

## The Issue of Nationalism

By Ariel A. Manning

A nation identifies itself by what it is not. During this current period where globalization seems to be the most dominant and enduring change taking place, the challenges faced by nations around the world have now been brought to the forefront of that very same conversation. It is an unstoppable change that has opened up geographical as well as non-physical borders (by way of the internet), through an ongoing exchange of information. Technology has also given access to different groups that have up until the present, existed along the periphery, in some cases. Globalization in its many different forms has presented the opportunity for these groups to reclaim their narrative and have a place in this new fast paced, inter-connected world. Yet the opportunities and benefits presented by globalization for this new world of inter-connectedness has also created fear within the pre-existing “majority” groups. That fear is that the intermingling of different cultures, as well as different groups of people, will produce such homogenization that there will be a loss of their identity.

There is a fear of the minority or a “fear of small numbers” as described by Arjun Appadurai. As mentioned prior, a nation is able to identify itself by what it is not, meaning that to maintain their sense of identity they will cleave to the similarities that make them whole. They must maintain their identity and seek to use nationalism to assert that claim. The majority group however, needs the minority in order to exist and by ascertaining the differences, the majority is thereby able to identify itself. As Appadurai points out, “the creation of collective others, or ‘them’s’ is a requirement, through the dynamics of stereotyping and identity contrast for helping...mark off the dynamics of the ‘we’” (Appadurai, 50). To demarcate the boundary

between the “we” and the “they” is the first step in re-establishing the enduring aspect of nationalism.

In the case of [the conflict](#) between Israel and Palestine an explanation of the conflict through the Primordialist approach “explains ethnicity as a fixed characteristic of individuals and communities” (britannica.com). It promotes that understanding ones identity is historically based within the culture. Within societies that are multiethnic, conflict is inherent due to a biological urge to protect this identity and ensure its survival. Strong ties that a group may have to culture are extremely important. In the case of the Israelis and the Palestinians, culture is intertwined with religion. Judaism and Islam are identified by cultural characteristics that contribute to the identity of the opposing groups. “Both religious nationalisms claim more or less the same territory...both sides adopt an exclusivist view of territory that in principle territory can never be shared with the other side or any other side or any group” (Mitchell, 35). In the case of the Israeli’s and Palestinians the conflict over land that both sides historically claim as significant fuels this deep rooted conflict and bolsters a strong sense of nationalism on either side. In specific regard to culture, there seems to be an inherent need to maintain the national identity of the group that holds the majority, with the need to secure “national purity” (Appadurai, 58). This is the driving force behind any type of mobilization. Whether mobilized to violence or to a condition just short of that outcome depends on how far the pressures of globalization push the group to draw inward and hold on to the binding ties of nationalism.

Culture and history and religion and language and any other characteristics that fortify a sense of national identity when trying to rectify “the anxiety of incompleteness” as Arjun Appadurai describes. In the case of the Israelis and Palestinians a strong sense of religious-nationalism has resulted in the complete “othering” of the opposing side due to the construction

of identities that have been defined by constant conflict over land. This is at the core of who they are as a people. This has reinforced for each side what it means to be Israeli and Palestinian, majority and minority and oppressor and the oppressed.

Yet cultural dimensions of globalization are not the sole force behind the enduring nature of nationalism. As highlighted by Ian Bremmer in [Our 'Us vs. Them' World: 5 Reasons why Globalism is Failing](#) factors such as those that effect the economy, stability and the secure nature of different countries as well as the aforementioned aspect of technology play an integral role as well. Globalization promotes certain benefits to the economy, especially when observing the positive trends regarding trade. However, all are not able to access those benefits which provides for the space between the haves and the have nots to widen. Thus, inequality abounds and the cycle that allows groups to benefit, does not reach everyone. With technology comes large scale change due to the advent of different forms of communication such as social media. There are essentially no barriers separating communities from experiencing the transfer of information (and culture) between groups. Security is also affected, especially once there is the actual *movement* of people across borders. This can prompt the creation of policies that endorse the safety of the majority group above all others. It is “us vs. them” on a larger scale. Bremmer emphasizes the importance of culture, stating that globalism “creates fear centered on identity”, and this fear “[feeds] public anxiety by shifting the racial, ethnic and linguistic and religious makeup of communities, sometimes abruptly” (Bremmer, 20). That abrupt shift is what spurs the mobilization of “predatory identities” (Appadurai, 51). The threat impressed upon a group from all aspects of globalization makes the majority feel threatened. They then cling to nationalism because the distinguishing factors are what successfully separates the “us” from the “them”. The

need to have “completeness of the national ethnos” (Appadurai, 57) is why nationalism will continue to endure.

“Nationalism is alive and well, partly because the problems that provoked it are still with us”, Bremmer states in [The Wave to Come](#). Those problems, now more rapidly manifested due to globalism, could spur the shift from fear and the need to simply invoke nationalism, to the need to utilize violence that may target minority groups (as has occurred previously throughout history). This could be the [Grey Rhino](#) that Michelle Wucker describes in her book [The Grey Rhino: How to Recognize and Act on the Obvious Dangers We Ignore](#). However we are no longer at the stage where the inherent need to embrace nationalism is the factor being ignored. The temporary denial that Wucker details has moved past the phase of “muddling through” and now may be at an area where we have diagnosed the specific issue, that of globalization. Globalization will neither slow down nor cease to be a driving force in the world today. Nationalism will not cease to be an enduring entity which different groups assemble behind. Therefore, addressing the problems that provoked it, as Bremmer states, is perhaps a way to move forward as well as not repeat the same mistakes of the past. All groups, whether majority or minority, can benefit from the attempt to achieve this goal.

## References

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