The Development of Nationalism and Citizenship

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The study of nationalism and citizenship is a fairly recent phenomenon in comparative historical sociology, a field that largely took for granted the territorial nation-state as the overarching framework of its main object of study—the evolution of modern societies. For understandable methodological reasons, most historical sociologists also treated the nation-state as the main analytical unit of comparison in macro-historical studies, even as the sociological reality this term purported to connote was not fully applicable even to West European societies prior to the 19th century, let alone to patrimonial empires of the Russian, Chinese, or Ottoman types. In contrast to these fundamentally pre-modern political structures that based their legitimacy claims on religiously sanctified autocratic rule (loyalty to “throne and altar”), nation-states derived legitimacy from the notion that the state represented a “sovereign nation”, and not a predominant “ethnic group” as is often wrongly argued. This is because the term “nation” was, from its inception, closely intertwined with claims to political representation on the part of a variety of elites and social groups (e.g., the Third Estate in France) who claimed to embody a “sovereign people” in opposition to monarchical and/or imperial rule (e.g., the French Revolution, the early American republic). The histories of the nation-state, nationalism, and citizenship are thus intimately related, even if the concept of citizenship can claim a more ancient genealogy in the intellectual heritage of the Greek polis, the Roman res publica, and Renaissance city-states.

For a variety of intellectual reasons, the problematic of nationalism and citizenship remained on the margins of interest in comparative historical sociology. For Marxists and modernization theorists, nations and nationalism were derivative phenomena that could be explained by reference to more fundamental processes in the “economic base” or accounted for by the functional imperatives of modern industrial societies, while citizenship was conceived either as a constitutive element of “formal bourgeois rights” or a “universal status” that met the systemic needs of differentiated societies at higher stages of social evolution. Theorists of social revolutions, a burgeoning field in comparative-historical sociology from the 1960s to the 1990s, largely privileged factors like population growth, agrarian social relations, class conflict, elite splits and counter-elite mobilization, the fiscal crisis of the state, and geopolitical competition in explaining the causes of social revolutions, while relegating culture and ideology to the status of auxiliary factors. Finally, theorists of state autonomy and state development who could have been expected to lay greater emphasis on nationalism and citizenship as the “cultural glue” linking state institutions to diverse group interests in civil society, typically favored an “institutional statism” that left little room for the independent role of political culture or ideas in explaining political change. As a result, with some notable exceptions, theories of nationalism and citizenship developed on the margins of comparative-historical sociology or outside of the field altogether.

Nevertheless, under the impact of political developments (the transitions to democracy and dissolution of multinational states in the former communist world; the renewal of civil society discourse; the revival of peripheral nationalism in the West; “transnational” and “multicultural” citizenship; immigration) and independent intellectual trends (the “cultural” and “historic” turns in the social sciences; political theorists’ emphasis on the nation as communal framework for the realization of liberal rights), comparative-historical sociologists have taken up the challenge, making notable contributions to the field. The purpose of the following overview is to place the most influential theories of nationalism and citizenship in the broader context of the history of sociological thought, while recognizing that some of the key sociological arguments in the field were also developed by anthropologists, political scientists, and historians.

Nations, Nationalism and Citizenship in Classical Sociology

Max Weber
Among the sociological classics, Weber (1978) made the most significant contribution to the
study of nationalism and citizenship. Weber's writings on the topic have to be understood in the historical context of the rise of imperialism and mass politics, and his intellectual preoccupations with the rise of the autonomous Western city.

Weber conceptualized the nation as a territorially based status group that cohered on the basis of shared memoirs and defining political experiences. Such experiences often overrode objective markers of status-differentiation like ethnicity (the "subjective belief in common descent"), as in the case of German-speaking Alsatians whose loyalty to France was based on their attachment to the legacy of a revolutionary regime that abolished feudalism. Likewise, Switzerland demonstrated that national solidarity did not necessarily depend on a myth of common origin or "objective" markers of status differentiation (race, religion, language). In both cases, shared memories and defining political experiences were essential to forging the nation as a status-based "community of political destiny" that strove for territorial political power on the basis of a shared culture.

Secondly, the appeal of nationalism had to be understood in terms of the unprecedented fusion of culture and politics in the modern world. In the age of mass politics, state legitimacy increasingly depended on nationalist appeals, while the nation needed the state to protect its unique culture. The fusion of the status aspirations of intellectual strata as the bearers of national culture with the Realpolitik interests of political elites greatly increased the mobilization potential of nationalism as exemplified in the military superiority of nation-states over empires during World War I. The sacralization of the state as the guarantor of the survival of national culture helped explain the existential "pathos of the nation", ultimately reflected in the expectation that the individual "face death in the group interest" (Weber 1978, vol. 2, 903).

Thirdly, the fusion of "national pathos" with "national honor" accounted for nationalism's broad emotional appeal. The dissolution of in-group status differences through shared feelings of national pride and superiority claims vis-à-vis out-groups held a strong emotional appeal for the masses, as it enhanced their subjectively felt status honor. As a result, nationalism could cut across class lines in defiance of socialist expectations.

Curiously, Weber never related his writings on the nation to his sociology of the Western city, whose differentia specifica resided in its character as a self-governing association of citizens who had sworn an oath of loyalty to laws of their own making and allowed willing outsiders to freely join the urban community as individuals. The dissolution of kinship, tribal, and magical ties through the bond of universal religion and the rise of non-kinship based military confraternities decisively differentiated the medieval Western city from its "Oriental" counterparts, which remained internally segregated by tribal affiliations and externally dependent on patrimonial overlords. The rise of the city as the main locus of the monetary commercial economy enhanced social mobility through economic acquisition, internally dissolving feudal bonds and externally emancipating the "burghers" from seigniorial domination. Thus, the roots of democracy were to be found in the historically unique development of the ancient polis and the medieval commune. Though Weber never explored the ways in which the legacy of ancient and medieval citizenship was transposed onto the national state, subsequent scholarship demonstrated that his intuition was promising: as they travelled north, the political ideas developed in Italy's Renaissance city-states decisively shaped the "Atlantic republican tradition" (Pocock 1975).

**Emile Durkheim**

In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* Durkheim noted the similarity between the collective effervescence of religious rituals and revolutionary-patriotic festivals: in the Jacobin phase of the French Revolution, Fatherland, Liberty, and Reason became the core values of a secular religion whose object of worship was society itself. For Durkheim, this self-worship of society was another confirmation of his theory of religion: the connection with nationalism as a "secular faith" remained unexplored in his work. However, Durkheim's emphasis on the transformative role of the division of labor in the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity influenced functionalist theories of nationalism. Also, as a committed secular republican, Durkheim extolled the role of civic patriotism in "moral education": only where the citizens saw the state "from an affective angle" could we speak of true nations. During World War I, Durkheim favorably contrasted this ideal, which he saw as compatible with international cooperation, to expansionist German nationalism, whose excessive "statism" he interpreted as a sign of collective anomie (Giddens 1986).