French citizenship at majority. But few availed themselves of this right. Most of those concerned preferred to live in France as foreign citizens, thereby escaping military service. In response to this perceived anomaly, the extension of *jus soli* was first proposed in 1831, in the form of an amendment attached to a law on military recruitment. The amendment would have declared French all persons born in France of long-domiciled foreign parents. That this was proposed thirty-five years before the size of the army emerged as an issue and even longer before demographic stagnation was widely recognized as a problem clearly shows that the impulse to extend *jus soli*—in the mid-nineteenth century, at least—did not spring from military or demographic interest.”

Although France is a civic country, it can be seen that it extended *jus soli* mostly because they wanted to secure the operation of military service, and to further secure its military building instead of really showing its inclusiveness. If so, inclusiveness might not be the uniqueness of civic nationalism.

In addition, it has been mentioned by Brubaker (1992, p.87) that the primary Revolutionary codification of member for state kept at the same track with ancient regime jurisprudence in one respect. He (ibid) added that in order to become a French a civic oath was required to take for

people who have French parents and were born outside the country and people who are the offspring of living abroad protestants. He (ibid., p.87) continued that foreigners were also asked to take a civic oath after 5-year residence in France. It can be argued by him (ibid) that the demand of taking a civic oath showed “a newly voluntaristic understanding of membership”. However, the civic oath stayed insignificant in deciding citizenship regardless of subjective highlight on voluntary fidelity (Brubaker, 1992, p.87). Then he (ibid., p.87) said that people would acquire French citizenship automatically without taking a civic oath if they were born in France and had French parents. While blood and kinship has been defined as the character of ethnic nationalism, from this French immigration regulation it can be seen that it includes ethnic nationalism character. It automatically includes French ethnicity.

4.2 Civic Nation Traits in Ethnic Nation Germany

While Germany has been regarded as a typical example of ethnic nation, it is contended that it is inclusive to non-German citizen. According to Agence France-Presse (2015):

Germany registered 964,574 new asylum seekers in the first 11 months of the year, putting Europe’s top economy on track for a million arrivals in 2015, official figures have shown. Some 206,101 migrants entered the country in November alone, a new monthly record, up from a previous high of 181,166 in October, according to the interior ministry. The number of arrivals for the year so far was more than four times the total for all of 2014 with Germany now the top European destination for people fleeing conflict, repression and misery in the Middle East, Asia and Africa.

It can be argued by Brubaker (1992, p.113) that compared to Germany France had much more tolerance and assimilationist in existing perception of nationhood. Consequently, taking citizenship automatically based on *jus soli* went on in France, whereas in Germany *jus sanguinis* still prevailed. Nonetheless in reality, Germany has received a large number of refugees and gave them status recognition. The conception of *jus sanguinis* seems not prevailing that much in Germany now but *jus soli* can be seen. Thus, this weakens the familiar contrast of civic and ethnic nationalism.

4.3 Ethnic Traits in Civic Nation the United Kingdom

There is another example from the United Kingdom. It is argued that civic nation also can share ethnic nationalism character. According to Nikolas (1999, p.16), individuals have freedom to choose citizenship which decides their nationalism in civic nationalism. Britain and France are two representative countries where citizenship decides nationality along the course of history, while it had been illustrated by a recent example that their conduct did not match with the features of civic nationalism because they started to practice ethnic nationalism principles (Nikolas, 1999, p.16). She (ibid., p.16) took Britain as an example

saying individuals needed to provide relevant documents to demonstrate they have kind of kinship connection with the United Kingdom then this individual can be granted a British passport. She (ibid., p.16) concluded that this attached importance to kinship.

A more detailed example was given by her (ibid): “recently a young woman seeking a British passport in the above mentioned manner was refused because she was adopted and so her grandparents were not her biological grandparents, thus she had no real genealogical ties to Britain and hence no claim to a passport.” *Jus soli* could not be found here, *jus sanguinis* was shown instead. If the United Kingdom’s nationalism is based on territory, how could it not allow this adopted young woman not to have a British passport?

Apart from whether being exclusive or inclusive to non-state members, it is contended that myths and symbols appeared both in civic and ethnic nationalism in practice as well. Myths and symbols, according to Anderson (1991, pp.11-12), have been utilized in ethnic and civic nation. The Council of Europe (1996) claimed as well that history had been employed to satisfy rulers’ need in systems of politics and historical facts and shielding of nice people and villain were forced on people’s mind.

It has been mentioned by Kuzio (2010, p.11) that intellectuals, poets and writers contributed to building English nationalism in the Tudor and Elizabethan era based on cultural nationalism. Fogarty (2009, p.106) also argued that similar to other types of nationalism, customs and symbols helped to convey and update civic nationalism. “In America’s earlier years, these symbols tented to focus on the myths and biographies of great exemplars of American Virtue. Fabulously embellished Christopher Columbus, Patrick Henry, Capt. John Smith, and George Washington became the national mythology. The cherry tree, the discovery of America, and the phrase ‘Give me liberty or give me death’ all made up the historical caricature of America that provided some sense of shared heritage, and in some ways they still do”, according to Fogarty (ibid., p.106). It can be seen that symbols and myths also exist in civic nationalism as the United States belongs to the Kohn’s (1945) “civic west”. This weakens the argument about familiar contrast of civic and ethnic nationalism.

5. ALTERNATIVE FRAMEWORK

The final aspect is alternative framework. It is believed that ethnic nation can be evolved into civic nation. It has believed by Kuzio (2010, p.16), “Kohn’s division of nationalism traces its positive, inclusive qualities retrospectively back to the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries. He (ibid., 16) added that nonetheless the character of civic nation did not match with civic nation’s primary blueprint. For example, one thousand slaves used

to be under Thomas Jefferson, the American President, and they were regarded as defective forever to be entitled to right (Smith, 1997, p.105). According to Kuzio (2010, pp.16-17), "Slavery existed until the 1860s in the USA and the slave trade helped to build up the wealth of Western states. Indeed, it was only Switzerland of Kohn's five Western examples that did not profit from slavery."

According to Kuzio (2010, p.17), transforming from ethnic nation to civic nation happened around the West. The transformation was "the norm, not the exception." (ibid., p.17) He (ibid., p.17) believed, "only from the 1960s can we define Western states as civic, while the majority of the East became civic only three decades later in the 1990s. Although democratic consolidation and civic state building is far from consolidated in the East, in contrast to the West, the East is encouraged by international organizations to continue to evolve along civic lines. That Western civic states are still in a process of evolution and are not perfect civic states can be seen in the numerous problems that continue to bedevil them." Take America and Australia as an example, they could not be defined as "civic" nations based on current definition of "civic" nation before 1960s, as there was racial segregation in these two countries (Kuzio 2010, p.17).

In summary of the third part, examples are used to further examine that temporary distinction of civic and ethnic nation may be not that sharp in terms of whether being exclusiveness or inclusiveness, whether these two kinds of nationalism having myths and symbols, and alternative framework. After discussion, it can be seen that civic nation may not be that inclusive and open anymore, whereas ethnic nation might be open and not that exclusive anymore. Although there are symbols and myths in ethnic nationalism, civic nationalism is the same. Actually not all civic nations were originally "civic", they also shared some features of temporary "ethnic" nationalism.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I am also dubious about the familiar contrast between ethnic and civic nationalism. It is argued that the temporary distinction may be not that different. According to Kohn's (1945, p.330) theory about the distinction between ethnic and civic nationalism, there are three pairs of contrast: "political reality" and "myths of the past", "rational cosmopolitanism" and "inferiority complex", and kinship. There are other scholars who also share similar ideas about the distinction: Smith (1991) and Ignatieff (1993). However, Brubaker (1992, p.13) did not share similar idea with Kohn (1945), Smith (1999) or Ignatieff (1993) by showing "French and German understandings of nationhood have not been fixed and immutable". Although both of them look at the same subject, their ideas are not the same: Kohn's (1945) theory seems to be more absolute and ideal, while Brubaker's (1992) idea looks more flexible and

reasonable. It is not hard to see that Kohn's theory (1945) may be used only for analytical purposes. However, when looking into realities, Brubaker's (1992) idea may be more applicable. In this article, three perspectives which are exclusiveness, myths and symbols and alternative framework as well as real world examples are utilized to challenge the temporary distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism. It turns out that civic nationalism may share many features with ethnic nationalism: civic nations are exclusive and have myths and symbols in their current and historic life and they might start as an ethnic nation as well because there was racial segregation in the civic nations as well. However, ethnic nation may accept non-kinship members and have temporary civic features in temporary distinction.

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