

## Concepts of National Identity. An Interdisciplinary Dialogue

(Edited by Peter Boerner. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft. Pp. 262. FRG)

This collection of papers offered at a conference at Indiana University in Bloomington in 1985, presents a subject worthy of profound analysis. The volume is a timely and scholarly addition to the growing literature on national and ethnic identity.

There are considerable terminological uncertainties, not only in English but also in other languages, relating to the use of the term "nation", as well as its derivatives, such as *national*, *nationality*, *nationalism*, etc. These concepts can be intimately linked to phenomena connected with ethnic groups at least as much the State, if not more so. One finds extremely different interpretations concerning the essence of "nation" and "national" in scholarly publications, in political rhetoric or in the press. Authors representing different geographical and cultural areas, belonging to various disciplines (sociology, history, political science or anthropology) follow separate paths in the explanation of this major social phenomenon. Therefore a wide-ranging survey and an "interdisciplinary dialogue" – as the subtitle of the volume indicates – can only be welcomed in the process of clarification of this important notion.

In the past, most studies related to the concept of national identity or national character have been concerned with its development separately in individual countries. This book differs from the general run in that Western, East European and also African national identity problems are treated here in a comparative manner and introduced by a series of common questions.

In the Introduction, *Peter Boerner*, the editor of the volume, provides a stimulating presentation of some general conceptual problems e.g. the need to consider specific constellations of political, economic, religious and cultural influences with regard to the socio-psychological development of an individual nation. He notes that the ideological contents of concepts of identity differ from nation to nation and from historical situation to historical situation. Boerner describes the variety of factors constituting a collective identity, first of all the relationships that have existed and could exist between the political entities and the ethnic and emotional complexes. *Raymond Crew's* contribution "The Construction of National Identity" opens the discourse. He gives a short survey on the extent to which the main intellectual trends have paid and continue pay attention to question of the national identity, its formation and functioning in various historical circumstances. Grew's conclusion is that national identity becomes significantly different and apparently more important in the nineteenth century than it was before. The decisive role in its genesis was played by the individual states, but industrialization, increased communication and mobility also contributed to its development.

For those, who are interested in Hungarian and East Central European studies, *Mihály Szegedy-Maszák's* paper "The Idea of National Character: A Romantic Heritage" provides an especially valuable analysis concerning the evolution of national thinking in this part of Europe. The thought that nations, as well as individuals have a unique character, can be traced back to Romantic era. Under the influence of German *Geistgeschichte*, this idea prevailed among Central and Eastern European intellectuals for a long time. It served honest political aims in certain cases (e.g. it helped national minorities preserve their identity), but – as the author points out – it also fostered a derogatory view of other nations, together with mystical images and prejudices which contributed to mutual distrust in inter-ethnic relations. In the construction of national identities a permanent comparison with other collective sentiments and behaviours is involved. *Orest Ranum's* paper "Counter-Identities of Western European Nations in the Early-Modern Period: Definitions and Points of Departure" examines the question of the competing communal values and the contrasts of the schematic "they – we" image. He presents historical cases where the process of identification with

one community's values and qualities implied in some way the alienation (estrangement) from those of others. However, the perception of foreign culture and its comparison with our own culture does not lead necessarily to stereotyped images; it may also stimulate all-human ideals and supra-national loyalties. *Konrad Bieber's* essay "Patriot without a Flag: French Writers Look at their Country and across the Border" is a superb presentation of the way in which, various dimensions of collective sentiment (national, European and universal) were integrated by some famous French intellectuals. It is a historical fact that group identities are not always competitive; they can be complementary or even mutually reinforcing. The various scales and levels of collective loyalties do not displace each other; they correspond to separate – however related – basic human needs.

*Jack E. Reece's* paper "Outmoded Nationalism and Emerging Patterns of Regional Identity in Contemporary Western Europe" discusses the causes and consequences of the recent ethnic revival in the western part of our continent. There is no doubt, that the state has an impressive arsenal for inculcating loyalty, including the school system and the power to design and manipulate symbols etc. On the other hand, the appearance of national minority and ethnoregional movements in the old states of Western Europe suggests that "nation-building" has its limits. Nation-states have lost much of their prestige and other forces have scored remarkable successes in identity formation. One of the basic conclusions which can be drawn from this study is that in many cases the complexity and multiplicity of ethnic phenomenon does not permit us to equate national identity with a feeling of loyalty to the state. In Europe there are only very few countries where the ethnic and political borders coincide; so it would be also theoretically more appropriate to differentiate (ethno)nationality from citizenship, (ethno)nationalism from patriotism, etc.

In contrast to Reece's essay, *Robin Alison Remington's* contribution "The Balkanisation of Communism: East European Nations in the 1980s" seems to be less consistent in differentiating ethnonationalism from state-nationalism. An obvious example is the way the "Romanian National Defiance" is presented in this paper. The fact that Rumania (and especially Transylvania) is a multinational state, and has a considerable non-Rumanian (ethnic Hungarian, German, Slav and other) population, is even not mentioned by the author. Thus "nationalism" receives a narrow, almost exclusively inter-state interpretation, and its important intra-state (anti-minority; discriminative and forcibly amalgamating) aspect is simply ignored. In the case of Yugoslavia and (to a lesser degree) Bulgaria the relationship between ethnic components and international factors is analysed in a more balanced way.

The various dimensions and levels of collective loyalty are also discussed in *Richard Bjornson's* study "National Identity Concept in Africa: Interplay between European Categorization Schemes and African Realities". Smaller and larger scale attachments, tribal, regional and national solidarity ties are described here through the example of Cameroon. Four papers present the way in which the historical and present day aspects of national identity interplay in the German-speaking area of Europe. *Conrad Wiedemann's*, *Heinrich C. Seeba's*, *Werner Weidenfeld's* and *William M. Johnston's* thoughtful and well-written essays analyse the causes of the absence of a clear German and Austrian self-image. In these contributions the growing need for a community awareness is written neither from a *grossdeutsch* nor a *kleindeutsch* point of view. The papers show evidence of old issues having been thoroughly rethought during the last decades, and above all liberated from the concept and rigid mold of the nation-state, in search of new criteria for identification.

*Udo Rossback's* "Documenting Publications Related to the Concept of National Identity" concludes the selection of essays with a list of relevant international literature.

This book will engage the attention of the serious general reader as well as the social scientists representing various disciplines. It should be a required reading for all students of the national question. Especially for those who are interested in study of ethnically intermingled areas such as East-Central Europe, where a large number of national groups live in communities extending across state boundaries, and where a particularly sharp antagonism between the "nation-state" and "national culture" has emerged and is still taking place.