

Forget the 'nation': post-nationalist understanding of nationalism¹

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Abstract

There is a great failure and mental morass concerning theory and political practice of nation and nationalism, including not only traditional approaches but late nationalism studies as well. The reason is a long-standing and widely shared quest for adequate definition of what does not exist, in reality, as a collective body. Nation is a powerful metaphor which two forms of social groupings – polity (state) and ethnic entity (the people) – are fighting to have as their exclusive property. In its latest manifestation, it is an argument for geopolitical engineering and for questioning the legitimacy of weaker collective actors on the part of the winners. There is no sense in defining states and ethnic groups by the category of a nation. The latter is a ghost word, escalated to a level of meta-category through historic accident and inertia of intellectual prescription. A suggested 'hard scenario' for breaking the methodological impasse is a 'zero option', when both major clients for being a nation will be deprived of a luxury called by that label. The process of dismantling the non-operational category should be started with the intellectual courage to forget the nation as an academic definition and extend this logic into the domain of politics and everyday discourse.

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There is a conceptual *impasse* characterizing studies of 'nation' and 'nationalism'. The main reason for this is a widely shared belief that it is not the *reality* (essentialist or constructivist) of the nation, but rather the *real* problem, since the subject came on to the research agenda, is the weakness of scholars to define it. A similar inference is made as follows:

Nationalism and, indeed, the nation itself appear in an ever greater diversity of forms and configurations, changing and constantly reinventing the phenomena that scholars have meticulously tried to fit into analytical categories. However, even though no definition may appear completely satisfactory given the complexity and multidimensionality

of national identity, a working definition is necessary for constructing a theoretical framework (Triandafyllidou 1998, pp. 594–95).

Thus, we have a situation when the phenomenon being analysed is described not through ‘analytical categories’ but through a randomly selected ‘working definition’ for the purpose of developing further theory. This scholarly rationale travels from one publication to another and from one generation of scholars to another. Until very recently, no one seriously challenged this major mystification surrounding notions of *nation* and *nationalism* which, from our point of view, are not academic or politically functional categories (Tishkov 1996a, 1997a). The same question was raised recently by the outstanding anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, who said

[F]or me the question is: how useful is the idea of “nationalism” for sorting all this out, first intellectually and then in policy terms? I have no simple answer to this question and no complicated one either. But doubts arise when ordering concepts such as “countries”, “peoples”, “societies”, “cultures”, and, of course, “states” all seem to get sucked into “nationalism”, as though it were some sort of a strange attraction – their particular force and meaning lost or weakened as they become interchangeable with it and with each other: multiple synonyms with floating referents (1997, p. 4).

A few other authors elaborated in similar directions mainly on European materials (Verdery 1993; Brubaker 1996; Wicker 1997) making it easier to formulate a major revision of the nation mainly as a problem of a wrong language being chosen for defining human coalitions and projects. Here, we suggest this revision through analysing how everyday political rhetoric and geopolitical social engineering prescribe and actually dictate the directions and language of research, thus making theory of nationalism even more decrepit and obsolete.

Weakness of traditional vision

All former and contemporary visions of nationalism are weak because they elicit more questions than answers. The dominant *Weberian* or *historical* approach views nationalism as a global phenomenon with its own moment of origin, stages of growth, and similar characteristics regardless of region and country. Within this framework, little difference can be found between the ethnic tree of nations drawn by Anthony Smith (1986), the ethno-historical interpretation of Miroslav Hroch (1985), John Armstrong’s nations before nationalism (1982) and the ethno-genesis constructions and nationalities studies of the Rossian² scholars (Bromley 1983, 1987). For the last ones, *ethnoses* or ethno-nations often

go back to a late Paleolithic time, thus providing based on culture group identities with a continuous historical lineage (see, for example, encyclopedic articles in Tishkov 1994; 1998). Methodologically, the historical (Weberian/Marxist) approach tends to see a *nation* as a powerful social and historical reality, and this archetypal collective body serves the only basis for a 'normal' state, its political economy and culture.

Authors of numerous definitions of the term *nation* attributed to it objective/subjective characteristics like territory, language, common economy, mentality (shared beliefs), and so on. As a collective body and historical subject, a *nation* also has its own (*national*) consciousness, or in a more elegant way, (*national*) identity and a collective will and aspirations (*basic needs, interests, fears, 'everyday referendum'*). As to ethnically mobilized politics and violent fights, these are seen and interpreted through to the same rhetoric of 'national' sovereignty, liberation, struggle, revolution, war, and so on. For example, according to the German historian of 'multinational Russia', Andreas Kappeler, 'national consciousness and national movements are a product of lengthy development, and their legitimacy results from history' (1993, p. 9). Thus, a *nation* is a kind of a 'terminal community of fate' (Geertz's earlier definition which contradicts his present day vision) or a sum of all generations.

All attempts to develop terminological consensus around *nation* resulted in a grand failure, including methodologically poor project on concepts and terms in the study of ethnicity (see Riggs 1985) under the auspices of the International Social Science Council's Committee on Conceptual and Terminological Analysis [INTERCOCTA]. None of the existing definitions is a functional one due to endless exclusions, especially when one tries to make a list of (non-)nations and to define their membership beyond the fact of sharing citizenship. All kinds of scholastic taxonomies of (non-)nation-states and nation-groups look like naive scholarship with a narrow view of what is supposed to be a global exercise (Nielsson 1985). No more enriching and convincing textbook-styled descriptions of 'the integrated theory of the politics of nationalism and ethnicity' (Kellas 1991) or Oxford readers on nationalism (Hutchinson and Smith 1994).

Most often, authors use the terms *nation, nationalism, national, multinational, transnational* when talking about different phenomena and taking the basic word and its derivatives as just granted. A certain academic conventionality can be observed only on pre-consensus level of nationalism discourses with inter- and intra-state oppositions involved when two broad forms of nationalism can be observed: political/civic/state nationalism and ethnic/cultural nationalism. There is also a good degree of consensus among scholars that civic nationalism is attributed to a political community that usually has a referent ('core') culture(s) linked to a dominant (demographically and politically) ethnic

group(s) or to a multicultural (*national*) representation complex. As for ethnonationalism, it refers to an ethnic community with a political and an etatist element to it also. In other words, civic nationalism cannot be neutral in a cultural sense: politics and bureaucracy prefer to speak one language, usually a language of eponymous ('titular') group or a language of former metropoly. For example, in the Russian Federation, this is exemplified by the dominance of the Russian (*russkii*) language and culture. In its turn, ethnonationalism cannot avoid claiming authority and state and to be a political project as well. For example, practically all Soviet culturally distinct communities were first trained to be 'socialist nations' with their 'own' statehoods before aspiring to full political sovereignty as soon as the process of liberalization was launched by Gorbachev's *perestroika*.

Those who do make a distinction between two types of nationalism regard state nationalism as a liberal ideology and a legitimate practice of nation-building, that is, the creation of a nation-state. It exists in many forms – from patriotism and isolationism, to chauvinism and expansionist messianism. Ethnonationalism is usually interpreted as a collectivist and authoritarian one. It is defined as a form of particularism and exclusivity and, furthermore, as a means for a certain group to gain political power and control over resources and to create ethnically homogeneous states alien to pluralistic democracy and civil society (Greenfeld 1992). It is only recently that an apology for and a requalification of ethnonationalism have been offered within the framework of the traditional Weberian concept. It is presented either as a true 'liberal nationalism' (Tamir 1993; Lind 1994) as opposed to a civic nationalism being a form of 'nation-destroying' rather than of 'nation-building' (see, the earliest view expressed by Connor 1972) or as a phenomenon of 'national rebirth', 'national awareness', 'national awakening', or 'culture incarnate' (see, Balzer 1995; Guibernau 1996; Smith 1997). The essentialist approach remains to serve the level of everyday language perceptions when students of nationalism never question the functional significance of basic terms, especially since of late they have become meta-categories, scholarly disciplines and titles of professional journals and associations.

The constructivist interpretation of nation and nationalism looks more sensitive and appealing for social scientists but on closer examination it is still no less essentialistic than a primordialist vision. In this approach, a *nation* is seen as a social construct and an imagined collective, becoming a crude reality as the masses begin to believe in the idea of one community and its major political/cultural references. More often, no factual evidence for these shared beliefs at group level is provided, apart from citations from élitist writings contrasted with an illiterate populace, and the group-called-a-nation is nothing more than post-factual, selective reductionism of much more complex diversities. In this case, nation and

nationalism vocabulary serves as a sort of 'mechanism for the reconceptualization of a political community which had been categorized in other ways before' (Geertz 1997, p. 3). This is even more relevant for a cultural community. We have only one reservation: in both cases (political and cultural) reconceptualization procedures are an élite project on behalf of something often arbitrary and selectively called *nation*.

The constructivist vision has been challenged recently by the *posties* like 'post-colonialists'. There are also authors who elaborated the concept further as the new version of 'indigenous nationalism'. They argue, for example, that Bengali nationalism (and therefore the Bengali nation) existed in India before the state Indian nationalism of Nehru and Gandhi and it is not only a printing industry but war which brings a nation into existence (Chatterjee 1993; Balakrishnan 1996). The works of African scholars include studies of 'aboriginal nationalism' during colonial times. They doubt the legitimacy of post-colonial African nationalism of non-tribal (civic) types and use this to substantiate the current legitimacy of mini-nationalism within multi-ethnic states in the continent. To overcome the Euro-centric character of previous debates and to give a global dimension to discourse on the nation, it is the case that nations in their *Asian forms* (Tonnesson and Antlov 1996) are invented now for the regions and countries where this political category itself and 'every-day referendum' had never existed at all.

The most recent efforts are directed towards combining political and cultural/symbolic (representative) substances of the nation. In 're-thinking ethnic and racial studies' Martin Bulmer and John Solomos suggest

A nation is not only a political entity but something which produces meanings – a system of cultural representations. People are not only legal citizens of a nation; they participate in the idea of the nation as represented in national culture. A nation is a symbolic community and it is this which accounts for its power to generate a sense of identity and allegiance (1998, p. 827).

The problem with this remark on the representative nature of a nation is the same as with previous formulae: it does not meet a given case. The actual case citations again evoke more doubts than clarifications. The editors of *ERS* put the following questions:

But how is the modern nation imagined? What representation strategies are deployed to construct our commonsense views of national belonging or identity? What are the representations of, say, England, which win the identifications and define the identities of English people? (p. 827).

Behind these questions we read a supposition that before asking about

(prior) symbolic representations, one should accept the 'English people' as an accomplished nation. This supposition suggests several questions.

In the case of the 'English people' being a nation, how many other nations exist in what should be labelled, according to this logic, 'multi-national' Great Britain (or, the United Kingdom)? If a nation is not only a political entity but also a representation, then what are the political and civic (citizenship) parameters of 'English people'? If 'English people' is a *fait accompli nation*, does it mean that there is no 'British nation'. Furthermore, how can you sort out the British population among the English, Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish nations? If both (British and specific) characteristics exist, how do they coexist: on mutually non-exclusive or on parallel trajectories, and again, how are you to deal with the issue of membership for all these nations? As to the British nation, it is clearly a citizenship and this approach allows one to understand the language used by other authors of the same journal when, for example, they elaborate on the *transnationalism* phenomenon and use words like *national governments* and *national borders* (Portes *et al.* 1999). But again, what is political, civic and even cultural behind the 'not only political entity' English nation?

Identity and representation references are not enough to solve this epistemological dilemma because identities are multiple, situational and fluid. I noticed that my friend Dan Smith, Director of the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo, self-categorizes himself more often as 'English' while locating in the UK, and as 'British' while in Norway. Several years ago I had exactly the same debate in a London restaurant with the late Ernest Gellner who also favoured the notion of 'English nation' but could not answer my immediate question as to what would be his own personal national affiliation. Ernest Gellner was a self-confident person but even he agreed at that moment that what we were talking about was rather a question of academic *heteroglossia* over esoteric realities? Thus, in spite of an existing rich library with many ideas, in my view nationalism studies fail to address the main issues: what really are 'nation' and 'nationalism', and why is there no consensus on what we are discussing? The big paradox is that the modern intellectual quest is retreating from better understanding and from any integral theory.

Late nationalism as a political project and as a fight

The liberal West would never have achieved victory over Communism (a metaphor for the USSR and its political/ideological system) in such a dramatic form, had it not had such a powerful ally as the Soviet (or East-European) ethno-cultural understanding of the word *nation*. It is precisely this doctrine, based on its political practice, that directed Gorbachev's liberalization not only, or not so much, along the path of civic democratization and the improvement of governance, but along the

path of break-up and conflict. This happened because the word 'liberalization' is closely related to the notions of statehood and political self-determination. As a result of this relationship, immediate associations arise when the same word is used in its ethnic connotation; for the ethnic Abkhazians, Chechens, Kazakhs, Lets, Russians, Tatars and Ukrainians, they must seek *national* self-determination and possess their 'own' states as *nations*. If they do not have their 'own national state', then they are a kind of 'semi-nation' or incomplete nation. Equally, all ethnic Germans, Hungarians, Russians and others, who constitute separate nations, must reunite or return to their 'historic homeland'. It includes even those who call themselves *Germans* but who are, in fact, Russians as far as culture and identity are concerned, and their ancestors moved to *Rossia* at a time when there were no 'Germans' at all. According to the same logic, if Czechs and Slovaks live in one state, the more natural solution would be to create two states. And *vice versa*, Albanian 'national communities' (notice that this vocabulary borrowed from Marxist-Titoist Yugoslavia is also the language of Western 'peace-enforcement' for Kosovo) in Macedonia and Yugoslavia claim they would be better off as one 'Great Albania' (*Shqiperia e Madhe*) together with 'the mother country' of Albania. At least, those were allegedly their sentiments before ethnic Albanian activists in Kosovo, together with their external supporters during the war for division, started to redefine themselves as a *Kosovar nation* deserving its 'own' state.

Different arguments are cited by academics and public activists to support these postulates and political appeals: from naive-mythology to intellectual dishonesty. Again, as to the former USSR area, scholastic rhetoric on ethno-nations as biosocial or ethno-social organisms (Bromley 1983, 1987; Gumilev 1989, 1990) served for several decades as the basis for (post-)Soviet ethnic engineering and for nationalist entrepreneurship as well. These *ethnos* schemata had been inherited from past intellectual tradition, but they were reanimated on a grand scale in a situation of ideological vacuum when ethnicity became the only easily understandable and accessible form of collective mobilization. *Ethnos* and *nation* became rigid synonyms which in a time of painful transformations and of a healing from past traumas carried provocative political projections about the 'dying out' of a nation, 'nation-destroying', 'nation-killing' as a danger within the framework of 'multinational states'. There is no big difference in what is cited as a case, be it 'deported' Chechens (Lieven 1998) or 'divided' Russians (Kozlov 1996): the arguments and a message are completely similar. In my view, they represent militant and exclusivist – but politically unrealized – projects for usurping the state (its power and resources) on behalf of ethno-nations. They are projects of self-determination on the part of élites or of armed sects trying to use exiting 'oppressed ethnic groups' to take a separate historic journey.

The simplistic vision of the external world motivates another argument

of ethno-nationalists. This simplicity penetrates social science texts as well. Many activists and analysts perceive Germany, Italy, France, Norway, Sweden, Finland and others as countries peopled with eponymous peoples (nations) speaking one language. Participating in current political debates, they may argue that the Spaniards who have achieved self-determination live in Spain, the English – in England, the Chinese – in China, the Indonesians – in Indonesia, the Pakistanis – in Pakistan, and so on. For example, many domestic and outside experts on the former communist world believe that after the break-up of the USSR and Yugoslavia, the historic norm of ‘nation-states’ has been (re)established for most of these states: from the Baltic countries to Croatia, Slovenia and Macedonia. There is only one ‘multinational state’ left: it is *Rossia* where not all, but only fourteen nations have attained self-determination. The others ‘did not gain independence following the break-up of the USSR simply because of bad luck or a quirk of fate, but not because they are any less deserving’ (Carley 1996, p. 15). Behind this rhetoric, there is a hidden political agenda in the assumption that in the post Cold War world a problem has emerged around the non-accomplished process for nation-building or of ‘quasi-sovereign states’ (Carment and James 1997, p. 205). Therefore, the *Rossian* Federation remains a ‘mini-empire’ (Balzer 1994) or ‘improper Russia’ (Brzezinski 1994) covering a huge territory spanning eight time zones. *Rossia* is a historical anomaly, a ‘wrong state’.

The third argument of late nationalism is a wrong reading or manipulation of international legal norms and declarations on minority rights and self-determination. The irony is that the USSR had been a long-standing champion of the ideology of self-determination, especially for ‘exploited’ and colonial peoples. As to the outside world, this ideology was installed as a means of supporting ‘international national-liberation movements’, gaining in superpower rivalries, and exposing imperialism. Experts and propagandists did not bother about the fact that the principle of self-determination and the post-colonial states were a product of anti-ethnic thinking and of political/administrative territoriality. This ambivalence has never been perceived and explained for consumers of this principle among the domestic audience. New understanding did not emerge even after the break-up of the USSR which in reality happened not along ethnic lines but on a basis of existed multi-ethnic Soviet republics. Activists from many ethnic groups considered *nations* by Soviet definitions formulated different scenarios of exclusion or division fighting. The most flamboyant leaders in Abkhazia, Chechnya, Karabakh, South Ossetia and Transdnistria managed a self-proclaimed independence and organized a military resistance against steps of new states to defend their territorial integrity. Three out of five cases escalated into major wars with heavy human and material losses without reaching political goals.

Late post-Soviet ethnonationalism emerged as a political and academic metaphor that caused a serious reassessment of world experts on nationalism. Self-determination became revised through many new publications. Most discouraging, these changes in thinking about nationalism occurred as an apparent effect of new political agendas and ambitions, not as a result of acquiring new knowledge. Eric Hobsbawm (1990) referred to nationalism as a 'political project'. Today, one can talk about a *project around nationalism*, that is, about a grandiose exploitation of this category to impose new semantics and normative prescriptions on the world community. The testing ground for this is a facile label, 'ruins of empire', which is applied to former Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union area, including *Rossia*.

A number of serious experts agree that the language of the so-called Marxist-Leninist theory of nation and national question (see Connor 1984) and the political practice brought about by this theory have proved to be self-destructive due to unforeseen political consequences (see, for example, Suny 1993; Brubaker 1994). But it did not serve as a lesson for any serious revisions of this decrepit methodology. At least, this was the case in *Rossia*. The constitutional experts began the first line of the 1993 Constitution with 'We, the multinational people of the *Rossian* Federation . . .'. In the Soviet past one did not bother with 'multinationality' and 'self-determination up to cessation', clichés found in many declarations and academic writings. There were no procedures or chances for their implementation. Only recent transformations have brought to life a new situation where it is possible to seek more responsible meanings and thereby produce adepts of these meanings. It is still not clear what price will be paid for the inertia of the élite's mentality. What is clear is that there are many experts and policy-makers within and beyond *Rossia* who are ready to punish the country for its intellectual impotence.

It is hard to deny that Western experts and politicians made use of the self-destructive language of their long-standing opponents in order to create intriguing scenarios to dismantle the USSR and to promote a second round of disintegration at the expense of *Rossia*. In this respect, the position of Western expertise has quickly been consolidated: there are no ethnic minorities in 'multinational' *Rossia*; instead there are 'non-status nations' or 'nations without states' (Bremmer and Taras 1993). The ideological message is clear: ethnic problems in *Rossia* are the problems of minorities, their cultural status and needs; 'national problems' in 'multinational' *Rossia* are the issues concerning nations and their self-determination in relation to the non-nation-state or 'the imperial system'. As John Hall writes,

In retrospect, it is obvious that the Bolsheviks continued the work of the Tsars, thereby so delaying nation-building that its contemporary incidence is that much sharper and more determined. The peoples of

the former Soviet Union itself were always likely to be attracted to nationalism for the imperial system which dominated them was led by Russians – whose depredations were not merely political and economic but quite as much ecological (Hall 1995, p. 25).

This explicitly political stance ignores the point that it is precisely the Bolsheviks who constructed, institutionalized and sponsored ethnic nations in the country. It is also because of them that all major non-Russian ethnic groups used to have and possess today a growing level of ethno-territorial autonomy with their own constitutions, state symbols, languages, legitimate governments and strong representation in federal power structures. Tainted with one-side politics, academics do not bother to inquire how it is possible for mythopoetic collective bodies – nations – not to have their own state while not a single member of the nations – the people of *Rossia* – is a stateless person. All have their own state called the *Rossian* Federation.

‘We, *Rossian* Germans, are deprived of our own statehood’, Vladimir Bauer, President of *Rossian* Germans Cultural Autonomy Association, declared at a meeting.

‘Does that mean that you personally – or anybody you represent – do not have a state to belong to?’ – I had to ask Bauer in response, given that he was the Federal Deputy Minister of Nationalities and former Head of Administration Department at the State Duma, and thus a man who had all thinkable and unthinkable rewards as a result of being in the state service for the last five to six years.

To understand and to expose the emptiness and hidden agenda of this scholastic debate on who belongs to the state of *Rossia*, it is best to descend to a personal level. If ethnic Russians (*russkie*) dominate the state and bring for the ‘others’ even ‘ecological depredations’ and the others represent ‘nations without states’, does it mean that three of my Deputy-Directors and half of my Institute’s staff do not have ‘their own state’ and the rest, including myself, do? Does it mean that about half of the members of the Federal (national!) government rule their own state, and the other half, including the recent Prime Minister Primakov, a Jew, do not rule ‘their own state’? And how is it that the Tsars did not speak the Russian language and Stalin and Beria spoke it with a heavy Georgian accent? And how had it happened that one-third of the Chernomyrdin’s government were ministers with an ethnic Ukrainian background? The same would also be true of the previous Krushchev and Brezhnev ruling party clans. Born in the USSR, living in *Rossia*, and being a member of the Egor Gaidar’s government, I cannot locate who were and are these ‘Russians’ who ‘led’ this country and cause the ‘depredations’ cited above?

The irony of double readings (and, consequently, of double standards) demonstrates, for example, that for Western social scientists peoples like

the Navajo, Odjibwee or Hawaiians with long experience of self-determination and 'first nations' programme, remain in the categories of ethnic groups or minorities. My US colleagues whom I had consulted in my Amerindian research two decades ago assured me that the passports issued by the *Odjibwee nation* were nothing more than the manipulations of urban professional Indians. Maybe they were right and I was wrong by writing in the Soviet tradition about the 'American Indian national self-determination movement'. It is also possible to agree with non-militant academic *heteroglossia* when my friend, the American anthropologist John Moore, displayed his political sympathies by calling his profound ethnography *The Cheyenne Nation* (1987) without risking a challenge to the state which could have caused serious damage to this part of the US citizenry. But there is also the *heteroglossia* of the fighting *nation* when words can kill more than bullets. For post-Soviet space, it is not just a question of ambivalent language because too much blood has already been spilt over academic definitions that become uncompromising, political projects. In transforming *Rossia*, there is another, more acute agenda of de-etatisating ethnicity and the de-ethnicization of the state. Other approaches to ethnonationalism leave no room for governance in the course of peaceful transformation from an *ethnos* to *demos* based polity.

Nationalism as a politically correct and dangerous utopia

To be precise, the terminological drift and politically motivated ambivalence of the discourse on nationalism did not start with the collapse of the USSR. In 1960–80, the notion of a nation in the ethno-cultural sense began to be introduced into the international academic and political language under the influence of human rights and minorities movements. A number of prominent scholars and publicists spoke out quite consistently from what they considered a humanistic position against different forms of direct and structural violence, often exercised by the state against the non-dominant groups. This school was represented by the Norwegian scholar, Johan Galtung whose recent book contains an ambitious plan of bringing 'peace by peaceful means', including the creation of an organization of united ethno-nations (1996). As a persistent proponent of state self-determination for ethno-cultural communities (including his spouse's 'native people', the Hawaiians), he believes that this principle is applicable to the whole world. In spite of its strong humanistic connotations, this is a risky and naive utopia because, strangely enough, it appears to lead more often than not to humanitarian catastrophe.

Many Western anthropologists have contributed to this sympathizing ethnography, acting as self-appointed advocates of small groups who are discriminated against. What has not been noticed is that quite often they are playing the role of manipulated romantics or political lobbyists for

local, sophisticated activists and those who pretend to speak on behalf of their people. This allowed anthropologist Fredrik Barth to say about his colleagues the following:

They have neglected the closer analysis of process of collective decision making that emerge on the median level [for Barth, this is a level of group mobilization for diverse purposes by diverse means, the field of entrepreneurship, leadership and rhetoric] and how they produce policies and actions at odds with the popular will and the shared interests of people in the population affected (Barth 1994, p. 24).

A similar position has been formulated by Donald Horowitz who criticizes politically correct sympathy for the claims to self-determination of 'oppressed' ethno-nations without considering the likely knock-on effects for others of any resulting secession. Horowitz laments the great failure of imagination in adapting democratic institutions to the predicament of severely divided societies (1997). By the way, this remark reminds me of the visit to *Rossia's* republic of Tatarstan which Donald Horowitz and I made in 1993 at a time of turmoil, when local radical nationalists and their sympathizers propagated non-negotiable secession. President Mintemir Shaimiev assured us of his persistence in negotiating a situation which eventually won more common good for everyone else in comparison with cases of breakaway regions in post-Soviet states.

There is much evidence of how the chaotic behaviour of the apologists for 'exoticized' ethnic groups and their grievances has greatly contributed to the serious destabilization of the situation in Chechnya and the Caucasus at large and ruined a fragile inter-group balance in this region of *Rossia* (Tishkov 1997a). For some experts, these linguistically and politically 'nationalized' communities within *Rossia* are 'utterly different nations, which can be seen as representing forces which have confronted each other since the very beginnings of recorded human history' (Lieven 1998, p. 4). This has been said about hypothetical Russian *versus* Chechen opposition by a representative of a national school of social science which treats the opposition between the equally hypothetical 'Navajo nation' *versus* 'American nation' as an urban intellectual's provocation.

No less interesting a case is where East-European lobbyists introduced ethnonational semantics at the level of an international official language. It was through Hungarian and Turkish initiatives that the word *national* has been added to the title of the UN International Labour Organisation [ILO] Declaration 'On the rights of persons belonging to ethnic, racial, linguistic and religious minorities'. Thus, typologically similar situations became qualified as 'language minority' or 'ethnic minority' in some European countries and 'national minority' in the others. *Heteroglossia* ceased to be recognized as such and became a clear policy when the

Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe [OSCE] established a High Commissioner for National Minorities. As a result, activities of this institution have been channelled towards the countries of the former USSR and its linguistic followers in the 'national question'. The High Commissioner, Max van der Stoep, was never allowed to visit Northern Ireland, Tyrol or Pays Basques because by definition it is not *national*, but ethnic, religious and language minorities who live in the UK, Italy and Spain. Yet the metaphor of *Basque nation*/Nation Corsicaine is no weaker among these groups than among Chechens or Tatars.

A radical collapse in understanding nationalism took place most recently. During the last few years, international lawyers and politicians have begun to revise the doctrine of self-determination by retreating from the principle of state integrity and non-recognition of self-proclaimed secession. By reacting to strongly shocking atrocities carried out by a state towards its civic population, they often missed the nature of militant, non-negotiable separatism or irredentism, granting it an undeserved moral stance which is not there. Kosovo and Slavonia are striking examples where one 'national community' (ethnic Albanians in Yugoslavia) has been armed, instructed and defended with airstrikes to punish Milosevic. In the same mirror situation, another 'national community' (ethnic Serbs in Croatia) have been cleansed for the same punishing purpose.

In order to conform to contemporary political correctness, some political philosophers have revised the concept of *nationality* in favour of its ethno-cultural (Soviet) meaning (Miller 1995). Moreover, the obviously weak but politically correct explanatory models for recent geopolitical transformations have become dominant. These are based on clichés (coined by Carrere d'Encausse) about '*l'empire éclaté*' (collapsed empire) and 'the triumph of the nations' (1978, 1993) when explaining the break-up of the USSR and ethnic turmoils in the former 'Socialist camp'. A more sensitive analysis, however, suggests that it is precisely the metaphor 'the triumph of the nations' which is the more likely to win out.

One of the intellectual fallouts of a new monocentric world can also be traced in the tendency to talk about the 'challenge to the state' (Kottak 1998) and about a new shift in international relations. Here hundreds of 'minorities at risk', by virtue of historical law, are on their way to abolish 'failed states' and to remake global political geography (Carment and James 1997). Renewed debates on what is a nation-state and who does and who does not deserve this title are really embarrassing. Impressive quantitative methodologies used for these studies are poor but are astonishingly well financed and highly praised by enthusiasts of geopolitical engineering (Tishkov 1999).

It is rather obvious to me that nationalism studies approached intellectual collapse because of the Cold War mental inertia and new 'civilizational clashes' marketing the idea that one big fight should follow

another. However, not everything is in a hopeless morass, at least with a better understanding of European nationalism. For example, Rogers Brubaker argues that the upsurge in nationalism should not lead to reify nations.

Nationalism can and should be understood without invoking “nations” as substantial entities. Instead of focusing on nations as real groups, we should focus on nationhood and nationness, on “nation” as a practical category, institutionalized form, and contingent event. “Nation” is a category of practice, not (in the first instance) a category of analysis. To understand nationalism, we have to understand the practical use of the category “nation”, the ways it can come to structure perceptions, to inform thought and experience, to organize discourse and political actions (Brubaker 1996, p.7).

Nation as a ghost word

In the course of historic evolution, people make various coalitions for biological and social existence. The main feature of these human collectives is their tremendous diversity and changing dynamics. Scientists are searching to explain these coalitions through categories as certain consensus verbal models. These models are intended to reflect reality adequately and, at least, to provide a dialogue between scholars, managers and lay public. Being a speech act, categories have a number of important features. First, they are highly conventional and can in no way accommodate the diversity of social realms and of verbal experience. At different times and in different conditions, people tend to select different social configurations to be defined and these they call by different names. Secondly, speech acts are not only secondary, reflective phenomena; they have the power of prescribing and mobilizing, and may themselves bring about ‘real’ things and even destroy them. Finally, definitions born within academic discourse, political language and legal texts claim to express some higher form of common sense and to be a kind of prerequisite tool for scientific knowledge. They tend to compete on a horizontal (inter-language, inter-cultural) level when some academic concept and political formulae impose their dominant status upon others. This is especially relevant for the contemporary world when political information and academic dialogues are carried out on a global level.

The struggle over definitions and the imposition of meaning have become part of group competition, including that between worldwide coalitions. Thus, the establishment of meanings through definitions is an important element in a wider operation of imposing political will and power. Here, the language component and academic expertise act together with economic, military and other resources of competition. As

a rule, it is the richer and the stronger that impose definitions and lead debates. This is done not through a mandatory decree (although this can occur, for example, through international legal texts and declarations), but by having the means to allocate greater resources for training professional producers of subjective prescriptions (including academic formulae) and for their professional performance.

With the emergence of this particular form of globalization, it is the Western intellectual tradition that enjoys a dominant status in the world's social sciences. Despite some internal differences (first of all between European-American and East European-Soviet/Rossian discourses) this tradition has to a large degree a common ground, and many fundamental global concepts come from this milieu and evolve amidst this culture. This cultural tradition, for example, invented and introduced concepts like *race*, *tribe*, *family* which dominated global discourse before being seriously revised or dismantled as a result of fusion with other world cultural traditions (see corresponding accounts in Barnard and Spencer 1996). Usually, it does not happen without hostility towards deviations from long-cherished, commonly approved and well-served postulates.

Apparently, a weakness of the concept, or even the loss of its functional meaning, applies to the category *nation* and to its derivatives – *nationalism*, *nationality*, *nation-state*, and so on. Today, these words are really 'multiple synonyms with floating referents'. It is the semantic approach which may assist in finding a way out of the methodological impasse over the understanding and use of this concept in academic research and political language.

However, there is one more problem in understanding nationalism which I would define as the issue of the *ghost word* – as an analogy to an established phenomenon in linguistics and semantics. This refers to the case where a word emerges because of a misunderstanding as a result of a mistake by a scribe or a misprint in a dictionary (see Baranov and Dobrovolskii 1996, vol. 1, p. 249). In other words, we should not only be talking about better understanding and refining some concept, since it is no less interesting to learn how it itself originated through political and intellectual legitimization. How did initially random, unclear and common usage escalate to the level of a meta-category.

Comparative historical researches demonstrate how a *nation*, a term from a student fraternity in a medieval university, became a synonym for the state through important acts of political will. These include such events as the creation of the League of Nations (pan-European level of legitimization) and the United Nations anti-fascist coalition followed by the establishment of the UN. The latter was an act of global legitimization because to join the UN, its members had to share the *nation* label, even when neither the word nor the concept was present in other languages and societies.

Similar historic records can be established for the ethno-nation

phraseology beginning in the late nineteenth century Austro-Marxist writings and Wilsonian rhetoric, supported by the physical power of the winners of World War I. The major speech act result of this period has been to refer in public discourse to ethnic issues in complex societies as the 'national question' formula. Since then, the 'national question' in its non-etatist meaning, began its long journey in politics and academia of Eastern Europe and also among other ideological satellites of the USSR (such as Maoist China, Cuba, Mongolia and Nicaragua).

In the Soviet tradition, it is quite easy to trace when and how after the early Bolshevik of 'nations, nationalities, *narodnost*, and ethnographic groups' the term *ethnos* was constituted in the early 1920s (Shirokogorov 1923) and revitalized in 1970–1980 (Dragadze 1980; Shanin 1989; Banks 1996). These studies describe how the multiple use of the term *nation* gave way to a more rigid definition as the 'highest type of ethnic entity' with its scholastic taxonomies in a framework of so-called 'ethnic processes' (Bromley 1987; Bromley and Kozlov 1989).

There are many cases where everyday jargon or randomly selected words turn into encompassing categories which over a long period acquire their own life as powerful and indisputable concepts. Efforts to understand them can end with experts making the discouraging confession that nationalism anyway is beyond rational reasoning.

Because of this, we suggest as a methodological breakthrough that rather than viewing it as an organic phenomenon defined with textbook formulae, nationalism should be understood as a series of postulates and actions formulated and initiated by activists within a particular social space. Nationalism is a set of simplistic but powerful myths arising from and reaching to political practices. Lengthy debates about 'when is a nation?' (Connor 1994, pp. 210–26) are fruitless in many respects if not used in a civic/political sense to imply actual statehood.

What then is to be done with the nation? *Nation* is a word loaded with a vague but alluring political content. Activists use it for specific purposes to mobilize and establish their own in-group and out-group status. When it is introduced to a larger audience and becomes a part of everyday discourse, a group may be called a *nation* without any specific outcome. *Nation* is a metaphorical category that has acquired emotional and political legitimacy. It cannot be a category of analysis, that is, a scientific definition. As a result, it cannot be of service to public discourse because it is poor jargon for what it is supposed to name: state politics and ethnic entities. Because of high capitalization, both these two collective actors (or, more precisely, those who pretend to speak on behalf of either state politics or ethnic entities) are fighting to have the *nation* label as their exclusive property. Both have different chances to win a valuable trophy and the fight is not over. It would be wrong to keep the old rules and wait for an end game until the next millennium.

Changing a state of mind

In spite of lively debates on failing states and the end of the nation-state, these states as we know them remain the most powerful form of human coalitions with the crucial functions of organizing order and subsistence for contemporary human collectives. No other institutions can exercise these functions. States secure territorial boundaries and establish functioning modern governance. States enjoy a right to exercise legitimate violence towards members of this coalition, and states are responsible to provide internal peace and to prevent violence. 'Strong States, Strong Hopes' is a resumé of The Aspen Institute's report on Post Cold War United States foreign policy and the role of US foreign development assistance (Ulman 1997). This report has a sparkling conclusion: 'If American diplomats were given one wish that might come true, they should wish they were living in a world of strong states. They might, however, find it too boring' (p. 28). This last sentence is a true scholarly discovery: strong-strong is a boring dichotomy for those who find themselves in a situation when (using Newt Gingrich's words) 'time has come for us to change America and the rest of the human race'.

What is important is that by the virtue of their globality and power as well as by international (note the use of this word!) law and language, states have more resources and legitimacy to be called *nations*. So far, they have the capacity at least to define their membership through citizenship and thus to substantiate a collectivity with different levels of homogeneity. Even in difficult cases of deeply divided societies, Yugoslav Serbs and Albanians form more of a common community through everyday peaceful or warring interactions than all the ethnic Albanians (in Albania, Greece, Macedonia and Yugoslavia) who do not interact except for random trade trips, visits to relatives and smuggling arms and narcotics through Kosovo (Rapper 1998).

The problem is that this civic/cultural commonality is not in public debate and research agendas for reasons of politics and of linguistic tradition. In the former Yugoslavia's regions, as in the former USSR, all people with kinship links qualified as 'national communities'. Thus, the crucial dilemma emerged as to who makes a nation: all the people of states that are post-Yugoslav or post-Soviet, or people who are ethnically linked kin divided by state borders or living in far away countries? Or maybe, a nation is for those who can organize a militant fight (or front) to galvanize a certain polity, irrespective of how they label themselves: Kosovars, Transdnistrians, Karabakh Armenians, Northern Irish, or Québécois? This is a difficult question, actually without a definite and commonly agreed answer. Through history, the answer has been given through force, will and fortune but not by logic and established rules.

If the 'ethnos *versus* state' fight for a nation continues, it looks as if the

polities (states) will win the battle and not without a serious foundation. Together with their coat of arms, anthem and the myth of their history, the idea of nation serves as a symbol for the utilitarian purposes of consolidation and loyalty of the population within the state's borders. Using Ian Lustick's (1993) expression, 'the hegemonic idea of a state' attained through this concept is of no less importance to the polity than the Constitution, established legal norms and guarded borders. That is why every state undertakes efforts to impose a shared feeling of belonging, and not only by means of securing legal ties and responsibilities between the bureaucracy and the citizen. That is why today there are no states among the UN members that would not use this tool, or not consider their being a *nation-state*.

Thus, the question is not which state may be academically defined as 'national', and what state cannot? All attempts to work out such nomenclature are naive and useless. These attempts have never gone further than citing 'island state' cases or giving an approximate percentage. In reality, we can only be referring to the degree of success of a certain state in carrying out the operation of establishing the concept of a common nation among its citizens. Thus, we have to talk about the state of minds, and not about a real ethno-cultural or civic homogeneity. Some states are characterized by immense racial, ethnic and religious diversity or by sharp regional differences and disconnection. However, the belief in a common nation may exist on the élite, and even on the mass level. The examples would be India and Indonesia, Spain and Switzerland, the USA, Brazil and with a rather well articulated concept of a civic nation. Some of these states are racially and ethnically more diverse than *Rossia* where the record of *nation* metaphor is different.

States tend to differ more in regard to the degree of self-ascribed and properly institutionalized meaning, than to the degree of cultural diversity. As Liah Greenfeld notes:

In some societies, we fail to notice this diversity and believe them to be "homogenous", whereas in other societies it can manifest itself in the most painful forms. It happens not because there are less distinctive features among its members, but because the very same diversity is perceived differently. But each society attaches cultural significance to ethnicity and ethnic diversity, and not every society considers these characteristics as the essence of the basic identity of its members (Greenfeld 1994, p. 9).

A lot depends on administration policy and ideological prescriptions. In the 1950s, China conducted one of the censuses using Soviet standards and communist *ethnofilia*, and it happened that about 400 'nationalities' were identified. After urgent bureaucratic regrouping, only fifty-six have been officially institutionalized. Their overall

membership is still over 100 million people but no one is questioning China as a nation-state.

The USSR turned out to be a unique case in its attitudes towards the word *nation*. The Soviet authoritarian regime could afford the luxury of using ethno-nations in policy and administration, using them to build state structures. It was more because of the polemic with 'bourgeois federalism' based on territoriality than for any other reason that the principle of internal 'national statehoods' became established in the USSR. The idea of a civic nation was replaced by the ideology of Soviet patriotism and by the formulae of 'the Soviet people as the new historical community'. Therefore, the notion of a *nation* and the term *nationality* for ethnic affiliation became the property of culturally similar groups among the country's population. The task of 'nation-building' was delegated to the ethnically designated internal state formations. With the KGB, the Communist Party's apparatus, and with the newspaper *Pravda* at its disposal, the state easily downgraded the idea of *nation* to lower level structures than what is considered to be a 'national'. In the USSR, the appealing but potentially self-destructive formula of 'multinationality' emerged and nowadays it is strongly present in *Rossia*. Rogers Brubaker was right when he wrote:

Thus the Soviet Union was neither conceived in theory nor organized in practice as a nation-state. Yet while it did not define the state or citizenry as a whole in national terms, it did define component parts of the state or citizenry in national terms. Herein lies the distinctiveness of the Soviet nationality regime – in its unprecedented displacement of nationhood and nationality, as organizing principle of the social and political order, from the statewide to the sub-state level. No other state has gone so far in sponsoring, codifying, institutionalizing, even (in some case) inventing nationhood and nationality on the sub-state level, while at the same time doing nothing to institutionalize them on the level of the state as a whole (Brubaker 1996, p. 29).

The degree of success in using the metaphor of the *nation* at an all-state level depends not only on the purposeful ideological efforts of the state itself, but on other factors as well, among which economic well-being is extremely important. So-called *nation-building* does not correlate directly with the ethnic complexity or the ethnic homogeneity of the population. Economically successful states with socially successful, liberal governance tend to secure the loyalty of their citizens with greater ease. The latter are more willing to recognize a 'common nation' state, that they consider a homeland, when they recognize it as being better to live in than other countries. The length of process which was needed for their consolidation (*nation-formation*) does not in itself account for the homogeneous character of, say, Euro-American states. It can, however,

be explained in part by the strong preference of the community members to maintain the social comfort they have achieved. Prosperity and order, which are important for any individual, enable wealthy countries to live without frantic efforts of civic nation-building, and even without the ensuing results of homogenization.

It is commonly believed that these countries underwent nation-building in the faraway past, in the times of the Tudors, the French Revolution, Bismarck, or Mazzini. For the lay public and for many experts, the Western European civic nations look like a *fait accompli* and are regarded as classical nation-states, those enjoying full legitimacy based on single core cultures. However, we know this not to be the case. The cultural and political heterogeneity of accomplished nation-states was not only sustained throughout the twentieth century, but it actually increased. Furthermore, it did not happen because of a kind of 'mini-nationalism' in Europe, but because of the influx of immigrant populations. These new populations are often more nationally-thinking than the old settlers. For example, in the UK, it is likely that only a minority would describe themselves as belonging to the 'British nation', whereas the majority differentiate between the English, Irish, Scottish or Welsh nations, by identifying themselves in ethno-cultural terms. Yet, very few would question the British nation-state and the British nation.

Therefore, the question is not only about the *building* and *forming* of collective bodies called *nations*. The question is whether one is willing to challenge this idea and to wage dissident 'we are different' debates. It seems that clients of cultural particularism or irredentism appear more often as soon as there is a deterioration in the standard of living or in security conditions. They may also happen to be the wealthiest section of the country's population who prove unwilling to share their gains with other members of the polity. Quite often, they are the first to challenge the project of 'one nation'.

Civic nations or nation-states may be regarded as 'terminal communities' only when there are no domestic and outside challenges or when these nations are protected by powerful military alliances. Spain and Turkey are one example. To contest the success of these countries in establishing commonly shared nations or to speak of them as 'multi-national states' with 'non-status nations' is virtually impossible, partly because of NATO's umbrella. That kind of questioning was much easier in reference to the former 'Second' and 'Third' Worlds where experts found what they call 'quasi-society' (Jackson 1990; Hall 1995, p. 27) or 'illegitimate states' (Guibernau 1996, p. 59). Actually, we can speak only of the degree of loyalty among citizens of poorly performing states, and this is not sufficient for making a politically significant categorization based on a *nation* metaphor. There are even less grounds to define 'legitimate' (mainly European) and 'illegitimate' (African and Asian) states (see this classification in Guibernau 1996).

The core of the academic problem is therefore not to establish the nomenclature of non-nation-states ('quasi-societies', 'mini-empires', and 'multinational states') and to turn them into nation-states as some kind of encompassing and natural form. Concerning *Rossia*, according to some experts, it would be 'making a felicitous environment of Russia to define itself as a proper Russia' (Brzezinski 1994, p. 79). The fact is that we are dealing with a phenomenon of weak and strong, rich and poor states where citizens, and especially élites, have different degrees of (dis)loyalty and opportunities for their manifestation. In *Rossia*, there exists a high degree of cultural and civic homogeneity. At the same time there are strong but mutually non-exclusive ethnic group identities which are articulated by conflicting élites.

The problem of this particular state of *Rossia*, we are dealing with the moral revolution of double negation when there was a radical rejection of political order and ideology which brought the denial of legitimacy of the state per se, of its history and its living experience. This huge area of the world became a mental *terra nullis*. Past human 'normality' and everyday muddling through became the caricature of *Homo Sovieticus* a concept imposed from the outside. As regards this case, contemporary nation-state discourse is impossible to understand outside of the context of global power dispositions. In contrast, no one would try to define 'proper America' according to the country's 'hegemonic idea' through the image conjured up in the words of the much loved song:

From California to the New York island,
From the redwood forest to the gulfstream waters,
This land is made for you and me!
[of course, without Alaska and Hawaii! –VT.]

States tend to use tools of consolidation differently. In some stable countries, like Switzerland or Great Britain, there is no need to stress notions of *Swiss nation* and *British nation*. Some are very nationalistic in a civic sense, like the USA where people sing the song 'America, America' even at the Oklahoma bombing memorial ceremony. In other countries, consolidation and rationalization of the entire society are provided by other means that prevent the fragmentation of what seem like 'quasi-societies' to the Western Europeans. In ex-Yugoslavia, it was the one party structure, a strong national leader's charisma (Tito, incidentally, was an ethnic Croat) and the modest pan-Yugoslav ideology which made this nation-state not the worst one even by European standards, especially from the point of minority status. In the former German Democratic Republic (East Germany) a 'socialist nation' unitary ideology, superious sport and a repressive apparatus secured the same mission. In China, however, the same ideological complex functions – the one party structure and a strong historical myth of an ancient state as the

centre of the Universe. In India, we can find the ideology and practice of pluralism, tolerance and compromise together with pan-Indianism. In Iceland and Jamaica there is a complex of geographical isolation that also implies integrity. In Puerto Rico it is a complex of association with a powerful neighbour. Theoretically speaking, there is no need for a *nation* to be a legitimate state. All these debates are political ones.

Today, to categorize two members of the UN, the former GDR as a *non-nation-state* and the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) as a *nation-state* would imply a *post-factual* rationalization. The GDR and ex-Yugoslavia were no less legitimate compared with other states. The real question is why did the Germans cross the Berlin wall in only one direction? They did so not because of their desire to leave a 'non-nation' and become members of their 'own nation-state'. The explanation should be looked for in the preferred social conditions, including political freedom. A reference to any specific language or political tradition, if East Central Europe is to use the words and hence the concepts 'state' and 'nation' distinctly and separately, does not thereby provide a 'more prudent and more productive' easy escape, as some specialists believe (Rothschild 1994).

Zero option for states and *ethnoses*

Contemporary *nation* and *nationalism* discourse in Eastern Europe and in post-Soviet states is in a political and doctrinal *grande impasse* and it is useless to discuss it in any traditional framework. It is really a problem of political mind. Partly, there is the difficulty of refocusing a research paradigm from 'ontological nationalism' to 'psychological nationalism' when 'both government and the people make a supreme effort to reaffirm and further develop the positive cultural and psychological characteristics, and make a similar effort to mitigate, reduce, perhaps eliminate the negative' (Diaz-Guerrero 1997, p. 379). The latter perspective looks like wishful thinking but no one should underestimate the role of perceptions and purposeful efforts to impose mental prescriptions. What I want to suggest as the 'hard scenario' of resolving this methodological and worldwide political problem is what I call the *zero option*.

States can abandon the use of the word *nation* as an academically and legally meaningless self-ascription. My position is that a state is just a state. Labelling it as 'national' or not, is like giving it an adjective of colour (for example, blue state, brown state). It is quite possible to start this major dismantling, beginning with academic language and expertise. This dismantling may happen rapidly as occurred at some moment of history with the concept of *renaissance*, initially understood and then maintaining its meaning as the second revival of the Ancient World.

This procedure, however, can be successful only if there is a simultaneous denial of the word by another competing client – the 'ethnic group'. The *nation* label with respect to ethnic community is even less

functional and even more meaningless. All attempts to sub-divide this type of human coalition, that is, ethnic entities into nations, 'peoples' or tribal groups are, in fact, counterproductive. Thomas Hylland Eriksen viewed the *nation* as a product of the ideology of nationalism and wrote that 'it emerges from the moment when a group of influential people decide that it should be the case' (1993, p. 105).

Once Evdokia Gayer, a member of Gorbachev's parliament and an indigenous leader, asked me: 'When, will we, the Nanais [an indigenous group in the *Rossian* Far East], be able to call ourselves a nation?' My answer was: 'From the moment you asked this question you can believe that there is such a nation'. Now, after six years, I can say that nothing developed along this line, simply because there was an absence of other activists from the same group as her to invest in this project. There are no other arguments for a nation but a chosen project and its followers.

Another example is a Gagauz case when in December 1995 a new nation emerged as a result of constituted autonomy in Moldova. No changes in cultural or social characteristics took place at the moment of this decision on the part of the Moldovan parliament. Whatever else happened, there was no *nation formation*. So the only way out of this *impasse* of meanings is to adopt the position that either all ethnic groups may call themselves nations if the term *nation* continues to play a role in politics, or else nobody can. At least, it should not go to the sphere of analysis.

Thus, behind the academically empty word *nation*, we are losing something much more important and 'real' in the multifaceted roles that ethnicity and *nationalism* rhetoric play in individual and group action. We are introducing into our research agenda a phenomenon that is simply not there and passing judgement on political actors and their accomplishments on the basis of false criteria and what I call 'mytho-poetic' definitions. That is why my final words are: forget the *nation* to save states, peoples and cultures, even if future scholars may question these definitions as well. As for the word itself, it looks as though there are new clients to try it on – among whom Californian gays and lesbians introduced this noble self-ascription by calling themselves a *Queer nation*. Let this people go.

Note

1. The author and editors of *ERS* are grateful to Dr Tamara Dragadze, London, for preparing the English version of the text.
2. *Rossia* and *Rossians* are a more precise English transliteration for the words used in the Russian language to define a country and its people (author's note).

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