

# Nations Beyond Interests. Emotional and Cognitive Motives in the Development of National Identities

István Kollai

*Comenius University Bratislava*

## Abstract

In mainstream academic discourse, the emergence of national identities has mostly been explained from a powerful modernist approach, claiming that nations, as we know them today, are modern and constructed phenomena. This implies that the spotlight of research has been on interest-based homogenization motives and how they can create mass loyalty as an efficient socio-cultural basis for political elites and capitalist markets. Nevertheless, attention might be slightly diverted from the possible emotional and cognitive motives of national identities. According to the conceptualization in this paper, interest-based motives can be paired with these emotional and intellectual motives, together constituting a generally relevant tripartite concept of national self-identification, where emotionality can be revealed through the “irrational” separatist feature of modern nationalisms, while cognitive motives are embodied in the expectations towards nations to offer intellectually defensible meaningful explanations about a collective origin and “our” place within the world. Without questioning the significance of means-end rationality behind the national homogenization processes, all of this points to a rather interrelated entanglement of motives where the development of the attitude of “belonging to a nation” is fueled not solely by interest, but emotional (“separatist”) motives and cognitive-intellectual (“historizing”) motives alike. As a result, we can establish a conceptual framework, not stressing the primacy of any of these motives within nationalisms, but instead focusing on the possible ways in which interest-based need for homogenization can collude with the emotional need of cultural boundary-making (separatism) as well as with the intellectual need for coherent explanations of state of affairs (historicism).

## Keywords

Nationalism; national interest; separatism; emotions; historicism

## Introduction

The conceptual scrutiny of nationhood (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008), when it comes to nationalism and the general attitude of “belonging to a nation,” does

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\* István Kollai, Institute of Social Anthropology, Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences, Comenius University Bratislava; [istvan.kollai@fses.uniba.sk](mailto:istvan.kollai@fses.uniba.sk).

not have a long history in the narrow academic sense, even though general thinking about the nation has been part of social sciences for a long time. Scientifically mature and established concepts that serve as major analytic frameworks primarily originated from the time following World War II (Özkirimli 2010; Kántor 2014, 75; Lajtai 2015, 122). Out of these works, mainly those written in the 1980s or later proved to be significant, such as the works of Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, and Benedict Anderson (Gellner 1983; Anderson 1991; Hobsbawm 1983a; Hobsbawm 1983b; Hobsbawm 1992), in describing nation as a modern and functionalist structure. The key idea of these conceptualizations might be summarized as such: that the nation – as we know it today<sup>1</sup> – is perceived as a construction of the modern world, the product of modernity (Hanák 1997),<sup>2</sup> stemming from objective changes in the mode of life and mode of production. By objective changes, Ernst Gellner primarily means urbanization and demographic expansion, and Eric Hobsbawm means the start of industrialization, while Benedict Anderson means the rise of literacy and capitalism, resulting in a “print capitalism,” fueling public debates and public cleavages. As the aforementioned authors explain, these changes not only paved the way for the evolvement of uniform egalitarian national cultures – by breaking up the former network of fragmented and heterogenous communities, full of feudal privileges – but their emergence was also the rational interest of newly-forming capitalist social structures: large urban industrial cores, capitalist factories, and mass production required homogenization and uniformized (national) code systems. This way, during the times of industrial and civil revolutions, it was a logical idea that the borders of the country should be identical with the borders of the “mother tongue” – and this became the definition of nationalism (Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1992). This approach can be called modernist, functionalist (O’Leary 1997), or instrumentalist (Smith 1984, 452; Smith 1991, 20), when recalling that development of modern national mass cultures had a means-end rational function.

The functionalist-modernist concept of nationalism has become a kind of quasi-mainstream orthodoxy (Özkirimli 2010, ix), and other schools – such

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1 The modernist concept of the nation does not exclude that the nation could not be an existing notion in the premodern age. This medieval or early modern *natio* may have embodied territorial, vernacular or feudal identities: the significance of these identity-layers and the self-reinforcing or mutually attenuating inter-relatedness among them could differ in particular historical situations within a community (Kontler and Trencsényi 2008; Erdős 2017).

2 Although primarily historians are quoted here, the research of national identity has become strongly interdisciplinary, as, e.g., the issue of “European identity” has been given more attention (Haas 1958; Risse 2005), or because of the national emancipation dilemmas and conflicts emerging in post-communist transitional societies (Palánkai 2013; Koller 2016), or due to the challenge which is posed by globalization before post-colonial developing societies.

as primordialists or ethnosymbolists – usually appeared as a critical alternative of just that (although their background sometimes goes back further in time). Primordialists do not see the attitude of “belonging to a nation” as a result of political programs or Macchiavellist manipulations of elites, but instead describe it primarily as an inherent affinity, i.e., they place the emphasis on the emotional driving forces of the emergence of national identity (Van der Berghe 1981). The ethnosymbolist approach points out that the – at least formally intellectual – knowledge related to particular ethnic groups and cultural codes inherited from pre-modern ages (symbols, narrations, and myths) is able to fuel the phenomenon of nationhood (Smith 1984; Smith 1991) and serve as cognitive cores around which a national homogenization program can be crystallized. According to this explanation, those movements proved to become successful “national movements” that were able to transform this inherited knowledge into an easily comprehensible and consumable modern national narrative.

Despite the interest-driven concepts’ robust explanatory power, reviews of theories of nationalism (Calhoun 2007; Özkirimli 2010) conclude that academic discourse has remained full of debates: there are too many arguments and case studies supporting each approach separately, while other cases deny their general validity. Therefore, a kind of scientific demand emerged to overcome the somewhat polarized truth-seeking debates among functionalist-modernist, primordialist, or ethnosymbolist approaches (Whitmeyer 2002; Egrý 2009a).

This study can be also classified as following this strand, as it wishes to outline an analytic framework about the emergence and prevalence of nationhood by elucidating how emotional and cognitive (intellectual) motives play roles in the formulation of a national identity, beside interest motives. Therefore, the first subchapter of the present study aims to distinguish three types of motives behind the national self-identification – i.e., interests, emotions, and cognition (intellectual driving forces) – while warning that it is primarily a theoretical separation, and these motives can hardly be examined separately, but should rather be examined in *interaction* with each other. In the second subchapter, the analytic framework will be developed further with these possible interactions among the primary motives – interests, emotions, and cognitive (intellectual) motives. In these fields of interactions, national identity, national solidarity, and national rationality can be shown to emerge. The main objective of this article is to embed emotionality and cognition into the discourse of nationhood through conceptualizing this integrative framework.

However, scrutiny of the role of emotion and cognition within human behavior has a rather long history in philosophy, and has its predecessors in social sciences too (Elias, 1978);<sup>3</sup> while in recent decades we can encounter the (re-)exploration of these motives' role on social structuration (see the "emotional turn" within the study of history: Boddice 2018; Stynen, Van Ginderachter, and Núñez Seixas 2020). As mentioned above, certain concepts of nationalism have already unfolded or referred to these emotional and cognitive driving forces (Brubaker 2009, Bonikowski 2016); moreover, even modernist- functionalist theories are aware about the existence of some emotional and intellectual motives, but they simply did not conceptualize them as "explanatory variables." Therefore, the third subchapter attempts to review modernist-functionalist theories, where we can see that this neglect of emotionality and intellectuality is rooted not just in theoretical reasons but methodological reasons, too: i.e., in the limitations of detecting emotional and cognitive motives separately from interests.

As a hopefully constructive finalization, the study points out the research of those situations from a micro-historical perspective where national macro-structures cannot prevail and dominate over personal self-identification, like in the epoch of unforceful proto-nationalisms. Deploying the apparatus of historical anthropology, micro-historical research is supposed to be able to grasp and detect emotional and cognitive motives, apart from self- and group-interests.

### **Emotional And Intellectual Motives Beyond Interest Motives**

The approach that traces nationhood – the self-reproduction of national identity affected by social circumstances and personal psyche – back to interactions between interests, emotions, and cognition is not utterly new in academic literature, even if this tripartite concept of motives is not explicitly conceptualized and explained in the studies on nations. The end-rational interest motive has proved to be the easiest to explore and prove of all, offering the conclusion that deliberateness and calculative rationality is an inherent characteristic feature of modern nation-building (Whitmeyer 2002). This process of instrumentalization has been reconstructed by historical studies, as premodern vernaculars went through lingual reforms that deliberately homogenized dialects; this process was typically cemented by the legal codification of grammar and spelling (Gyáni 2007). The same can be said about the codification of certain symbols like the national anthem, the flag,

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3 Norbert Elias made an academically precious distinction between sociogenetic and psychogenetic emotions; the idiom "emotion" refers in this paper to sociogenetic emotions.

or the coat of arms, or the selection of an official capital city: these steps all institutionalize the national identity from above. In a process similarly coordinated from above due to a central (state or elite) will, history and literature textbooks – extremely influential important tools of reproducing national identity over generations – were also uniformized. The writing and the distribution of these textbooks – coupled with checking the readers' (pupils') knowledge – have been conducted by a complete educational and public administration institutional network, governed and controlled by a political elite above it. This is why the nation can be considered as a product of centralized public administration in the sense that Ernest Gellner identified it; and this is why Eric Hobsbawm coined this century as the age of inventing traditions (Hobsbawm 1983, 1–14). From this perspective, the nation is a means-end rational structure, creating homogenized masses of producers and consumers for the economy and loyal masses of people for the political elite (Gellner 1983; Anderson 1991; Özkirimli 2010, 72–96): the illusion of tribal and blood connections creates a sense of equality within the nation, and hides inequalities that prevail in capitalist societies (Hobsbawm 1983, 1–14).

A plethora of case studies has already explored the rationally constructed structures for reproducing the sense of nationhood. This extensive research program within the social sciences has not only been capable of revealing the narrow elite interests behind the process of achieving nationhood, but has also emphasized that homogenization was in tune with the citizens' group interest from some aspects, since they were also interested in a uniform and efficient communication and economic landscape (Deutsch 1966).<sup>4</sup>

Still, we can see clear limitations of the explanatory power of formal aim-rationality. If this functionalist rationalism had fully possessed the human masses during the age of nationalism, the large imperial public administrations in the 18–19th centuries would have been able to easily homogenize the diverse ethnic conglomerates inside their boundaries, as both the elite and the ordinary people could have seen their material interests in such a lingual and cultural unification process, making internal migration, labor opportunities, or public administration free and open to everybody. But instead of getting homogenized along an official language lead by capitalist self- and group interests, polyglot empires proved to be the incubators of small separatist national movements, supported by many individuals who would rather become Czech or Romanian separatists within the Austro-Hungarian Empire than a

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<sup>4</sup> See for example the mixed language used by Swiss German and French unskilled workers, called *Bolze*, that facilitated their communication in work, but was later extended with identity elements such as worker's consciousness or provincialist pride (Brohy 2011, 105–24).

*homo monarchicus* without characteristics in an ethnic sense; they preferred creating and not dismantling borders around them (Wimmer 2008a; Egry 2009a). In other words, the existence of separatist entities did not meet the material interests of many of their own activists, spokespersons, and pioneers. Did these movements promise better career ways or higher living standards, with the possibility of being a senior bureaucrat in a newly established Romania or Czechoslovakia, than the Austro-Hungarian monarchy could promise? In parallel with homogenization and modernization, seclusion and separatism also became the imminent features of nationalism, and this separatist nature was against the rationality of capitalism. This Janus-faced feature of nationalism is an old perception in academic literature (Nairn 1981, 329–63); the double priority of “homeland and progress” implies that we can assume socio-cultural – in other words, emotional – driving forces outside the means-end rationality when scrutinizing the national identity.

The influence of emotions on nationhood, the status of belonging to a group, and group solidarity are mentioned by basically all conceptualizations of nationalism; the difference is rather in the assessment of a source and its historical significance (van der Berghe 1981; Whitmeyer 2002). Another feature of nationalism is that its self-justifying public narrative tended to focus on neither rational explanations nor emotions, but offered basically intellectual – usually historic – explanations about its own existence. Emerging modern national ideologies did not argue that nations existed because they were needed. Their narrative was rather the opposite: that a given nation is obliged to survive and prevail because it already exists. Its significance tended to be depicted many cases through a historical specter of its long-time existence; thus, the (perceived) knowledge of the past may play a role in strengthening nationhood. This cognitive core is regarded as a driving force of national awakening, primarily in the ethnosymbolist concept (Smith 1984; Smith 1991), but in fact, a number of explanations on nationalism refer to the nation-building role of common historical knowledge and shared cultural memory. Hence, it can be concluded that national identities are liable to have a special intellectual (or cognitive) motive, too.

The role of interests, emotions, and intellect in human behavior can be described not only relative to how they can affect macro-social structures, but they can be distinguished as three different selves of human habit.

The functionalist theory of nationalism, for instance, emphasizes the *homo economicus* feature of human behavior, with utility-maximizing means-end rational thinking. Adam Smith, who is usually considered to be one of the first scholars to describe *homo economicus*, emphasized a basic human inclination

to maximize utility through a deep routine of cost-value analyses (Smith 1979, 25). But can people behave only and exclusively as a *homo economicus*? Even the Smithian philosophical foundation of classical economists did not think this was true: Adam Smith (1976) himself argued for a “moral sentiment”; according to him, people have a basic inclination to feel sympathy for others. In addition, he confessed to the idea – moreover, he struggled to provide logical evidence to prove it – that sympathy towards other people’s joy or sorrow is not a self-centered “substitute” action to maintain our self-esteem, but it is rooted in a human disposition when our sense of utility is increased not only by our own benefit, but by the other person’s joy, too (Smith 1998). Since then, economic discourse has been burdened by the dilemma that while it is possible to nicely operationalize the attempt to maximize utility, it is rather difficult to specify what we mean by our own utility. What we can conclude is only that the individual’s benefit maximization can be separated from utility maximization: a man who would like to have as many assets as possible, but who does not increase his wealth by robbery or theft, basically wishes to maximize his sense of utility alongside social norms corresponding to his socialization (Sen 1999, 2–4). Polányian economic thinking expounded the embeddedness of utility maximization into social interactions: “Man does not act with the intention of protecting his own interest related to the possession of material assets, but acts with the intention of protecting his social status, social rights and social assets. Material assets are appreciated only as long as they serve this purpose” (Polányi 1976, 54).

After all, the thinking of *homo economicus* is rationalizing rather than rational, while “we cannot explain to ourselves” the reason for the internal preferences that determine its utility-maximizing behavior (Smith 1979, 25).

Another discipline, interpretive sociology, attempted to offer an answer to this problem by creating the ideal type of *homo sociologicus*, which is the self deeply embedded into society. The term itself was created by Ralf Dahrendorf (1968), who claimed that sociogenetic emotions actually mean extremely strong subconscious ties and limitations for human behavior. Maternal or fraternal love, the sense of shame or guilt against others, and the identification as a member of any community are all basic elements of our behavior – according to Dahrendorf, these are both ties and constraints – coming from socialization, and as a result, human behavior will become “emotionally charged” (Abell 1991). As for the set of objectives pursued as “self-interest,” it is also the result of a socializing process; this theoretical approach has been confirmed by research pointing out the determination of behavior by learned and absorbed moral codes or social connections (Ng-Tseng 2008, 270).



As we see emotional motives embodied in *homo sociologicus*, the cognitive (intellectual) motives can be explicated through the ideal type of *homo philosophicus*. This term is apparently less elaborated in social sciences than the concept of rationally interest-driven or socially sensitive selves of humans, but philosophy has a deep tradition of comprehending the disposition of the “contemplating man,” claiming that there is a “philosopher” in everyone, who, using his or her own abilities, attempts to give meaningful, coherent explanations without obvious internal contradictions about the outer world. As Karl Popper summarizes, “every man and woman is a philosopher, but some are more, and others are less” (Popper 1994, 174). The same idea is expressed by Karl Jaspers, too: “philosophical thinking is always with and in us” (Jaspers 1951, 132). This includes knowledge, the desire to learn, and the fact that man is a “remembering creature” (Romsics 2004). Among nationalist concepts, ethnosymbolists place the greatest emphasis on the identity-shaping power of cognition and knowledge: Anthony D. Smith’s idiom “*ethnie*” – which can be considered as the cultural subsoil facilitating modern nation building – consists of six attributes according to its own definition, and only one of them is an emotional ability (sense of solidarity); the rest can be considered as learned items, such as the name of the ethnic group, the myth of common ancestry, the shared historical memories, the elements of common culture, and the interpretation of a specific area as “homeland” (Smith 1991, 21).

While the academic literature referred to in the sections above proves to provide clarified concepts on the three *homos*, these ideal-typical selves cannot be comprehended in their solitude, but in a permanent interrelatedness among the emotionality of *homo sociologicus*, the intellect of *homo philosophicus*, and the effectiveness of *homo economicus*. And as changes in the outer world have impacts on all three characters, they are in constant interaction with each other. Because of these internal interactions, the individual cannot be considered as a *homo economicus* only, as he or she is influenced by his or her emotion and cognition, too. The next subchapter attempts to reveal these fields of interrelatedness.

### **Identity, Solidarity and Rationality of Nationhood**

It can be considered as a serious achievement in the social sciences that in the colorful world of interactions, the internal dynamics of certain relations have been identified, and it is possible to describe such key terms as national identity, national solidarity, and the rationality of national interest. These concepts can be expounded as having been born along interests, emotions, and cognition, and – seemingly of key importance – they can mutually and



spirally strengthen each other, hence bolstering cultural boundary-making and creating the habit of nationhood.

Starting with solidarity: works on the concepts of nationalism and the nation write about solidarity mainly as a synonym for, or the effect, of the feeling of togetherness (Weber 1978; Smith, 1991; Renan 2018; Calhoun 2007), and it is less clear how and why the members of the nation are interested in showing solidarity to each other. However, sociology has achieved a lot in explicating solidarity. In his seminal work, Émile Durkheim (1984) made the first conceptualizing attempt at crystallizing two types of solidarity: mechanic solidarity, when emotional bonds cement the internal ties of communities, and organic solidarity, when common interests determine the internal norms of a community (like in the case of guilds or trade unions), resulting in emotional bonds, too, after a while. These are two versions of solidarity with opposite signs: in the first case, a community of interest is evolved from emotional bonds, while in the other, the common interest generates emotional bonds. These contrasting sources of solidarity might not eventually result in any differences in manifesting performative acts, performing a self-reinforcing interaction. If we embed these solidarity-definitions into our conceptual framework, a conclusion can be drawn that solidarity evolves as the interrelatedness of interest and emotion, i.e., *homo economicus* and *homo sociologicus*. Mechanic solidarity may create structures (guilds, congregations using vernacular language, schools, etc.) that generate interest-based organic solidarity, and afterward, tight interpersonal relations are able to strengthen the further mechanic solidarity. This solidarity may not eliminate internal contention and may not ease the everyday patterns of coexistence, but can have performative manifestations like seclusion, prestige competition with other groups, and the representation of prestige interests (Weber 1978), or disparagement speech towards other groups, classifying them as inferior, or on the contrary, it can trigger defensive behavior toward a culture perceived as hegemonic (Armstrong 1982).

Secondly, the concept of identity can also be described as the intersection of two *homos*: through a permanent interaction between emotion and cognition. In addition, similarly to the concept of solidarity, academic literature revealed the possibility of two different relational entanglements from two opposite directions: from the dominance of cognition or emotion (Stachel 2007). According to the “weak” model of identity, our internal ability for auto-stereotypes (and, hence, for hetero-stereotypes) is rooted in experiences and rituals processed as *homo sociologicus* (“symbolic interactionism”) (Mead 1972), while the “strong” model of identity stresses a personal ability of

self-judgement, based on acquired knowledge and information, and is not determined by socio-cultural impulses coming from the environment. These two definitions are not in utter contradiction with each other, nor do they deny each other's relevance – since both highlight an interrelatedness of emotion of intellect – but they argue for different leitmotifs. This paper does not have the ambition to formulate an opinion over this – practically a bit unfruitful – academic debate, but simply wants to conclude that concepts of identity assume a two-way mutual interrelatedness of emotion and intellect, *homo sociologicus* and *homo philosophicus*.

The third concept, rationality, can be also defined similarly: along the interrelatedness of *homo philosophicus* and *homo economicus*. It can be also formulated from two different directions, with different emphases, depending on the source of rationality. Means-end rationality is defined by Max Weber as purposive, instrumental rationality, based on a cost-benefit calculation of options and pursuing effectiveness during individual decisions (*Zweck-Rationalität*) (Weber 1978). In this paper's conceptual framework, it can be comprehended as the prevalence of utilitarianism in *homo economicus*, entangled with the ability of *homo philosophicus* to judge between options. On the contrary, concepts regarding value-rationality (*Wert-Rationalität*) can be described with the same interaction between the people of interest and the people of thinking, but the judgement of *homo philosophicus* is the primary source of social action.

The previously outlined conceptual framework on nationhood is inspired by various interdisciplinary concepts on human habit, attempting to interpret core findings of nationalism studies in an integrative manner, based on the triangularity of *homo economicus*, *homo sociologicus*, and *homo philosophicus* (see Figure 1). This concept presupposes the unfruitfulness of debates about a “pristine motive” of nationhood, and stresses the importance of interrelatedness of motives in nation-building and cultural boundary-making. A methodological implication can also be originated from this stance: focusing on interpersonal relations (and not, e.g., on impersonal class relations) from an anthropological perspective can promise valuable contributions to the scrutiny of nationhood, where different motives can be elucidated in different situations.

Some of the elements of the above concept – as we can see in the quoted academic literature, too – are not completely new ideas at all. The gradual development of the disposition of belonging to a nation (nationhood) is portrayed by a large number of contemporary works in academic literature, attributing the prevailing presence of nationhood to a predominant form of

discourse and everyday – often unconscious or routinized, situation-based – performative patterns (Billig 1995; Brubaker 2004; Calhoun 2007; Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Wimmer 2008b; Maxwell 2022). It is reasonable to quote Calhoun’s discursive formation at this point, as he raises the pointlessness of the contest among modernist, primordialist, and ethnosymbolist approaches, and proposes the possibility of harmonizing them. This paper would intend to contribute to this integrative nationalism-discourse with a relatively schematized concept of social action, where motives of interests, emotions, and intellect (cognition) can be identified as the inherent homogenizing, separatist, and historicizing attitude of nationhood. *Homo economicus* is embodied in the reflex of homogenization, making the surrounding world as effective as possible – by eliminating differences. Meanwhile, our *homo sociologicus* self implies the reflex of cultural distinction, embodied in cultural, and eventually political, separatism. Finally, *homo philosophicus* can be regarded as the human self which strives to comprehend and explain the cosmos through coherent narratives, embodying in storytelling about nation. This latter does not mean just grandiose historical accounts on pristine states and past battles, but personal narrative routines, when, for example, dismissing common cultural grounds with people who are qualified in a current conflict situation as “enemies,” or when a poorly performing ruler, soldier, or footballer is suddenly qualified as not being a genuine patriot but rather only a foreign ruler or a legionnaire (foreign player). These routines can be considered “the canonization of the preferred interpretation selected from the possible meanings” (Romsics 2004), defined as framing, or frame selection (“*Die Selektion der Bezugsrahmens*”) (Esser 2002, 259; Wimmer 2008a).

Tracing back nationhood and cultural boundary-making to the interrelatedness of the somewhat abstract motives of interest, emotion, and intellect – whose interrelatedness can be embodied even within micro-communities’ social actions and their interpersonal relations – implies a criticism towards nationalism studies relying on class conflicts, assuming that usually the elite governs, and average people are governed. It is a legitimate question to bring up: is it not possible that somebody belonging to the elite may have been “governed” by the contemporaneous social atmosphere – because of his/her *homo philosophicus* intellect? Can we describe the behavior of Hungarian aristocrats István Széchenyi and István Batthyány, or the thirteen Hungarian generals – executed at Arad in 1849 after the failed military uprising – as having elite interests? Moreover, is it not possible that elitist behavior was influenced to some extent by impulses received from non-elite people, by the “public opinion” created by them from below? (Billig 1995; Whitmeyer 2002; Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008). Besides, tracing back the development

of nationalism primarily or exclusively to interactions among elites and everyday people raises a question that is difficult to answer: do intellectuals form a proper in-between class? The category of literal people actually includes a conglomerate of extremely diverse people, from well-paid court historians to vagabond wayfarer-printers and booksellers, from archbishops to nonconformist priests spreading Christian theorems among peasants, and from directors of cultural institutions to barn-stormers. Even if we look at intellectuals as a uniform social group, their relation to the elite is not clear, whether the elite's aristocratic historicizing feudal consciousness "trickled down" to middle-class intellectuals at the dawn of modern nationhood, making them historicizing and nationalistic (Bibó 1991), or if quite the opposite occurred, and the intellectuals of middle classes conquered the cosmopolitan premodern elite with tribalizing thoughts, opening the possibility of social mobility for themselves upwards, to the elite (Kedourie 1961)? The tension among these contradictory theories – which are still convincing and can be promoted by historical examples – might be eased by thinking about interactions among people, and not only interactions among classes (Egry 2009b). Focusing on interpersonal relations and not on classes, the existence of interests, emotions, and intellect is assumed for everybody – even if the ratios might be different in each social class, and in different ages (Riesman et al. 1961).

The interrelatedness within the motive of interests, emotions, and intellect might be utilizable for another reason: to unfold situations when some impulses can mutually strengthen each other, bolstering the self-reinforcing nature of cultural boundary-making, and/or resulting in inter-group conflict spirals. However, the conflict of interest is seemingly the most intense pristine source of tensions; it cannot solve the problematics of how and why non-interested parties – earlier just observers and outsiders around a particular conflict situation – are involved in the controversy at the end of the day. The answer lies rather in (offended) emotions and (contested) intellect than in the changing position of interests. Moreover, as seeking its pure interest, *homo economicus* would be as prepared to launch conflict as it is prepared to end it. Yet conflicts rarely have such a sudden stop that they are liable to be sparked off; in practice, they are easily transformed or colored as cultural conflicts even if controversial interests triggered them. Offended emotions, feared social status, humiliated prestige, denied or contested "truths" about past or present, and bilateral distrust might be significantly responsible for the spirally self-reinforcing nature of boundary-making processes and/or conflict situations, spreading in space and deepening in the mind, eventually exceeding the borderline between fierce verbality and physical aggressiveness. This spirally self-reinforcing ability of the sense of "belonging to a nation"

(Weber 1978, 387–95), or at least its stubborn path-dependence (Brubaker 2004; Wimmer 2008a), is referred to by academic literature, too, and the conceptualization above intends to provide an analytic framework for that.

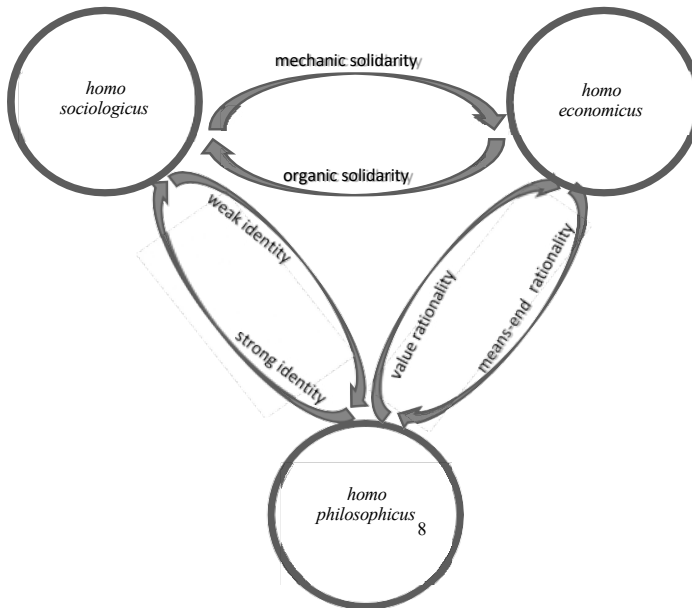


Figure 1. Interaction among *homo sociologicus*, *homo economicus*, and *homo philosophicus* as a source of national identity, solidarity, and rationality

### Re-Reading the Modernist Theory of Nationalism

It was mentioned several times above that even modernist concepts of nationalism hint at the history- shaping role of emotion and cognition (personal intellect). We are now going to review the related references to find out how modernists reflected the significance of emotion and intellect, and how they commented on their possible operationalization.

Starting with Eric Hobsbawm, he attempted to describe proto-nationalism – the historical phase before the industrial and civil revolutions – as when illiterate people’s emotions (“sentiments of illiterate”) were in some kind of interaction and connection with the world of the literate, too (Hobsbawm 1992, 48). The subjective motives beside the objective motives of national identity are described by him with the metaphor that national identity is, after all, an “everyday referendum.” In fact, Hobsbawm provides a two-fold definition for the term “invented traditions”: “It includes both ‘traditions’

actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and datable period...” (Hobsbawm 1983, 1). Based on this, we might have to talk not just about the invention of traditions in a top-down manner, but about emerging, bottom-up traditions, too.<sup>5</sup> At the end, Hobsbawm merges these two concepts into the single term of invented traditions.

Ernest Gellner also addresses emotional and intellectual motives, for instance, in relation to the separatist movements in Great Britain and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Gellner’s answer to separatist phenomena is that for some reason, certain groups of people felt the urge to identify themselves with a national narrative, while others did not feel the same (Gellner 1983, 45). He tries to trace back this identification partly to utilitarian motives: the alienated masses that flocked to towns struggled to join identity blocks in which they could expect the least persecution or exclusion on the long term (“to be spumed”). But besides this, Gellner even refers to emotional and cognitive motives, when saying that identity-entities with larger and deeper historic bases were more attractive. And he does not suppose that national agitators would have exclusively followed their self-interests: in Gellner’s words, when these people were walking in the forest, dressed in folk dresses, fabricating folk-style songs, they were not thinking about the possibility of becoming ministers and ambassadors one day (Gellner 1983, 46–61). It is probably Benedict Anderson that puts the most emphasis on objective reason: he affirms the market-acquiring power of the “print capitalism” already from the time of reformation, stating that the first intellectuals of the Gutenberg galaxy did not work and write in a vacuum, but they embodied the supply side of emerging capitalism, working on the establishment of “writer-reader coalitions” (Anderson 1990, 71–5). But even Anderson mentions emotional and intellectual motives when he outlines the impact of secularization on human thinking, namely that the timelessness of sacredness has been replaced with thinking over time.

Based on the above-outlined overview, we can actually say that these authors referred to the existence of emotional and intellectual motives, too, but did not

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<sup>5</sup> Hobsbawm uses this division elsewhere, too, such as officially vs. unofficially, or politically vs. socially created traditions (see Hobsbawm 1983b, 263).

conceptualize them, and did not include them in their nationalism concepts.<sup>6</sup> There seem to be several reasons for this.

One of the reasons stems from the authors' approach towards the philosophy of sciences: their modernist approach can actually be in accordance with macro-level explanations, focusing on social classes, and level of conflicts of mass interests. In the case of the Marxist Hobsbawm, the primary point of explanation is the impersonalized relations between the elite and the masses: in his views, nationalism "trickled down" from the bourgeoisie to the lower layers of society (it is worth noting that he deals with the era of 1870–1914 here) (Hobsbawm 1983b, 306). In the case of Benedict Anderson – a Marxist, too – this impersonalized but robust impact is represented in a more abstract way by the power of capitalism.<sup>7</sup> Ernest Gellner identified the essence of the macro-level approach, focusing on regimes of social institutions by explaining the way that history is obviously around people, but it is really *around them*; therefore, in his opinion, the explanation of the individual's destiny cannot always be described in human levels ("in terms of chaps"). Researchers who still preferred "human-focused" explanations were "individualists" in his opinion, and his criticism towards them was that they regarded human characteristics as given "independent variables," even though they are determined by social norms and customs (Gellner 1973, 1–14). Gellner did not agree with personality-focused explanations of history, interpreting the course of history as merely a continuous interaction of human behaviors. He questioned the completeness and operationalization of this "interactionist"

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6 The fact that this valuable content was finally lost/omitted at the level of conceptualization is perhaps partly the result of the simplification how modernist authors cited each other. It is striking, for instance, that Hobsbawm agrees on the first page of his book with Gellner's concept defining nation is a fiction, an artefact (Hobsbawm 1992), meanwhile Gellner's book does not even use the phrase "artefact"; and instead of fiction, it mainly talks about the nation as a historical phenomenon.

7 The schematizing effect of the Marxist ideological constraint is obvious for example in the case of the Czech Miroslav Hroch, one of Hobsbawm's important inspirations – who tried to carry out a comparative examination about the earliest stage of capitalism: Hroch (1985) describes the extremely colorful and complex world of the initial phase of national movements. The historian classified as Marxist refers to the fact in his foreword that there seem to be some other driving forces, too, at the birth of nationalisms, apart from class interests. Finally, another recognized English researcher, the Marxist John Breuilly, wrote a strong criticism about the book, saying that the author's declared conceptual academic framing narrative – i.e., that industrial and civil revolutions triggered nationalisms – are not in line with the actual contents of the book. Indeed, the content itself, without Hroch's foreword and afterword, could be classified even as anti-Marxist, and it actually does not prove the effect of capitalist industrial development on the initial development of national identity.



philosophy of history: among others, he criticized Peter Winch's work.<sup>8</sup> Gellner basically qualified these thoughts as useless, since no utilizable methodology has been derived from this philosophy, despite the fact that social sciences had long examined the identified dilemmas of interrelatedness between human behavior and social norms (Gellner 1973, 47–49). After all, the *ars poetica* of the modernist-functionalist approach can be summarized by saying that “nationalism has no deep roots in human psyche[...] The roots of nationalism are in the well-defined structural requirements of industrial societies, rather deeply” (Gellner 1983, 34–5).

In the case of modernists, the other reason for the lack of concept for emotional and intellectual motives is the clear methodological limitations. Hobsbawm also refers to this methodological difficulty with some self-criticism when saying that his volume on the invention of traditions deals rather with traditions having political motives behind them; meanwhile, traditions emerging alongside sociocultural changes are scrutinized to a lesser extent and only in a speculative way. He says: “it is unfortunately easier to document the motives and intentions of those who are in a position formally to institute such innovations [...] than new practices which spring up spontaneously at the grass roots” (Hobsbawm 1983b, 303). Although he finds this “from-below” approach important, too – i.e., the cosmos of desires, hopes, needs, human relations, even on the level of illiterate – he has strong doubts and reservations about the possibility of researching that, concluding that we know too little about what was going on in the minds of these people. And as we are not able to recall these thoughts in an authentic way, all of this remains mysterious and vague (Hobsbawm 1992, 79). Because of this, Gellner says that the emergence of separatism that develops in parallel with homogenization – which was defined above as the key manifestation of emotional motives – cannot be predicted: only the emergence of the principle of nationalism can be predicted, but the actually emerging entity “depends on a number of historical accidents” (Gellner 1983, 54). Gellner also made it clear that the research of history does not lack an interest in the emphatical understanding of human behavior; what research lacks is the possibility of collecting, aggregating, and calculating data about it (Gellner 1973, 49). According to him, the emergence and prevalence of nationhood cannot be explained better than with general

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Winch was of the opinion that interpersonal social actions mainly resemble the exchange of terms in a conversation. Winch assumes it was a wrong direction in social sciences that – under the spell of the successes of natural sciences – social scientists were looking for regularities like physical laws, even where the subjects of observation – people – themselves conceptualize facts with their own terms (no metering instrument will show what “war” is, it is decided by people). Moreover, observers themselves are part of the observed society: a social scientist is not an engineer who examines machines (as John Stuart Mill writes), but an engineer who examines other engineers (Winch 1990).

statements if approaching nationalism from the perspective of the micro-level, i.e., from the level of human interactions.

### **Conclusion: Methodological Implications**

To “individualists” criticizing the macro approach of modernists, Gellner lets off a thought-provoking riposte: how do they imagine the work of a historian? Since a historian ought to be more than a biographer *en grande série*, i.e., a large-scale biographer (Gellner 1973, 1–14). Investigating the roles of emotional and cognitive motives definitely poses a serious methodological challenge, indicated by many researchers like Weber (1978, 925) and Özkirimli (2010, 131), but perhaps Gellner’s provocative question could be answered in the following way: a social scientist researching nationhood should be more than a biographer, but perhaps he or she should partially be a biographer, too. The research of individuals, small groups, and microcommunities (families, fraternities, communities within institutions), and the genre of collective biographies might be able to reveal the motives of nationhood that are hidden at macro level. At the macro level – the level of major social processes – the obvious existence as well as the significance of interest relations may easily overshadow the emotional and intellectual motives. Behind spokespersons’ nationalistic phraseology – professionally masterminding large masses – it is easier to presume a calculating career interest, then, in the case of premature unechoed monologies of stand-alone marginalized pioneers. When nationalism already emerges into a predominating mass attitude alongside industrialization, modernization, urbanization, and mass literacy, then, most emotionality and intellectuality can be suspected to be only superficial camouflage for the concealment of actors’ vital interests to act like members of the nation, as the functionalist approach of nations tends to affirm.

However, where less functionalist motives are present, there may be a possibility to research latent emotional and cognitive (intellectual) motives. This is why it seems particularly fruitful to scrutinize discursive patterns far away from well-structured political interest relations, like ground-to-earth or, on the contrary, highly intellectual discourses (Trencsényi and Kopecek 2007), or to reveal interpersonal situations that are marginal compared to the development of the political landscape (Brubaker 2004), deploying the methodological apparatus of discourse analysis and political anthropology or historical anthropology. The latter has proved to be useful when scrutinizing the proto-nationalist era, having a somewhat marginalized position within the typical time horizon of nationalism studies. Yet, such endeavors back in time prove to be precious for comprehending today’s nationhood and the emergence

of fresh cultural cleavages as well: proto-nationalist manifestations of lonely pioneers had not been embedded into nation-building macro structures, so it offers a chance to investigate personal identification processes and symbolic boundary-making through the lens of quasi-Robinsonades. Looking at the Eastern-Central European region, this is the period before the 1780s, the long decades before the reign of Joseph II and the French Revolution, when capitalism, the Industrial Revolution, and the demographic expansion were hardly perceptible. At that time, at least in Eastern territories of the historical Habsburg Empire, there were no signs of significant industrialization, the concepts of Enlightenment had not reached the masses yet, and the political and public elite did not show much interest or need for launching national movements. Still, some learned (but not necessarily high-born) personalities started symbolic boundary-making by dividing themselves to Hungarians, Slovaks, Romanians, etc., producing and promoting national narratives against each other on the basis of the biased reconstruction of the past, and harshly or humiliatingly criticizing – often offending – views of each other.

At the end of the paper, it might be worth uncovering that the previously outlined analytic framework about the interrelatedness of motives behind nationhood was, after all, inspired by the early Hungarian-Slovak identity conflict of the proto-nationalist age (1720–1789), when – beside the evident motivation of self- and community interest – both the emotional and intellectual (“truth-searching”) motives can be detected in the spirally self-reinforcing nature of these more and more cutthroat disputes. This spirally self-reinforcing nature is embodied in how these tensions had been increasingly emotionally heated and taken intellectually seriously, involving newer and newer players into the debate, and forcing them to declare their nationality in a performative way and effectuate some sort of cultural boundary-making against the “otherness.” The controversy started with the volume of Mihály Bencsik, a Hungarian jurist, issued in 1722: in this work, the author filled one and a half pages with slanderous comments about Slovaks, describing them as a nation subordinated to Hungarians due to historical right (because of the defeat of Svatopluk against Hungarians), hence, the argument says, they are not entitled to lead towns and cities. Some Slovak scientists – feeling offended in their Slovak-ness – put pen to paper and compiled lengthy vitriolic ripostes to Bencsik, arguing for a Slovak cultural superiority over Hungarians, too. Bencsik’s short but offending train of thoughts triggered the birth of a whole book in reply, deploying a huge amount of historical sources and logical argumentation against Bencsik’s personal integrity and ideas. As to insults, Bencsik’s opponents in the argument – who otherwise did not find it necessary to indicate their Slovak nationality earlier, as they were primarily provoked

by Bencsik – called the Hungarian jurist a drunkard and a liar, and they supposed he was of gypsy origin that was classified as inferior. Basically, this is the first documented identity conflict between Hungarians and Slovaks, and its continuation can be detected later throughout the 18th century (Kollai 2023). Besides emotionality, the intellectual need to explain the outer world in a coherent manner can be also detected in the uncompromising historicism of this corpus, ascribing unquestionable explanatory power to “historical truth” in settling present disputes.

Meanwhile, it is striking that the political elite did not really support any parties and their arguments, only tolerated them; the local political elite was not divided into Hungarians and Slovaks at that time. However, these proto-nationalist disputes were triggered partly by conflicts of interests – i.e., who have the right to lead city councils – even though the partaking scholars of these verbal rivalries had no influence on this question practically. Yet, they were able to spread their tensions along emotional and intellectual waves they raised. It is worth mentioning that urban conflicts among Slovak, Hungarian, and German vernacular groups had been sparked off utterly fiercely in the late medieval and early modern centuries, but these tensions remained situational and faded away, due to the lack of general intellectual framing explanations around conflicts of interests (Kollai 2022).

This paper does not wish to go deeper into Hungarian-Slovak identity conflicts; this sole example only wishes to demonstrate that politically marginal situations might provide interesting data for the research of nationhood, especially its emotionality and intellectuality (for valuable case studies revealing emotionality through quasi-Robinsonades, political interregnums, and marginalized life paths, see Stynen, Van Ginderachter, and Núñez Seixas, 2020). From the perspective of research methods, a considerable challenge originates from the fact that already established national structures have the aptitude to trigger inter-group emotional and cognitive cleavages, and this way, the possible “demand” for intra-group emotionality and intellectuality is not so visible, remaining overshadowed by the emotional and intellectual “supply” of nationalized public structures. Research is made even more difficult by the fact that anyone who represents their nationhood through emotionality or intellectuality – as a poet in the 19th century, or as a civil activist in the 20th century, or as an agile Internet commenter in the 21st century – right at the moment of their declarative step, becomes a supplier of the emotional and intellectual framing of nationhood, or any other form of cultural boundary-making. Therefore, it seems rather difficult to trace back the phenomenon of nationhood to clear causal relations. The above-outlined

analytical framework attempts to give a possible answer to this conceptual and methodological challenge, offering a behavioral explanation of nationhood – or maybe not only nationhood, but other forms of cultural boundary-making which penetrate late- modern globalized societies – tracing these cultural cleavages back to driving forces related to interests, emotions, and cognition (intellectuality). Nevertheless, the operability of this framework depends on the success of the genuine separation of these motives in individual or group behavior, while revealing their interrelatedness as well.

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