DEMOGRAPHIC PROCESSES, NATIONALISM AND ETHNIC CONFLICTS

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1. Nations and demography

Nationalism obviously proceeds from the idea of nation. What seems to have become a common view, among many debatable interpretations, identifies it with the nation-state. Accordingly, nationalism would be "a state of mind in which individual feels that everyone owes his supreme secular loyalty to the nation-state". At face value, history seems to corroborate this assertion, by providing innumerous examples of belligerence between countries. Most armed conflicts, however, do not support the definition, at least not before the emergence of a centralized and legitimate structure of power denoting a state. For instance, during the Middle Age, war was practically the exclusive occupation of the nobleman. Laymen were left aside, with little state of mind, if not reluctance, as collateral victims to the conflict. Later on, with the emergence of absolutist monarchies, one should have expected that population as a whole would have been more actively involved in the antagonisms. This, however, would be disregarding family feud as the main element of dynasty disputes that left most of the civilians marginal to the confrontation, except as occasional clients and incidental victims. Maybe, the French revolution has offered one of the first illustrations of a deeper involvement of the population into wars. Responding to the exhortation "La patrie est en danger" the revolutionary government was actually stressing a concept of "nation" over one of "state" or "kingdom". In fact, nationalist conflicts appear late in history, as late as the 19th century, not as an emanation of the state, by then well established, but more often than not against the central authority. They stand as the exacerbation of national sensitivities among huge groups of people who feel that they belong primarily to what they claim to be their community and not to the entity figured by the ruling power.

The eighteenth century had been known as the period of "enlightenment", during which all thinkers, in spite of their philosophical and political differences had united around the idea of individual freedom. This century used also to be called "The Age of Reason". The philosophic family drawn together by its hostility toward both church and state, professed the universality of the individual. That was a time, when rationality, mostly in France, was exclusive. From Germany, however, came a late reaction against this dominance. The year 1774 seems to have been a landmark in this direction, as the Sturm und Drang movement proclaiming its identity and its continuity, aimed at

emancipating the German literature from the predominant French culture. That same year, when Mozart produced the very first opera in German language, *Die Entfürung aus dem Serail* (The Seraglio), Herder published his important book: *Auch eine Philosophie der Geshichte (Another Philosophy of History).* Operating a retreat from rationalism, he asserted the primacy of the irrational and rehabilitated religion, while emphasizing individualism, but not on the basis of universalism that he was attacking. The human being was no more an abstract individual, but with his peculiarities a product of his cultural community. Herder contended that all cultures are specific and equal in rights implying, therefore, "collective individuals". These must be taken as a whole. He so laid the basis of the ethnic theory of nationalities where the individual identity is conferred by the group to which he belongs, as his condition is determined by "what he is" and not "what he selects", contrary to the French conception that Renan expressed many decades later : "La nation est un plebiscite quotidien" (a daily resolution).

Even when the "nation"as a cultural unit coincides with the "state", sharing strictly the same territory, the rise of a national feeling among the people is not necessarily bound to the instituted authority. While at times a spontaneous display of allegiance strengthening the cohesion of the people, nationalism may adversely express an opposition to the sovereign power either as a manifestation that encompasses the whole country or as a claim originated by a distinct group. As a community perceives the singular amalgam of cultural and physical traits that it acknowledges as its own, it identifies similarly the "other" group as distinctive and naturally hostile. Hence, principles which build a nation are unrelated to those that rule the state. National feelings are not bound to administrative stipulation evidenced by official documents as is citizenship. They flow out of the group or of individuals as a place of the mind.

For example, two people run across in the New York subway. The man, though American born and a US citizen, is acquainted with Romania, by his father who immigrated from Bucharest and by his mother who came from Bessarabia, a former province of Romania, now federated to Russia. He still speaks the language and so does the woman who is a visitor from the new Republic of Moldavia (Bessarabia). She has some difficulty with her English. The man helps her. They discover that they both speak Romanian and they feel that, though foreign to each other, they belong to some cultural entity. He has the reminiscence of past told stories. From her part, she brings a vivid knowledge of the old country. For a while, they can imagine that they have common recollections quite distinct from their present environment and that they belong to the same background. This so far circumscribes a national feeling, which has nothing to do with their respective citizenship.

The fact that two people can feel that they belong to an extensive community implies that, without knowing each others, members of this community experience the same feeling, which has little to do with their official identity. This was so well perceived by some government, that in multiethnic states as Yugoslavia and the former USSR, for instance, a distinction was made between citizenship and nationality on the passport that bore a stamp specifying the national origin : Serb or Croat, and in USSR, Russian, Ukrainian, Armenian, Uzbek,....

Nation can actually be seen as an extended group of people looking back in the same direction, so implying a common history. It is an abstracted commonality, because without knowing each other, these ethnic peoples imagine that they have the same recollection. It is also a post-fact reality. It could be compared to the situation met by partners of a couple who bear a common memory of past life lived together and because of it, anticipate jointly the future. As such, nation can be deemed to be a nostalgic vision, a community dream, selectively preserved to be projected into the present, as a principle for action.

Since the nation relies at face value on pre-existing features it could be deemed to be a pre-requisite to the foundation of the state. No straight highway, however, leads from one to the other. While a nation asserts itself through alleged traits, these can change and in turn originate a new nationalism even within the state, or straighten out to it. Although cultural factors have been prominent in shaping national feelings, reconstructed history from folk tales may still alter them and provide a major constituent for rallying people around new national values. Nation is a territory of the mind, and nationality not a designated status that administration awards on the basis of legal criteria. The nation is a mentally built in representation of *the* community. As such it belongs to the domain of ideology which figures the way a society thinks itself and acts accordingly. The nationalistic passion shown for instance, by the Serbs takes its roots, together with the orthodox religion, in a short lived mediaeval Empire of Serbia. Between life and dream, this mythic kingdom has become, among other religious, cultural and political acknowledged values, the dynamic force of their extremism.

By contrast, at the time of the Revolution, the Americans who had in common with the French Canadians a hatred for the British economic discrimination and the same practical views and life style that land colonization generates, always refused, even at the time of worst distress, any kind of alliance with or help from them, not because of difference in language but in religion. While both were Christian, and despite a religious pluralism in the rebellious colonies, French Canadians were "papist"and that was too much for the Protestants. A singled criterion was emphasized to justify the creation of two distinct communities.

Basically, the nation does not refer specifically to a territory, except when competing directly with the State for regional autonomy or for a new version of the country. People, however, use to occupy a place where they share a common life style, albeit where they are also part of a social network including class hierarchy and eventually ruled by the State in their capacity of citizens. In this superimposition of value-systems nation's bounds are usually weaker than social bounds, and still weaker than state mandatory decrees. Circumstances, however, can foster one or a few national characteristics, endowing them with values that become the spearhead of a revolutionary situation. The nation is then a group of people in the process of becoming the people.

A pre-requisite to the formation of a nation is not necessarily the existence of a state, but of an extended society, culturally structured and aware of its distinctive features. It implies that space be involved at least in the form of a personal territory, whether reference is made to a homeland or a place of origin, so that, in exceptional cases once

settled nomads, referring to their birthplace or to their usual residence, can also pretend to form a nation. Ethnicity, with all of its constitutive elements, if not conducive to the formation of a nation-state, is closer to what Hobsbaum calls a proto-nation. In Western Sahara, Sahrawis, for instance, a special case of a proto-nation of nomads, have added a "historical relation" to the emergence of a nation-state through fifteen years of sedentariness in refugee camps. Formally identified by place of origin and by their genealogy as a population, they claim their particularism in order to choose the hard way of their independence from Morocco. From a population loosely delineated through original features, they pretend to a national autonomy in view of proclaiming an independent state, by making a distinction between a religious allegiance to the king they recognize, and a political submission they do not; a situation that history has widely confirmed.

National feelings may affect the behavior of communities. People from a self declared nation tend to be seen as behaving in accordance with a common pattern that comes from the memory of standard ancestral reactions to circumstances. These can create a set of conditions that mold the adaptive population. Though superficial, the comparison John Fisher proposes between Ukrainians and Texans, illustrates beyond his wit, likenesses between two distinct populations, yet ostensibly exposed to similar conditions. Vastness and nudity of the land -region as a physical context can help shape a national pattern- , a tradition of horsemanship, cattle raising and cotton growing shaken by an industrial boom, all this seems to have created a common complex of superiority manifested through the same buoyant attitude.

History has always made a difference between state and nation, although the attempts of the former to claim the characters of the latter often caused confusion. For Gellner, however, nationalism "is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent....In brief, nationalism is a theory of legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones, and, in particular, that ethnic boundaries within a given state...should not separate the power-holders from the rest" Rebellion, independence fights, protests for cultural freedom and the right to preserve affinity based on language, religious forms or life style, have also nested within states the germs of nationalism, inasmuch as independence struggles erupt against unaccepted authorities. The Nineteenth century used to be the golden age of nationalism. This was the time when nations emerged from some striking features people shared claiming as perennial their occasional commonality. The following century, however, would consecrate nation-state aspirations, following Wilson's principle of self-determination, with the creation of numerous new states, in the wake of World War I. This is indeed the situation that Renan had anticipated. Nowadays, nationalism having seemingly faded in the face of other ideologies, operates an unexpected come back, which further increases the difficulty of defining it.

In the debate, what mostly tends to be forgotten is the very core of a nation or of a state: the population. Attempting to retrace this elementary truth brings into light the reality of a population, otherwise identified by criteria such as language, religion or ethnicity. However, defining population is not straightforward. It is apparently the task of demography, standing as an autonomous discipline for studying human population. Is

this a self-sufficient claim both in substance and method? Answering this question requires to be more specific about the ways and aims of the "study" and about what, in this instance, is meant by "population".

Should "to study" be understood as rendering a comprehensive picture of the "population"? Morphology, quantity or built-in process? Under which perspective? Before considering an uncertain answer one should remember that the first mention of the term demography was made by Achille Guillard, a French beforehand "demographer", who published in 1855 a book entitled: *Eléments de statistique humaine, ou démographie comparée.* Even if he saw demography as "the natural and social history of the human kind", his whole title was unequivocal enough for his followers to assign the new discipline to "the scientific study of human populations, primarily with respect to their size, their structure and their development". More explicitly, "it takes into account the quantitative aspects of their general characteristics". This definition remains in line with Quételet's "Social Physics"that secured the ties of demography to statistics, in the main-stream of a positivism derived from physical science. As a distinct branch of statistics and under its formal aspect, the new specialization was bound to the fascination of the number, leaving the door open to other kinds of studies in population matters, nonetheless considered as extraneous to the strict discipline.

Insofar as demography abode by the positive science, it was bound by the very nature of its approach. While pretending to ignore man, to focus on macro-analysis, it had nevertheless to struggle with the notion of risk, and therefore, of uncertainty, central to a population process. Having to deal with mortality and fertility as the dynamic ingredients of a population, demography was addressing the probable occurrence of events. Not that mortality be a risk by itself. After all there is an eventual certainty attached to death, for every life comes to an end. But death may be delayed or anticipated and can occur at any time between birth and older ages reached by individuals (*It can be said that, declines in mortality and fertility rates in Western countries express an overall delay to dying or to being born with respect to the past, emphasizing the role time plays in demography.*). Similarly, other events such as marriages and birth can occur early or late in the course of life. When risks are concerned, it becomes difficult to speak of strict determinism, even when probabilities are assigned through greater numbers of people. Indeed, changing probabilities is inferring new explanatory interpretations that are foreign to formal demography, which of its own cannot treat causality. Anyway, since past and present conditions induce demographic events that convey social memory and thus take place in a social setting, demography ceases to be this positive science that early statisticians dreamed of, to become deeply involved in social sciences. As if it were possible to draw a firm partition between the "what is?", the "how?" and the "why?", formal demography confined, however, on the safer ground of description and analysis of abstract populations, entrusting "population studies" with explanation.

"Studying" is only one term that helps define demography, while its object, the core of ethnic groups, remains vague. Functional definitions of "population" have been proposed. Among these, the *Multilingual Demographic Dictionary,* referring to the demographic usage, specifies that the term "population" applies to the inhabitants (those

who occupy as a place of settled residence) of a given area". Another formulation directly relates the term "to the number of people in a given area"

Linking so population to the territory, fulfills two different, though related, types of preoccupation: one for statistical purposes assigns a strict location to a population that must be viewed through its quantitative aspect, the other deliberately neglects nomad populations as such, noting their occasional presence within a given territory. Gypsies, for instance, only exist by reference with the territory that includes them at a date or during a definite period. Space being given by definition, demography can thereon focus on time rather than on spatial dimension. By insisting on a settled population, one privileges the administrative approach that characterizes the state over the nation or over any community based on some feature, emphasizing pre-determined geopolitics over cultural characteristics, and this, quite curiously, at a time, when Herder's romantic conception of the nation tended to prevail all over Europe, in the mid nineteenth century.

In demography, while time may seem flexible enough to figure either as the moment (date) or as a period (year, decade...), a territory to be useful, must be an area that contains the address as the most accurate reference. Although time and space suffice to locate a population, they are unqualified to define it. Barring residence characterizations, other traits are actually needed to do so. For instance, the number of convicts is barely determined by locating the population of a prison at a given time. They can be confused, for instance, with the penitentiary personnel. Incarcerated people may well reside in the reformatory building, but what characterizes them is that they are not allowed to leave; they have been sentenced; they are identified by their status. They represent a population in the sense that they are part of a specific process that parallels the demographic course. As prisoners, they are born at the time they were condemned and being assigned to a jail became "immigrants". Again, the location is subsidiary. What matters is the qualification of the location. They may only leave, through death or their release seen as an emigration. By then, they lose the status that defined them, they cease to exist.

Indeed, biological patterns as sex may also serve as a main or joint criterion to apprehend groups of people. Age is certainly an essential distinction between individuals and the very variable pertaining to demography. Are not these typical objects for demography? Apparently, only once conditions of geographical residence have been set.

A broader definition would view population as any collection of persons sharing some common characteristic. Emphasis is not anymore on residence that becomes but one characteristic among others, once it has been specified that "attributes" refer to human beings. While in essence the definition still responds to statistical purposes, it could, as it fits, accept qualitative aspects when duly defined. Yet, measurable traits are implicit to this definition, since the selected criteria should determine a homogeneous community of people.

As can be surmised, definitions of population, and, therefore, of demography as its analytical tool, derive basically from the practical need of sorting out people according

to unambiguous criteria. Congruity is evidenced through statistics that relinquishes the individual to deal with groups composed of quasi-identical constituents. A census is precisely this administrative device that records homesteaders within the borders of a given territory, in accordance with preset shared characteristics; hence the prime necessity of defining "population" as the number of people in a given area at a given moment in time. Formal demography finds its source and its initial justification in the census. Its primary concern is to estimate population size and structure, measuring and analyzing the components of population change--that is, births, deaths, and migration--and those aspects of population structure--that is, the composition of the population by age and sex- that help explain its evolution. While the census seems to come as a static description of a given stock, it bears enough results and trends to infer the dynamics of the population from the continuous registration of its vital events. The demographic process delineates a delicate balance between natality and mortality, where the number of births usually prevails.

In theory, a census is inquisitive. It can be seen as a control device over the population and, likewise, in accordance with a statistical approach as the expression of rationality. The census, therefore, proceeds on two levels: one addresses the individual in its present self condition and second as the family representative, or for practical considerations, the household head, given the difficulty of defining unambiguously a "family" for statistical purposes. Hence this notion of household that stresses the economical intra dependence of the social unit composed of individuals living under the same roof. The main object of a census is then to enumerate all the individuals according to the smallest effective social organization.

Despite its apparent simplicity, the operation and its magnitude involve enormous costs and management constraints. This results in making it a state affair that only a national or international entity can finance and undertake.

As relating always to the national territory, the census considers residency as the prime criterion of legitimacy, whether the enumerated persons are inhabitants by right even when absent at the time of the taking (*de jure* population) or, while away from their home, are present at the place of the enumeration (*de facto* population). Strict administrative definitions do not allow to decide whether responding or not. The State usually makes the census compulsory.

For the census, the territory is given, even if reality shows how versatile can sometimes be a borderline that moves with the hazard of history. On the map, country limits are determined as much by physical characteristics of the land and its material resources than by human environmental features. Internal politics and the balance of power with neighboring countries tend to make national frontiers more precarious, so that a fixed territory and the state built upon it express only the will of the present authorities to achieve and perpetuate their geopolitical model. It results that a territory is primarily a political space and that a population census founded on it is a political action aimed at asserting sovereignty. Mandatory as it is, the census enumerates the citizens.

This aspect of the census underlines the tight dependence of demography on its state-national sources and political objects. This is further displayed by controversy about

questions included in many censuses, either about religion, ethnicity or economic status and the political or psychological reluctance shown by respondents to deliver unambiguous answers to personal and sometime politically sensitive questions. To inquire, for instance, about spoken language, in a Belgian census, may eventually reflect on the current administrative divisions, parting the country according to the French or Flemish in use within the region. This "natural" linguistic partition as shown by the national census becomes a political asset that affects, i.a., the school distribution between Flemish- and French-speaking education.

Paradoxically, these questions often contradict the centripetal intentions of the census by creating or emphasizing the consciousness of a difference among linguistic groups or religious communities. In this opportunity, the census provides the arguments to communities that aspire to shape their specific identity in the face of the nation-state. It can be noted that, at a time when nationalism displays a revival of tense aggressiveness, being a member of a nation still comes as a chosen status, a feeling of belonging, where nevertheless territory and residence are at stake, but where citizenship tends to become meaningless.

Referring to what he considered as one of the 18th century great novelties in the techniques of power, Foucault pointed out "population" as an emerging economical and political problem: "wealth-population, manpower-population or labor capacity, the population is in balance between its own growth and the resources it avails. Governments notice that they do not simply deal with subjects, not even with a 'people', but with a 'population' implying its specific phenomena and its own variables: natality, morbidity, length of life, fertility, health condition, illness frequency, modes of alimentation and habitat". This could indeed justify the population census, but the rediscovery of a "population" beyond its vital rates in terms of social factor belongs in its own right to the 20th century.

Summing up, it seems that current definitions of population are either too restrictive, when assigned to a territory, or to vague for a formal demography when any characteristic can be attributed to a human group. Stricto sensu, population can, however, exist in the absence of a fixed territory. A nation, for instance, even when questing a location, does not need borderlines or physical characters to define itself. As the population is identified by given attributes, the people have the option of adhering to values which are constitutive of a nation. Self-determination makes then the difference with a given citizenship.

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