

Globalism and nationalism: which one is bad?

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Zygmunt Bauman (1998:60) points out that ‘globalisation is not about what we all, or at least the most resourceful and enterprising among us, wish or hope to do. It is about what is happening to us all.’ Bauman is, of course, right. The development of new technologies and ways and means to communicate and exchange information has a direct impact on global changes in the fields of economy, politics, and culture that affects all of us. Fast production and distribution of information and goods influence the quick and relatively painless dislocations of companies from one part of the globe to another, in search of a cheaper labour force. Global economies are also characterised by the almost daily mergers of already huge conglomerates and companies that seek to establish new, this time world-scale, monopolies. The need for and existence of common markets give rise to regional, continental, and global political integrations whose aim is, among other things, to preserve the benefits of globally oriented economies. Economic and political integration both demand, and ultimately lead to, unification and homogenisation of individual needs, lifestyles, languages, and cultures. This unification of different ways of life leads in turn to the universalisation of social problems that are now for the first time perceived as problems that are common to the entire human race, such as ecological disasters, abuse of human rights, gender inequality, and so on. All these issues and problems certainly do influence all of us. In this sense, there is really no escape from globalisation.

However, this paper addresses not the process of globalisation as such, which certainly affects us all, but rather the ideology behind this process—*globalism*. The actual and highly irreversible process of globalisation is often indistinguishable from the ideology of globalism. While globalisation itself is a historical, cultural, and political artefact—a structural force that one can like or dislike but can hardly influence significantly—globalism is an ideology, a set of ideas, values, and

principles promoted by a particular group of people. Like any other ideology, it seeks to establish its own hegemony and as such can be analysed, dissected and, if necessary, opposed. Unlike globalisation, which is a *historical process*, globalism (just like nationalism or socialism) is a *normative ideal* of how societies should be organised.

We are faced with the two dominant ideologies in the contemporary world: globalism and nationalism in all their forms. What I would like to do here is to sketch the main features of these ideologies and to single out their potentially positive and negative characteristics, using examples from Eastern Europe, where the struggle between the two ideologies is most apparent. Globalism and nationalism are usually thought of as being opposing and mutually exclusive ideologies. Globalism is generally seen as integrative, liberating, and progressive, whereas nationalism is widely viewed as regressive, disintegrative, oppressive, and a relic of the past. In other words, globalism is good, while nationalism is bad. I shall argue that these two ideologies show more similarities than differences when their structure and content are analysed. For not only are the two ideologies deeply related and often complementary, but they also share the same aim, which is to explain and interpret the nature of the social reality in which we all live. By presenting their interpretation of that reality, they both equally aim to monopolise their knowledge about it. In other words, just as all ideologies do, they seek to establish their hegemony by presenting themselves as the only right way to look at social reality. Both of these ideologies are modern and are in fact a response to the radical change that the process of globalisation has brought upon us all. As ideologies, they amalgamate positive and negative features.

Globalism tells us that we are first and foremost individuals with our own personal needs and liberties. Individual freedom has priority over authority, equality, and justice. Globalism firmly believes in progress and rationality; it proposes the removal of all state borders and the free flow of goods, services, and people. It strongly encourages spatial mobility and cultural exchange as a means of reducing stereotyping and prejudice. It stands against the idea of the nation-state, and supports continental and other global integrations. Globalism also has a firm trust in technology and sees technological development as being liberating for the global individual. Technology makes our lives easier by making us independent from space and time.

Nationalism, on the other hand, tells us that we are primarily members of the particular group into which we were born, whose

culture we share and to whom we thus have responsibilities. The loyalty towards the culture of the particular group has precedence over the wishes of its individual members. The group, a nation, cherishes the idea of equality among its members where the nation itself is perceived, as Anderson (1983) calls it, as 'deep horizontal comradeship'. However, the authority of the group does not rest only in each individual's duty towards it, but also in his/her affection and love for and from the group. Nationalism promotes solidarity among the group's members and their need to preserve their cultural uniqueness. Nationalism believes that the continuity of the individual lives through the eternity of the group. In a nationalist view, common memories, shared ancestry, and family ties make our life unique and meaningful.

These two ideologies do oppose each other, but they are also complementary. First, they are both reactions to the process of globalisation: globalism hails this process, whereas nationalism uses its means (i.e. technology) to condemn it strongly.¹ Second, to have any influence on the general public, they are dependent on each other. Without globalist-integrationist ideas there cannot be a retreat into nationalism, and vice versa. Third, and most important, the two ideologies share the same form, if not the same content: whereas globalism supports the right to be different at the individual level, nationalism defends this right at the level of the group. Globalism supports individualisation within the (world) society (every individual has the right to be different), but opposes individualisation outside society (the existence of nation-states). Nationalism supports individualisation outside society (the existence of nation-states), but it suppresses individualisation within society (the nation is more important than the individual).

Globalism argues convincingly that technological developments in fields such as transport and information have brought about greater liberation for individuals and societies, who can now travel longer distances rapidly and receive information more quickly from all over the world, from many and various sources, and can thus more directly see and understand the problems that people face in other parts of the globe. In the era of information technology, one cannot have total control over the mass media. While in the 1950s, Soviet and other East European establishments could easily jam the signals of Radio Free Europe if they so wished, in the late 1980s it was impossible and senseless to forbid hundreds of thousands of satellite and cable dishes and other transmitters that were receiving news and programmes

from the West. The attractions of consumerism—Levi's, Pepsi, and Hollywood films—were another globalist element which undermined and finally brought down the ascetic communist ideology. The Internet creates even more difficulties for authoritarian regimes world-wide. The proliferation of information has also given us more freedom of choice in organising our own lives. Because of globalisation, we may now eat Japanese or Mexican food in Prague, wear Italian or French clothes in Warsaw, or watch an American film in Sofia.

However, the response of nationalism to this change also has its merits. By liberating us as individuals, globalisation also cuts away our roots, making us all alike. As soon as our cities become globalised, they also become very similar, if not the same. The magic of difference and unpredictability disappears when we know that we will find Chinatown, Marks and Spencer, and Cineplex just as easily in London and Paris as in New York—and tomorrow perhaps in globalised Tirana.

Nationalism attacks—with every right—the uniform standardisation of human needs and forms of expression. Weber's (1948) well-known 'iron cage' truly becomes reality with globalisation. Instrumental rationalism and the worship of the consumerist values of globalisation lead to routinisation and eventually to disenchantment. In a McDonaldised world (Ritzer 1993) of mass and globalised society, human activities as well as needs become standardised, mechanical, identical, and thus meaningless. The cold, precise, and punctual rationalisation turns us all into icy machines, whereas consumerism makes us lazy and superficial sensation-seekers. As Bauman (1998:83) puts it:

[n]ot so much the greed to acquire and possess, not the gathering of wealth in its material, tangible sense, as the excitement of a new and unprecedented sensation is the name of the consumer game.

Consumers are first and foremost gatherers of sensations.

Nationalist ideology defends our right to collective difference. It seeks to provide us with the meanings, souls, and positive emotions of solidarity, affection, and love. Group membership is a precondition for solidarity. However, too much affection towards group members very often leads to animosity and hostility towards those who do not belong to it.

And this is the crucial problem of nationalist ideology. Inclusiveness and love for 'us' often turn into exclusion and hatred of 'them'. The protection and preservation of 'our way of life' often lead to autarky,

populism, and uncritical evaluation of everything which is 'ours' as glorious and divine. The collective worship of the nation, especially in its ethnic form, can make us distrustful of other cultures and societies, of anything that differs from our tradition. This can lead us to racism and ethnic hostility and, in its more radical form, can make us accomplices to genocide. Loyalty to their ethnic nation led the peoples of former Yugoslavia to remain silent in the 1990s when their next-door neighbours were taken into exile, ethnically 'cleansed', raped, or killed.

The interdependence of globalism and nationalism is perhaps most clearly visible in the post-communist societies of Eastern Europe. The new Eastern European regimes legitimise their right to rule through the ideology of nationalism. The message is that for the first time in 'our' history, 'our people' rule 'our' country. Some of the regimes in these societies see the ideology of globalism (represented by actors such as the EU and the USA) as a direct threat to their rule. For that reason they interpret the ideology of globalism as nothing more than world hegemony on the part of the West. It is claimed that although technologically and economically superior, the West is egotistic, soulless, perverted, and thus morally inferior. However, as a response to the world hegemony of Western globalism, nationalism has been used to create an internal hegemony in these societies. Hence, all globalist ideas are opposed as being foreign, imperialist, and 'not ours', while at the same time a similar if not greater level of ideological monopolisation has been achieved. Who can know what the authentic values of 'our society' are? Of course, it is the regime alone that knows how to articulate these values properly. In practical terms, nationalist policies benefit only the rulers – and even then only for a very short time. Nationalism leads to isolation in a globalising world where isolation, autarky, and localism mean permanent dependence, economic backwardness, and, in the long run, certain annihilation.

At the same time, the promoters of the ideology of globalism in the West have been given an excellent argument against the authoritarian nationalistic autarkies of the East. The message is simple: if 'we' do not accept the values and ideas of globalism, we will end up in similarly nationalistic, authoritarian, and backward societies. In this way, the ideologues of globalism gain popular support at home. However, the major problem with globalism is its intentional or unintentional blindness towards the stratifying nature of globalisation itself. What is currently happening is, as Bauman (1998:3) rightly points out,

[a] breakdown in communication between extraterritorial elites and the ever more 'localised' rest. The centres of meaning-and-value production are today extraterritorial and emancipated from local constraints—this does not apply, though, to the human condition which such values and meanings are to inform and make sense of.

Mobility has become a central stratifying element, and to be local in a globalised world means to be disadvantaged and degraded. The new situation that Bauman (1998) calls 'absentee landlordship' is producing new global elites that are for the first time independent from economic, political, and cultural constraints, whereas the majority of the world population are still largely immobile and confined to their place or country of birth. In other words, the truly globalised are the few, while the rest are stretched between officially promoted globalist ideals and everyday nationalist reality.

To conclude, nationalism and globalism are neither good nor bad *per se*. Each has features and potentialities of the other. The ideas and values of globalism can help us more efficiently and rationally to deal with the enormous changes that are happening in the world. Globalism rightly emphasises the advantages that new technologies bring us and how we can use them to transcend time and space in developing our own individual potentials. It also promotes the ideas that help us to leave the prejudices, collective pressures, and conformity of closed communities, traditionalism, and patriarchy behind us. Nationalism for its part also reminds us that we are first of all emotional beings who need to belong to a particular group, to love and be loved, and to share rituals and patterns of an individual culture. It is the irrationality and deviation from the routine and rationally constructed plans and programmes that produce creativity and change, and give meanings to our lives. Nationalism and globalism are very much two sides of the same coin, and in a globalising world we need the constant presence of both to avoid the hegemony of either.

Note

1 As Guibernau (1996:137) points out, Islamic fundamentalism, for example, has many features of nationalist ideology, and presents itself as a radical alternative to Western

ideologies, 'but at the same time it takes advantage of Western technology to reproduce and expand its message' to one billion potential Internet users worldwide.

References

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