DEBATES
Supra-Ethnic Nationalism: The case of Eritrea

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Introduction

Nationalism is our epoch's powerful force for mobilising human beings. The urge to form one's own nation represented by its own sovereign state has been enough reason for people to endure unimaginable sufferings. That people are ready to die for their nation is a conundrum that scholars still yet have not found satisfactory answer, yet it shows its power. Certainly nationalist sentiment and the quest for creating one's own nation have been one of the main driving force in shaping human history. As Gellner (1983) argues, nationalism invents nations not the other way round. The objective of this article is to investigate whether or not poly-ethnicity constitutes a constraint to the formation of nations and nationalism. It is my contention Eritrea represents the model of a civic nation.

Eritrea: An Empirical Overview

Concerning the definition of the concept of nation we have two common understandings. One is the mundane popular understanding where all independent states are considered as nations. The other rests on a strict technical definition. According to the latter certain specific characteristics should be fulfilled in order for a group of people to be considered as a nation. The criteria are quite often grounded on the epistemological and ontological development of the West. Hence, societies outside this view are considered anything but nations. Another point, which needs to be stressed, is that there is no commonly accepted definition on which scholars of nationalism can lean. To the contrary, the concept of the nation is characterised by fluidity and malleability giving rise to confusion.

The prevalence of multi-ethnic groups in a socially recognised and confined territory means the existence of two levels of identities - subnational (ethnic) and national (civic). While the first refers to a particularistic cultural identity, the latter involves an overarching supra-ethnic, civic, national identity. I will discuss these two levels of national identity - duality of identity - by reference to the Eritrean national setting, which by implication is also germane to all polyethnic societies.

Since its territorial genesis Eritrea has incorporated nine ethno-linguistic groups which pay allegiance to their territorially based civic identity. Yet they also pay due attention to their ethno-linguistic affiliation and belonging. Therefore, the basis of nationhood in the Eritrean setting is civic. Before discussing this civic basis of Eritrean nationhood I will discuss the ethno-linguistic element.

Ethno-linguistic Diversity

The debate on the primordialist-modernist perspective, in relation to Eritrea, is intended to serve instead of its either/or bifurcation, in a complementarity relation, to describe the different levels of collective identities. Therefore, it is interpreted in a manner that the primordialist premise serves to analyse the sub-national/ethnic level of identity, while the modernist premise serves to analyse the national/civic level of identity. The modernity view agrees with the colonialist view. Accordingly, it serves to explain the transformation process under colonialism and the resultant Eritrean nationalism. It is contended that ethno-linguistic diversity does not constitute an impediment in the formation of nationhood.

I have elsewhere shown how colonialism brought together the various communities of Eritrea, which had their separate primordially based collective identities (Bereketeab 2000). As the result of colonial rule, thus, a territorially based polyethnic corporate identity that transcended the primordial based identity emerged. The development, however, is characterised by the coexistence of primordial identities and modern identity. In other words, the sub-national identities exist side by side with the national. In general, an identity based on civic/modernist premises is grounded on territorial identification, which does not negate the primordialist features.

It is in this sense that the notion of complementarity would be useful for Eritrea, that is, in describing the relationship between the various ethno-linguistic groups. Unlike the notion of dichotomisation, which rests on the dimension of exclusion of an interethnic relation, the notion of complementarity is founded on the principle of mutual recognition and accommodation. Deriving from this theoretical conceptualisation we will examine the various ethno-linguistic groups in Eritrea.

In general we are able to identify two categories of conceptualisations: a) a bipolar, which sees the society as divided into two blocs; b) the multi-polar, which views the nine ethno-linguistic groups as exclusive entities with nothing in common. Both conceptualisations fail to reflect the reality adequately. Indeed, they lead to gross misrepresentation and distortion.

In terms of the bipolar view, the usual socio-cultural terms used in analysing the social and cultural composition of the Eritrean society are the 'highlanders' and the 'lowlanders' (*Kebessa* and *Metahit*), or the 'Christians' and 'Moslems'. This is a dichotomisation of the whole Eritrean society, as if by an intentional social engineering the society is mechanically bisected into twins. It is not to be denied that to a certain degree these categorisations are tenable. But they conceal some significant characteristics. For instance, if we take the category of *Metahitawian* (lowlanders), the various ethno-linguistic groups are put into one bloc on the ground of their faith with no consideration of the profound ethnic and linguistic elements which differentiate them. Moreover, groups of non-Moslems are also coerced in the category. Similarly if we take the *Kebesawian* (highlanders) we will discover that there are other non-Christian and non-Tigrinya speaking communities.

The usage of these terms quite often reflects the politicised nature of the categorisation, the roots of which can be traced to the period of British rule. Basically, the division embodies a geographical distinction, but it also coincides with socio-economic modes and religious differences. Since the era of parties, in the aftermath of the demise of Italian colonial rule, these terms have been in operation charged with political values. The British used it as the underpinning for their conviction of the non-viability of Eritrea as an independent state. Further, the occasional instrumentalist manipulation by various intellectual and political actors for political power

purposes in the liberation movement reinforced its political dimension. The latter phenomenon increased in magnitude after independence. The power relation expression of ethnic and religious differentials has taken bizarre forms with extremist ideas coming from individuals and groups - the latest one being the description of the Tigrinya ethno-linguistic group as 'Tigrean Eritreans'.
On one hand, we have this dichotomisation approach, on the other hand, a stark tendency is manifesed to treat each and every ethno-linguistic group as an exclusive entity - the multi-polarity view. No doubt, in a general terms, we are able to identify nine ethno-linguistic groups based upon the three fundamental criteria, notably, linguistics, ethnicity, territoriality. Nine languages, Tigrinya, Tigre, Saho, Nara, Kunama, Hidareb, Bilen, Afar, and Arabic are spoken. Nevertheless, in addition to the close relationship of genealogy between some of the languages (Tigrinya-Tigre, Saho-Afar, Kunama-Nara), many people have a working knowledge of the larger languages like Tigre and Tigrinya. Moreover there are some ethno-linguistic groups which use other languages as their own. The criterion of ethnicity or ethno-linguistics, thus, is not a sacred cow that is pure and fixed. To the contrary it is characterised by fluidity and flexibility. There is some primarily oral, but also documented evidence, that shows a cross-ethnic and cross-linguistic hybrid. This has taken the form amongst other things, of individuals or groups (family) crossing geographical boundaries and starting to live in an alien environment. With the passage of time they begin to inherit the language, culture, value, norms and belief-systems of the group(s) of the geo-ethno-linguistic space to which they moved. After some generations the group sheds all its original anthropological features and is entirely assimilated in the new milieu. What seems to remain or what it retains from its past is memory that has been passed from parents to their offsprings, in the form of oral narratives and rituals. This could be witnessed in the celebration of certain symbols and rituals - like Moslems observing Christian holidays or vice versa.
In the Beni Amer region, for instance, we find clans or tribes who claim to be or identify themselves as *Kebilet Hamasien* (meaning the tribe of Hamasien - which originated from Hamasien). We have also Ad Bijel (which means Adi Bidel in Tigrinya), indicating that these groups have originated from the village of Adi Bidel in Hamasien. Another group is the Deki Shihay (sons of Shihay - from the Saho ethno-linguistic group) (Pollera 1935: 44). A corroboration of this comes from Michael Hasama's book *The History of Eritrea* (1986) where it is claimed that all the ethno-linguistic groups of Eritrea are interconnected by blood and origin. The author maintains that the various ethno-linguistic groups not long ago originated from some common area or families. As an evidence of this he gives a detailed account of the names of many clans, families, and villages, showing a common origin. In addition to this, the communities' belief of presumed descent and various archaeological remains further testify to the view that the Eritrean society, contrary to the multi-polarity view, is mixed.
The relationality of identity is clearly displayed in the fact that it manifests cluster of properties among which are the transcendance of reigious and ethnic boundaries. Besides a common religion (perhaps because of the common religion) which transcends the formal or informal ethnic frontier, two groups ethnically considered to be different manifest akin cultural traits or vice versa. As an illustration we can mention the closeness of the Blin Moslems to the culture of the Tigre speakers, while the Christian Blin are closer to the Christian Tigrinya culture, the same ethnic group but which, because of religious differences, manifests a diverse culture. Another example is the closeness of the Nara and the Beni Amer, a case of ethnic difference but cultural similarity. These examples concerning linguistic and cultural similarity and interaction between the various ethno-linguistic groups, are clear indications of the prevalence of the 'field of complimentarity', a field

where there is a binding space in which ethno-lingistic groups interact and process their relations. Nevertheless, regarding for instance, habitat or territoriality, in a very general aspect, we find a relative consistency, notwithstanding the emigration of certain individuals or groups in search of job, farm land, grazing areas, etc. That is the different regions, lately known as provinces, are predominantly inhabited by the original indigenous ethno-linguistic group, or at least assumed to, thereby preserving the relative homogeniety of territorial ethno-linguistic nature. This excludes urban centres, which more or less, particularly since the beginning of European colonial era, have become an ethno-linguistic neutral habitat, in turn contributing to social integration of the society as a whole. During the armed struggle for liberation the blending of ethno-linguistic groups even in the rural areas increased considerably. This was due to the fact that some regions were safer from the military and security reach of Ethiopian forces, and people were compelled to seek refuge in regions which are conventionally viewed as not their natural habitat - thereby giving rise to the emergence of a mixed habitat. In spite of this conflation, however, the identification of a specific region with a specific ethno-linguistic group and the communities affiliation is still strong. From this we could safely conclude that the tendency to present the Eritrean society in the fashion of mechanical aggregation of purely isolated ethno-linguistic groups, in the form of bipolarisation, on the one hand, or in the manner of multifocal ethno-linguistic centres which have few things in common, on the other, fails to capture the reality.

Nationalist discourse and ideology invariably attempts to minimise difference. Eritrean nationalist political rhetoric during the liberation struggle presented the cleavages related to the ethno-linguistic discrepancy as vestiges of the colonial divide and rule artefact. The contradictions that invoke their foundation from the primordial aspects were perceived as an artificial magnification perpetrated by successive alien powers to protect their own interests (Sherman 1980: 67). This interpretation is only conditionally valid - that is if it means that the perpetrators of alien rule manipulated and exploited the socio-cultural content to the benefit of their own vested interest. Otherwise the multiplicity of the social composition of the society is there.

It is widely believed that colonialism generated a transcending identity based on the common historical experience of colonialism. Scholars of colonialism emphasise the role of territorialisation in the development of a consciousness of belonging to a commonly inhabited territory. Referring to Indonesia, Benedict Anderson, for instance, describes the effect of colonialism as follows:

> From all over the vast colony…from different, perhaps once hostile, villages in primary schools; from different ethnolinguistic groups in middle-school; and from every part of the realm in the tertiary institutions of the capital…they know that from wherever they had come they still had read the same books and done the same sums… To put it another way, their common experience, and the amiably competitive comradeship of the classroom, gave the maps of the colony which they studied… a territory specific imagined reality which was every day confirmed by the accents and physiognomies of their classmates (Anderson 1991: 121-22).

It is possible to relate Anderson's description to the situation in Eritrea where the various ethno-linguistic groups were brought together and subsequently were able to develop a transcending common identity. After the legal emergence of Eritrea's territoriality in 1890 the different ethno-linguistic groups were amalgamated to constitute a society by the same process and the same political forces as those described by Anderson in the situation of Indonesia. They intermingled and interacted in one or another way, in various spheres of social life at school, in the market place, in the workplace, in the Mosque, in the Church, in the bureaucracy, in the army and the

police force; in death and in life, shared happiness and sorrow in the NLM: matters that consequently enriched their common history, common memory, identity and destiny. All this is internalised, objectified and externalised to form a dialectical part of the repertoire of the national social psychology expressed in the way everyone describes themselves as an Eritrean.

Furthe, this process was enhanced by the national liberation struggle. The NLM played an important role in the integration of the various ethno-linguistic groups. Elsewhere, using the metaphor of the field as a melting-pot (Bereketeab 2000) I have tried to describe the role the NLM played in the integration of the society. There are no statistical data which show the quantitative participation of the various ethno-linguistic groups. Thus it is difficult to provide an accurate number. However, one thing is clear that the participation of the various ethno-linguistic groups varied in degree and intensity. The participation of some groups was relatively more than others, and some groups started to participate earlier than others. The case of two groups can be raised here - the Kunama and the Afar. The participation of the former was marginal, whereas in the case of the latter they were among the early participants although there had also existed an aspiration for a united Afar nation.

From a theoretical frame of analysis, and viewed from the conception of cultural and political community dimensions, the various ethno-linguistic groups can be categorised by the cultural category. Cultural communities, in the literature of nation formation, are perceived as non-nations (Smith 1986). They should, according to the proponents of this proposition, be transformed into political communities if they are to be considered as nations. Their location in the hierarchically structured duality of identity is therefore in the ethnic sub-national level.

A point of great significance for our aim is that the various ethno-linguistic groups undertook the struggle for national independence on the premise of a common overriding civic identity. They shared not only extreme adverse conditions, but also acted collectively to make their common civic history - a history that laid down a foundation for the emerging overarching civic identity.

Eritrea: A Civic Nation

Two social forces - European colonialism(1890-1991) and the national liberation movement (1961-1991) - acted upon the common social history and the consequent national identity of Eritreans. This identity is by necessity of a multi-ethnic nature. The compound term multi-ethnic/polyethnic is used to illustrate that the nation is composed of two or more ethnic groups. Moreover the designation multi-ethnic political nation (Krejci and Velimsky 1981: 87) is used to distinguish the difference between what is sometimes called the cultural nation or uni-ethnic nation from the political or even sometimes the territorial nation (Smith 1986, 1991). The former refers to the homogeneity of language, religion, ethnicity, tradition, whilst the later refers to the heterogeneity of those characteristics and to the political foundation of national identity. In the discourse of nation formation these two perceptions are discerned as the ethnic and the civic perceptions respectively.

In the case of Eritrea, throughout the history of the Ethio-Eritrean conflict, we had two dominant paradigms concerning the existence of Eritrean nationhood and nationalism. These were on the one hand that of rejection and on the other that of idealisation. Further, there are those who approached the question of Eritrean nationalism from the view point that it was Ethiopia's apparent weakening of the Eritrean economy, suppressing its culture and the subsequent political suppression of Eritreans by Ethiopian regimes, which united and made the Eritrean people rally

around the liberation movement (cf. Okbazghi 1991: 271). This notion appears to fit well into the now well known colonial school of thought that believes colonial rule and the resistance to colonial rule by Africans gave rise to the generation of African nationalism (cf. Hodgkin 1956, Emerson 1960, Smith 1983). One fundamental defect of this line of thought when it comes to Eritrean nationalism is that it ignores the impact of European colonial penetration on Eritrean society. To attribute the emergence of Eritrean nationalism merely to Ethiopian exploitation and suppression is to ignore the objective foundation of Eritrean nationalism that was layed down during European colonial rule. This objective foundation could be accounted for as territorial, socio-economic, politico-legal integration giving rise to a common history that led to common culture. In turn this culminated in the development of the subjective factor, the will to live together (Bereketeab 2000). It is this development that gave rise to the national struggle for independence.

Concerning the criteria the would best define Eritrea, Bondestam (1989:98-103), following Horace Davis' four premises: i) specific territory; ii) a certain minimum size; iii) some integration (centralisation and interdependence); iv) consciousness of itself as a nation, argues that Eritrea fulfils these premises which enables it to be considered as a nation. The first three premises are related to the objective criteria, while the fourth represents the subjective criterion. All four taken together constitute civic premises.

If we relate these variables with the above six variables we would be able to conjoin the first three with territorial, socio-economic, politico-legal integration; common history and common culture, whereas the fourth would be conjoined with the will to live together. One of the social forces that effected these social conditions was that of the Eritrean nationalists. At least at the later stage of the armed struggle this group made an attempt to construct Eritrean national identity on the basis of individual membership not as a collective belonging to a particular ethno-linguistic group. Pursuing a theory and practice of intentional social engineering aiming at societal transformational, the fronts embraced in their political programmes an ambitious concerted project to construct a new Eritrean identity which would transcend all socio-cultural boundaries (cf. Sherman 1980: 98). Evidence to this can be elicited from the political programmes of ELF and EPLF (ELF 1971, 1975; EPLF 1977, 1987). Indeed the fronts in the attempt of putting into practice their vision of the prospective new nation, mapped out not only the theoretical framework, but also plan of action, a design to put it into practice.

The integration and cohesion of society, in the civic conception, is presumed to emerge as a result of the establishment and development of secular public institutions. These institutions encompass economic, social, political, legal and cultural ones. Further, these institutions, in general terms, are to embody symbols, values and norms that are the result of an overriding accumulated common historical experience that the society can identify with in order to develop the will to live together. They are derivatives of a transcending political culture.

A certain degree of economic, political, cultural and historical relation between the various ethno-linguistic groups of Eritrea prior to the beginning of Italian colonial rule cannot be denied. Yet it was under the European rule that these relations were organised and integrated centrally. Undoubtedly the territorial, political and economic centralisation that took place under Italian rule underpinned the evolution of Eritrea as cohesive geo-political entity, although the correspondence of social cognitions might not have matched the centralisation at that time. In pursuing our precepts of the civic conception of nation, then, we would be able to argue that institutions reproduced by the colonial social force, albeit weakly developed, buttressed the process of nation

formation.

It is following this notion that research on Eritrean nationalism emphasises the importance of the socio-economic changes which occurred as the outcome of the penetration of colonial capital. Quite often, materialist oriented scholars stress the pertinence of the socio-economic changes in the sense that the effects of material changes on the societal integration were far-reaching. This line of argumentation is based on the assumption that economic innovation necessarily leads to a corresponding political consciousness and identity (see Leonard 1980, Houtart 1980, Bondestam 1989). This is taken as an illustration of the emergence of Eritrean national identity transcending the ethno-linguistic division, which is the outcome of the socio-economic integration and cohesion rendered possible by Italian colonialism.

The second phase (1961-1991) of the process of the development of the Eritrean nationalism differs qualitatively from the first phase (1890-1941). It is characterised by intentionality of mobilisation, participation, institution-building and societal transformation carried out by the indigenous social force of the liberation movement. That is, at this phase of the evolution of nationalism, a social agent with a specific agenda of societal transformation in the form of the NLM joined in. Terms like mobilisation, participation, institution-building and societal transformation are related to the enlightenment notion of people's sovereignty and democracy where the population is galvanised to determine its destiny.

A few Eritrean liberation fighters, theoretically and ideologically poorly equipped, yet representing the 'general will', set out to form the Eritrean nation. This social force gradually grew to a formidable one with the capacity to formulate both theoretically and ideologically the long and short-term objectives of nationalism. Mobilisation and participation as theoretical concepts, but also as acts of practice, served the short term objective of nationalism, whereas institution-building and societal transformation as long term processes and structurations harnessed the long term process of nation formation. With regard to the latter, societal transformation, which in principle is the accumulated outcome of the other categories, can be seen in the emergence of national consciousness and the will to live together.

Already at the end of European rule there were signs of the emergent Eritrean nationalism, albeit divided, resulting from the penetration of colonial capital. The readily available signs were: a) the rejection by Moslem communities of the incorporation of their part of Eritrea with Sudan, b) the rejection by many highland Christian Eritreans of total annexation of Eritrea by Ethiopia, and c) the resistance of all Eritreans to the division of Eritrea. Nationalist forces in the body of the Independence Bloc, particularly the Moslem League and the Liberal Progressive Party, demanded the incorporation of territories that were under the control of Sudan and Ethiopia and strove for the independence of Eritrea.

To conclude, the two phases in the formation of Eritrean nationalism - European colonial rule and the National Liberation Movement - can be connected with the fulfilment of the objective and subjective criteria respectively. A rough temporal allocation would enable us to assign the objective criteria as to be more or less accomplished, or rather as the grounds has been shaped during the first phase, whereas the subjective criteria could be construed as to have been fulfilled in the second phase. This division should not be misconstrued to indicate that I am proposing a clear-cut sequence. Rather the propensity is that there exists a dialectical relation between them in the sense that the one presupposes the other. But yet at a certain phase, one is more dominant than the other. In this project of the process of nation formation the attributes of what I have identified as second phase could be characterised by mobilisation, participation, building of

institutions and in the final analysis the transformation of society that was institutionalised by the NLM. As a civic nation, Eritrea combines the primordialist/modernist, the ethnic/civic and ethno-linguistic distinctions. Its nationalism is, thus, based on the unity of these diversities and is by definition supra-ethnic. In the remaining part of the paper I will review the theoretical and conceptual ontology and epistemology underpinning the discourse of nation and nationalism.

Theoretical and Conceptual Reflections

Theoretical discourse regarding the emergence and development of nations seems to focus on two basic schools of thought, notably the primordialist and the modernist (Smith 1986, 1991; Hutchinson 1994). Further these are connected with two conceptions of nation - ethnic and civic - which more or less derive from them. These binary oppositions characterise the scholarship of nationalism.

To narrow the gap between and to reconcile the two schools of thought a third perspective is suggested notably, the ethnicist perspective. Anthony D. Smith (1986) is the prominent scholar of nationalism who launched the ethnicist perspective. The ethnicist perspective while accepting the modernity of nations traces back the origin of these nations to what Smith designates as *ethnies*. It argues that it is ethnic communities that grow to nations.

Criticism has been directed against the concept of primordialism. It is argued that the criteria for the phenomenon might be necessary but certainly not sufficient. Informed by the social reality of his time Max Weber (1967), for instance, posits that criteria like language, ethnicity, religion cannot be sufficient for the constitution of a nation. Weber cites the example of the Serbs and Croats who, despite religious differences, lived together; while the Irish and the English, despite a common language did not. For Weber the criterion that constitutes a nation is common sentiment which in turn is grounded on a common historical memory.

In the political and philosophical theory of nation formation the distinction between the civic and ethnic perceptions are the fundamental foundations upon which the two basic forms of nations are grounded. The bulk of the literature discussing nations and nationalism can perhaps be distinguished along these basic lines. These two perceptions are again unavoidably represented by two schools of thought, notably the modernist and primordialist. Like the primordialist-modernist duality perspective, the ethnic-civic conception rests on the distinction between the old and the new. However, it is noteworthy that the discernibility of the perception of nations resting upon these basic distinctions is not to be viewed as if they are diametrically opposites in the sense of an either/or relation. It is rather to be viewed in terms of some nations are more to be described or defined following civic criteria, meanwhile for others it may probably be more appropriate to treat them from the stand point of ethnicity. Furthermore the civic perception of nation seems more dominant in the sense that there are very few nations which are utterly based on purely ethnic contents where a culturally homogenous collective identity constitutes the basis of citizenship.

In addition, seen from a theoretical and philosophical point of view, since the period of enlightenment there have been successive moves from collectivism to individualism which have given rise to the preoccupation with the sanctity of the individual as a citizen and building bloc of the nation. Individuation of societies bestowing the atomic individual a legal personality, a civic person with duties and rights, as privileged by liberal ideology, civic identity came to define nations and nationalism, particularly the one under the designation of patriotism. The individual is celebrated as authentic and genuine against artificiality of the collective. The distinction between

nationalism and patriotism was deemed necessary to emphasise the shift from collectivism as thought to be represented by nationalism to individualism as represented by patriotism. This development signifies the displacement of communalism that inevitably leads to the rise of atomism. For some writers nationalism holds a negative connotation, directed toward others - division, supremacy, chauvinism, archaic, and a cause of conflicts and wars, at times even juxtaposed with racism, whereas patriotism is given a positive connotation - love of the fatherland, sober loyalty to one's own state.

The basic distinctions between civic and ethnic perceptions of nation can be roughly stated in the following fashion. Herbert Adam (1994) in trying to highlight the distinction between the two puts the weight on the relationship between individual members and the binding elements both among individual members and the collective membership on one side and the state on the other side. Therefore, stemming from this presumption, the civic nation is viewed as 'based on equal individual rights, regardless of origin, and equal recognition of all cultural traditions in the public sphere'. Moreover, according to this notion, the civic nation is presumed to be based on consent rather than descent. Citizenship in ethnic nationalism, on the other hand, is based on blood and ancestry (Adam 1994: 17).

Citing cases of the latter, which shade light on the ethnic perception of nation, Adam gives an account of Germany and Israel. In both nations it is not only legally permitted but it is a legal right of those who purport to possess the right ethnic genealogy, despite the fact that the putative returnees are culturally strangers to the host culture. Conversely emigrants, for instance in Germany, notwithstanding the generational habitance in the country and notwithstanding their assimilation in the German culture are denied nationality, because the determining criterion of nationhood is ethnic genealogy. Adam claims that civic nation is characterised by the paucity of nationalism, because cohesion is based on equal rights for every citizen. In the perception of civic nation, nationalist ideology is presumed to perceive members as mere individuals - not as members of ethnic, religious, or linguistic group - but rather as individual members of the whole nation.

A terminology closely linked with the civic nation is that of the territorial nation (Smith 1983). In addition to the basic characteristics that the latter shares with the former the emphasis in the case of the territorial nation is that on the politically imposed nature of the formation of the nation. The basition of identity here is territoriality. The imagination of commonality and social solidarity springs from the consciousness of sharing common geographical space - in Anderson's (1991) terminology, an 'imagined community'.

Following Max Weber's conceptualisation, Giddens (1985) elucidates the nation as a product of the centralising power of the nation-state. He contends that nations emerged as the result of bureaucratic, economic, legal and administrative centralisation in a territoriality where the nation-state retains monopoly of violence. Giddens, without utilising the civic-ethnic dichotomy discourse of nation formation and nationalism, starkly inclines toward the civic perception. His argument is limited to the west European historical experience and he clearly asserts that nation-state model is not exportable to the non-western societies. Yet, in spite of Giddens' attempted restriction, it is readily applicable to the non-west, since it is conceptualised as the artefact of the centralising state, which is a universal dimension.

The civic nation model would represent both the west European nation that is presumed long to have shed away its ethnic content (if it has ever had) and the multi-ethnic societies of the colonial world that by historical irony were forcefully brought together by external forces. Concerning the

latter it pertains to the overarching supraethnic identity. In Europe the civic nation emerged as a result of what Smith (1986: 131) calls the triple revolution - division of labour, control of administration, cultural co-ordination. In contrast the civic process in the colonial societies took place through the colonial state by 'surgical operation' amalgamating various ethno-linguistic groups. Through bureaucratic, economic, legal and administrative integration, the colonial state produced a national unit embedded in civic identity. The colonial societies cannot be other than civic nations because, firstly they constitute aggregation of different ethnic collectivities, and secondly their common identity is contingent on the territorialisation of their homeland and the acceptance of it as the creation of colonisation.

Ethno-linguistic Diversity Versus Nation Formation

After considering the binary oppositions of primordial-modernist and ethnic-civic we will now deal with the question whether the social reality of ethno-linguistic diversity could be seen as posing an impairment for the project of nation formation and nationalism. A marked characterising feature of today's societies is multiplicity of identities. In spite of all claims of uni-identity or mono-identity, even most seemingly homogenous societies display strong instances of plurality. Yet, despite this fact, the bulk of the literature on nations and nationalism treats nations as homogenous mono-ethnic and mono-cultural entities. Further we are told the developing societies fail to fit the definition and criteria of nationhood, since they comprise of multi-ethnic communities. How true is this and do our conceptual and theoretical tools enable us to accommodate societies of such type?

First, I would like to make one point crystal clear notably, out of the plethora categories of identities what concerns us here is ethno-linguistic identity and its implication to the formation of nations. When we talk about multi-ethnic societies or nations it is clear the identity we refer to is civic identity that transcends particularistic identity. The concept ethno-linguistic indicates the overlap of common ethnicity and linguistic homogeneity. That is it refers to a group displaying both common genealogical descending (imagined or actual) and a common linguistic speech. The basic characterising feature in the ethno-linguistic entity is that the following elements are displayed: a shared language which distinguish the group; ethnic identity which members of a group commonly claim to originate from, imagined or actual descendent, an ideology of shared ancestry (see Eriksen 1993: 35); a compact territory (homeland) where the group is supposed to claim an exclusive rights of habitat for generations imagined or actual, and which reinforces the social construction of identity by keeping into continuous renewal of the remembered attachment. Two sets of concepts are involved in the analysis of ethnicity and interethnic relationships. These are the objective/primordial and the subjective/relational. In the objective/primordial set of concepts ethnicity is understood simply based on certain objectively given properties of a social group. While in the subjective/relational set of concepts ethnicity is understood as perpetually constructed and reconstructed in a specific societal environment, thus, assuming the nature of subjectivity, situationality and relationality (Eriksen 1993). In the latter, it is stressed that ethnicity should be perceived as an aspect of relationship, not as the cultural property of a social group. From this inference is drawn that in a solely mono-ethnic setting effectively no ethnicity is to prevail, because simply there is no other group with whom an act of communicating cultural difference can take place (Eriksen 1993: 34).

The central question that needs to be attended here is how multi-ethnicity affects the formation of

nations. The study of multi-ethnic national settings presupposes treating of two dialectically interconnected aspects. On the one hand we need to investigate and determine the relationship between the various ethno-linguistic groups. And on the other it has to deal with the commonalty of identity - the supraethnic national identity. The common space the ethno-linguistic groups share imposes upon them a dialectically interrelated bond. This bond refers to the civic aspect of their identity. Social solidarity as cohesive social organisation in a civic integration rests on different principles than ethnic integration. As Durkheim (1984) in his organic solidarity notion implies, collective consciousness gave way to individual consciousness where social solidarity is characterised increasingly by social differentiation, specialisation and generalisation, with the dominance of functional interests. Modern nations, therefore, are marked by a multiplicity of identity, but where the dominant power is that of civic identity wherein ethno-linguistic diversity is a marker.

Conclusion

Nations and nationalism are more or less connected with modernity. Informed by European historical experience, scholars of nationalism define and explain the nation if not the result of modernity then at least coinciding with it. This modernity whose ontology is only associated with West European and North American societies is uniquely attributed to have produced homogenous, compact and integrated societies that came to be known as nations. Behind this development is assumed to lie the socio-economic, cultural, technological and scientific revolutions leading to rationalisation, secularisation, bureaucratisation, individuation, formalisation and homogenisation of societies.

On the theoretical and conceptual side, mainstream scholarship focuses mainly on the binary oppositions of primordial-modernist and ethnic-civic in its analysis of nation and nationalism. Since the ontological and epistemological tools informing the discourse are firmly anchored in the social historical experience of west European societies and its offshoots, many western scholars seem either unable or unwilling to extend the discourse to non-western societies. Quite often these non-western societies are described derogatively as tribes, ethnic, or simply traditional folklore, communities. The main causal explanation given for the non-qualification of nationhood of these societies is the persistent and pervasive sub-national affiliations and demands that not rarely descend to conflicts and wars.

Nevertheless the mechanisms, processes, dynamism and forces that were responsible for the emergence of the European nation were also active in the development of the colonial nation. It has been asserted that the centralising state - absolute monarchy - played a decisive role in the formation of the European nation. The colonial state in Africa took this responsibility. Undoubtedly, perhaps due to difference of time range - five hundred years in the case of Europe and barely some decades in the case of Africa - full-fledged development of nationhood, in Africa on the same footing with that of western Europe, is not yet at hand. This coupled with the persistent conflict arising from sub-national affiliations and demands is given as a reason for the rejection of nationhood in Africa. Yet how does this differ from what Eugen Weber (1977) found about the French nation: that after hundred years of the declaration of its formation a considerable size of the population could not yet speak proper French or lacked a feeling of Frenchness? Or from what is happening in Canada, UK, Belgium, Switzerland, Basque region of France and Spain today where centrifugal forces based on primordial affiliations are threatening the central state?

Many civic nations in Europe are facing similar problems as those civic nations in Africa. This lends currency to the argument that societies in Africa are no less nations than their counterparts in Europe.

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