

Malešević, S.: *Grounded Nationalisms: A Sociological Analysis*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2019. 312 p

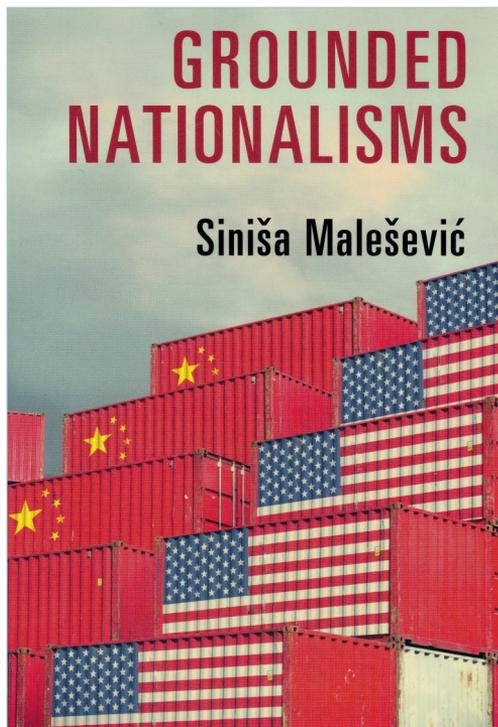
The discussion over nationalism has come of age but has not run its full course yet. Despite the vast volume of former and contemporary literature on nationalism, the narrative discourse around it continues to this day. While recent studies reveal new faces of the idea and the social movement, old debates re-emerge again. Among these discussions, *Grounded Nationalisms* seems to be a milestone. It is a grandiose concept that seeks to give nationalism studies a unique, comprehensive theoretical framework, while offering an opportunity to integrate former, often contradictory theories. The author's fundamental approach to the contemporary role of nationalism is denying the idea that the age of nationalisms is slowly coming to an end under the pressure of the postmodern, globalised world. On the contrary, he argues that this phenomenon is getting stronger even if it is subsided or not always dramatic. In a nutshell, MALEŠEVIĆ tries to explain that although nationalism stems from the modern era, it has roots in the Middle Ages. Furthermore, it has been constantly ubiquitous and adapts perfectly to the incessantly altering social-

political circumstances, so those who predict its decline are greatly mistaken. The theoretical framework which supports his argumentation is based on the author's previous works and provides a solid basis for his interpretation. Although MALEŠEVIĆ is not a geographer, national narratives have substantial territorial aspects, and geopolitics, area studies and the geography of belongings are also closely linked to the discourse of nationalism.

Siniša MALEŠEVIĆ is an Irish researcher originally from Banja Luka (Bosnia and Herzegovina). He lives in Ireland and is a full professor of sociology at the University College Dublin. His previous work on the subject may also have contributed to the fact that *Grounded Nationalisms* has been awarded a runner-up (honourable mention) in the 2020 Stein Rokkan Award for Comparative Social Science Research. MALEŠEVIĆ's 312-page book consists of 11 chapters apart from the *Introduction* and *Conclusion*. Each chapter also stands as an independent reading, as some of the author's previous works appear here in a revised form.

'Grounded nationalisms' is the answer to the questions of why nationalism is so enduring in the modern era, why it is present at all levels of society, and why it is able to constantly innovate. The author's compact explanation is that because nationalism is historically, organisationally and ideologically grounded as well as micro-interactionally. 'Historically' means that where it appears, it will be strengthened and become dominant at all levels of society. However, this was not a quick process, but it took a long time for becoming a prevailing operational ideology throughout history. Achieving national unity, as it happened in the 19th and 20th centuries throughout the world, required strong organisational power. This was often exercised through coercive measures, so national movements became 'organisationally grounded' and have remained like that to this day. All of this could have come hard without a strong and popular ideological foundation, such as 'collective liberation' and 'emancipation,' as it proclaimed equality for all who belonged to the nation. Furthermore, the modern nation-state also lives in a continuous process of ideologisation and gives a national interpretation to a vast majority of social realities, therefore, 'ideologically grounded.' Lastly, nationalism also plays a powerful role in everyday practices, as nationhood is discursively constructed through daily routines, so it is 'micro-interactionally grounded.' The above mentioned four notions of nationalism constitute the conceptual foundation of MALEŠEVIĆ's complex theory.

The main aim of the book is to show that "successful nationalist projects are premised on the organisational translation of ideological grand narratives into



the micro, family and friendship-based, stories" (p. 14), in addition to "how grounded nationalisms develop, operate and expand" (p. 15). Furthermore, MALEŠEVIĆ focuses on "the organisational, ideological, and micro-interactive underpinnings of nationalisms" (p. 15).

Although the author and the publisher have not divided the book into larger parts, three major sections can be revealed. In the first part (the first three chapters), MALEŠEVIĆ discusses his own theory in detail and compares it with other approaches, explanations and interpretations of nationalism. The second part (Chapters 4–5, and also Chapters 10–11) discusses some significant theoretical issues illustrated by particular examples from the Balkans, but also from other areas in Europe and beyond. In the third part (Chapters 6–9), he explores the regions or countries that have been scrutinised by him in his previous works as well, such as Ireland, Serbia, Bulgaria, presenting these national contexts within the theoretical framework outlined earlier.

The first chapter provides a detailed description and explanation of the author's complex theory. Firstly, he examines nationalism as an ideology. Regarding the widely accepted theory that nationalism is fundamentally a product of modernism, the author, although not denying it completely, takes the view that nationalist ideologies are deeply rooted in the past, which contributed greatly to the success of ideological penetration. In this respect, he contradicts GELLNER's 'Big Ditch' thesis and POLANYI's 'Great Transformation' hypothesis (HANN, C. 2015), which clearly contrast modernism with the ages that preceded it. MALEŠEVIĆ, on the other hand, also describes a significant difference between the modern and the Middle Ages. He points out that the legitimacy of power had divine origin in the past, whereas it is granted by popular sovereignty in modern nation-states. Amplifying the conceptual basis, he does not elude thorny questions, such as the priority of the nation or the state. In this 'the chicken or the egg causality dilemma' of whether the nation-state was first or the nation, he clearly takes the position that the state created the nation. Thus, those empires, kingdoms, and principalities were transformed into a nation-state where a national community could emerge. The further chapters of the book also show in detail that even without gradual transition, for instance, where transformations were initiated by wars or revolutions, the process led to the formation of the nation-state likewise. In fact, he argues that the social organisations and structures are a prerequisite for establishing the nation-state. All of this, however, required a strong and pervasive ideology that permeated all levels of society, a process MALEŠEVIĆ calls 'centrifugal ideologization'.

Turning to social structures and national identity, MALEŠEVIĆ indicates that, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries, national structures were often strengthened

between violent and bloody events. He calls this 'coercive organisational power,' but he means not only physical violence, but also structural. According to the author, nation-states, through their strong legitimacy and enormous organisational and coercive capacity, are able to interpret social reality in a special way, creating the image of 'national identity'. MALEŠEVIĆ considers this to be valid to this day, as most social organisations are overseen or run by the nation-state. Furthermore, it can be underpinned by the experience that people's lifecycle is supported and dependent on the nation-state from birth to death. This nation-centric worldview would not be maintained without everyday practices which notion was elaborated first in Michael BILLIG's *Banal Nationalism* (BILLIG, M. 1995). BILLIG is highly cited in *Grounded Nationalisms*, but MALEŠEVIĆ goes beyond BILLIG's notion and argues that the phenomenon he calls 'micro-solidarity,' which constructs national identity through everyday face-to-face relationships, needs to have strong organisational background as well.

In the second chapter, the author tries to reconcile the theories implying, on the one hand, that nationalism can be traced back to the Middle Ages or even earlier historical times, and on the other, that it is a completely new phenomenon. MALEŠEVIĆ explains with the help of the concept of *longue durée*, which deems nationalism as a long-term creative process, and argues that the two aforementioned theoretical approaches are not mutually exclusive. However, in contrast to *longue durée* theories, which focus too much on countries, he suggests concentrating on organisations, and highlights strong religious, imperial, and other organisations that had strengthened in the Middle Ages and played an extremely important role in building the nation-states later. The Balkans appear in several chapters of the book, perhaps not regardless of the author's provenance. One of the most astonishing findings is that despite the popular belief, Balkan 'national movements' in the first half of the 19th century, such as the First Serbian Uprising (1804–1813), were not 'national' at all. For example, the Serbian Uprising much more has to be considered as social rebellion against the renegade Janissary officers of the Ottoman Empire. MALEŠEVIĆ argues that the vast majority of Serbian society at the time was not at all receptive to nationalist ideals and the Sanjak of Smederevo, where most of the Serbs lived, was lacking in institutions, such as national administration, education system or intellectual life that could have provided the basis for the creation of a nation-state. The uprisings of the early 1800s in the Balkans can be seen as a superimposition of geopolitical games of surrounding empires and dissatisfactions with local rulers rather than 'national' movements. On the other hand, the organisational power of the Orthodox Church, which operated under Ottoman rule, contributed a lot to the creation of the nation-

state, which, in addition to intensive religious life, also operated schools and played a major role in the organisation of everyday life.

The book provides similar curiosities from Bulgaria, Greece and Ireland. Moreover, in a separate chapter, MALEŠEVIĆ analyses the problem of ‘small nation’ and compares nationalisms in Ireland and Serbia, two nations with small areas and populations. He tries to explore the reasons why in one context the adjective ‘small’ carries positive connotations, while in the other, it is being seen as a national tragedy and the greatness of the glorious past is being idolised in national narratives. Whereas the successful economic integration of Ireland is characterised by the ‘Celtic Tiger’ metaphor, Serbia is rather constructing an imperial past covering a large geographical area in the Middle Ages in contrast to the contemporary small one. These approaches are also well known in the countries of the Carpathian Basin. Behind the metaphors of the ‘Tatra Tiger’ in Slovakia or the ‘Pannonian Puma’ in Hungary (POGÁ TSA, Z. 2009; KANEVA, N. 2012), there is a belief in success, while the glorification of the past is also a characteristic of these countries. Finally, MALEŠEVIĆ provides in his volume an analysis of the connections between globalisation and nationalist subjectivities as well as a study about the relations between grounded nationalisms and the privatisation of security.

Still, the book, while examining nationalism from various angles, also has some shortcomings. The most striking example are repetitions, which stem from the fact that the author used his earlier works while compiling and writing the current title. Besides, although it is true that the MALEŠEVIĆ investigates a significant number of theories, which makes the book exciting, the author cannot present all theories in their completeness. Thus, in some cases, for example, the theories of GIDDENS, BECK or BAUMANN are presented in an oversimplified way, so it is unchallenging to make counter-arguments against them. In addition, certain theories are left out of the discussion, such as post-nationalism and transnationalism, but the most painful lack is that of regionalism. MALEŠEVIĆ’s attention is avoided by regions of nation-states (see ANTONSICH, M. 2009 for more details) as well as ethnic-national minorities (e.g. Catalans, Silesians, and Kurds) along with their willingness to exist within (or outside) the nation-state. The writer attaches enormous importance to “emancipatory, egalitarian and fraternal messages” (p. 277) of nationalism, but the perspectives of minorities related to this nation-centric, dominant sense remains unstudied. Thus, he may have a blind spot when it comes to national minorities.

In spite of these shortcomings, the theoretical framework outlined by the author is not only complex but also well applicable because it makes nationalisms universally comparable, whereas it avoids relativism and particularism. With the assistance of

this theory, individual phenomena and processes can be explained, since it provides a utilitarian conceptual scaffold for them. The author emphasises that “the strength of nationalism resides in its ground-ness, the well-entrenched and firmly embedded nationalisms are generally less visible to the naked eye... Once fully grounded, nationalism becomes second nature, a set of largely unquestioned beliefs and social practices that underpins equally the institutional dynamics and everyday life of ordinary individuals in the contemporary world” (p. 279). Therefore, the book is recommended for reading to all those who are interested in the history and contemporary processes of nation-states and nationalism. It is especially valuable for historians, social scientists, and geographers, and also for those who wish to gain a profound insight into contemporary social phenomena related to nationalism.

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GÉZA BARTA¹

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¹ ELTE Eötvös Loránd University, Institute of Geography and Earth Sciences, Department of Social and Economic Geography, Budapest, Hungary. E-mail: gezabarta@gmail.com