



Ernest Gellner's Perspectives on Nationalism in Nations and Nationalism

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Abstract

Nationalism has been one of the fuzziest and elephantine concepts which does not belong strictly to any specific social discipline. In theorizing about the issues of nation and nationalism, Ernest Gellner stood apart from the rest of his generation of post-war social scientists. During the period when the subject of nationalism was most disparaged, Gellner produced many remarkable writings on nationalism. This paper will explore the theoretical underpinnings of nationalism developed by Ernest Gellner in his famous book Nations and Nationalism. He is known to have provided a most logical and thorough explanation of the existence of nationalism as a corollary of modernity. Many issues emerge from his perspectives on nationalism. This paper attempts to explore a few of them. Firstly, it seeks explanations for Gellner's single-minded obsession with the issues of nations and nationalism. Secondly, his ideas about modernity and nationalism are revisited. And finally, the dissection of the strengths and weakness of his project of nations and nationalism is done to understand the underpinnings of his overall perspective. The paper concludes that despite a few inconsistencies in Gellner's theory about nationalism, it remains one of the most potent and plausible accounts in the modern perspectives on nationalism. His argument about the association between nationalism and modernity has a universal appeal and empirical promise.

Keywords: *Nation; Culture; Nationalism; Modern; State; Politics; Multicultural*

Introduction

Nationalism has been one of the fuzziest and elephantine concepts which does not belong strictly to any specific social discipline. Even the authors writing on nationalism significantly differ in their understanding of the concept. Ernst B. Hass, in his review of four theorists on nationalism, finds four different perspectives on nationalism. Dudley Seers defines nationalism as an economic policy, while Benedict Anderson addresses the term as a kind of manufactured linguistic identity. Anthony Smith refers to nationalism be a particular ideology of solidarity based on preindustrial roots. In contrast, Ernest Gellner believes it to be the result of industrialization leading to a social and political organization (Haas,

1986, 707-744). The boundaries of the study of nationalism have always been very porous, which often overlap with different disciplines such as sociology of modernization, modern political theories, economics, and political anthropology.

The genuine conceptualization of nationalism has not been uniforming throughout the history of social theory (Smith, 1983, 19-38). In the classical writings of social theory from about 1800 to 1920 (even in writings after that), very little attention was given to the problems of nationality or nationalism. So there was a minimal set of definitions. Wherever any serious work has been identified, it was limited in its appeal and direction. There is a serious need for integrating nationalism with different disciplines to provide an all-encompassing detailed, and comprehensible understanding of the phenomena. The existing concepts of nationalism have originated in different contexts with different meanings and limited scope. It was looked at with suspicion and disdain during and after the Second World War. Nationalism was alleged to be responsible for the onset of the deadly war in 1939. It was consciously ignored during the period of national self-determination of states and especially during the division of Germany or Korea. It was only in the 1980s that the scholarly attention was being diverted to the nuances of nationalism just before the break-up of the Eurasian Empires. The eventual break-up of the Soviet Union brought the debates of identity and nationalism to the forefront of intellectual activity.

In theorizing about the issues of nationalism, Ernest Gellner stood apart from the rest of his generation of post-war social scientists. During the period when the subject of nationalism was most disparaged, Gellner produced many remarkable writings on nationalism. In his numerous essays and three books, Gellner, the philosopher, anthropologist, sociologist, and multi-lingual polymath, has provided the most logical and thorough explanation of the existence of nationalism as a corollary of modernity. Gellner's first significant work on the theme of nationalism was articulated in *Thought and Change*, but it went unnoticed by the social and political theorists. In contrast, his book *Nations and Nationalism*, which is believed to be a sociologically ambitious work, was very well received by academicians worldwide. It remains one of the best sellers of its time. In this book, he has given a modernist treatment to the ideas about nationalism which is empirically quite promising.

This paper will explore the theoretical underpinnings of nationalism developed by Ernest Gellner in his famous book *Nations and Nationalism*. It has three sections. The first section will explore the setting that forced Gellner to write about nationalism single-mindedly throughout his life. The second section will spell out some of his principal arguments in his book, and lastly, the attempt will be to examine the strengths and weaknesses of his project.

It is worth exploring why Gellner was extremely captivated and engaged in writing primarily about the issues of nationalism throughout his academic life. Going through his biographical sketch, it can be established that his life experiences have tirelessly tampered with his intellectual endeavors. To go into the heart of his understanding of nationalism, it becomes pertinent to investigate the predicaments of his life.

I. Gellner: Biographical Settings

Going through the biographical sketch of Gellner, one cannot resist making the statement that his life was an ongoing struggle and search for identity and nation. His parents belonged to the lower-middle-class Bohemians of Jewish background. They had to change their allegiance from the German ruling minority to the Czech majority community to survive. The condition of Czech Jewry was deeply problematic in the last years of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Hall quotes Spector (2006), who vividly captures the plight of the Jewish community in Prague during those days. He writes that Jews in Prague lived in a tricultural world of Kafka - a world of dispossession which bred varied longings - for inclusion into the German world, for inclusion into the Czech world, and the recovery of simple Jewish roots and Zionism, more generally an endless oscillation between them (qtd. in Hall, 2006, 34). The break-up of the

Austro-Hungarian Empire added more to the plight of the Jews. Tomas Masaryk granted special status to the Jewish community by identifying them in the census by religion rather than by language or nationality. This move divided the communities further. During the inter-war periods, the separation from the Jewish community reached alarming levels, but it was comparatively better in Prague than in many other parts of the region. Such was Gellner's world in which he grew up. In the biographical sketch of Gellner, Hall very rightly sums up the life experiences of this twentieth-century Central European intellectual of Jewish background. He writes that Prague's socio-economic and political developments significantly shaped Gellner's disposition. Firstly, the pressures of modern life forced (Jews) to change identity whether needed or not; secondly, Welthistorischer forces were destroying diverse and varied identities, relentlessly replacing them with units based on a single culture. These developments led Gellner to lay great stress on the rule by one's co-national as one of the essential elements of the modern social contract (Hall, 2006, 34).

The family stayed in Prague until 1939 and witnessed Nazi troops. They narrowly escaped to England, but it turned out to be a harrowing experience for young Gellner. Gellner missed Prague during his school years. After the war, he returned to Prague but was disappointed. By then, the tricultural world of Prague had disappeared. Most Jews, including many of his family members, had been killed; he also witnessed the vicious ethnic cleansing of the Germans. Ultimately, he left for England in 1946 to pursue his academic career. There too, his troubled past is reflected in his intellectual temperament. He could not feel the sense of belonging to the Oxford academia circle and remained throughout an outsider or rather as central European and not British. He strongly wanted to be a part of the community but failed to adopt its customs. Hall remarks that this phenomenon created ambivalence in him – at once interested in and attracted to belonging yet feeling that no social organization would ever be able to contain him in such a way as to limit his freedom of thought (Hall, 2006, 35).

In later years of his life, Gellner re-examined his earlier notions about nationalism because of some major upheavals in world politics. His visits to the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 80's confirmed his postulate that the multinational political systems cannot sustain social pressures released by modernity. At the same time, the homogenizing forces released by modernity in Prague equally shocked him. The enormous costs incurred after the collapse of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires were very distressing for Gellner. The resultant power vacuum encouraged war. Ethnic cleansing, politicicide, population transfer, and genocide were used to sort European populations into more homogenous entities. These developments forced Gellner to reverse his previous prescriptive ideals. He tried hard to prevent the break-up of the Soviet Union so that its transition to liberalization was accompanied by sufficient cultural autonomy and to retain the passive loyalty of its people under a single political roof. His ideals could not arrest the disintegration of the Soviet Union, but at the same time, his fears of tragic mishaps did not realize. This journey through Gellner's life experiences establishes that he could not think about anything but nationalism throughout his life.

II. Gellner's Perspectives in Nations and Nationalism

In his book, *Nations and Nationalism*, written nearly two decades after his first book on nationalism in *Thought and Change*, Gellner restates some of its arguments. He rejects some of the prevalent theories of nationalism, which according to him, are incredibly flawed: (i) the nationalist theory that it is a natural, self-evident and self-generating principle; (ii) Kedourie's theory that it is an artificial consequence of ideas which needed no formulation and appeared by accident; and is inessential for the life of industrial society; (iii) Wrong address theory of Marxism which states that spirit of history or human consciousness blundered when it delivered its awakening message to nations (the wrongful recipients) instead of classes (intended recipients); (iv) Dark Gods theory which states nationalism to be emerging out of atavistic forces of blood or territory. Gellner feels that this observation is often equally shared by the lovers and haters of nationalism. The former considers it a life-enhancing phenomenon,

whereas the latter brand it barbarous. He then delineates his account of nationalism which is entirely different from the prevailing ones.

Gellner offers an alternative theory of nationalism that rests primarily on modernization elements. It is about a society that has moved from the agrarian to industrial phase of human history. He develops his argument by exploring the major characteristics of modern society. Modern society is essentially based on the ideals of progress, affluence, consumption, and meliorism. Its distinctive technological and productive base creates a literate, technically skillful, occupationally mobile, and homogenous society. The homogeneity in the culture presupposes a shared medium of communication and literacy. People communicate effectively with strangers whom they have not encountered before. In this society, people continuously occupy new slots. They must subject themselves to 'universalistic' or 'objective' tests and examinations concerning roles or positions they wish to occupy. Gellner further adds that these pools of homogenous liquid, within which fish of the same kind can move without cultural net or hindrance, are precisely what the ideal of nationalism requires. For this reason, his ideal of nationalism is not a result of any inherent or universal appeal; it is essentially a consequence of the basic organizational principles of modern society.

For Gellner, nations can be defined only as 'the age of nationalism.' The age of nationalism is when general social conditions make way for standardized, homogenous, centrally sustained high cultures, encompassing the whole population and not just the elite minority. It will be a situation where well-defined, educationally sanctioned, and unified cultures constitute precisely the kind of unit with which men willingly and often passionately identify. The culture then becomes a natural repository of political legitimacy. There is a fusion of will, culture, and polity in the age of nationalism. For Gellner, it is nationalism that engenders nations and not the other way round. Nationalism under such conditions for Gellner is:

“... the general imposition of a high culture on society, where previously low cultures had taken up the lives of the majority, and in some cases of the totality, of the population. It means that generalized diffusion of a school-mediated academy-supervised idiom is codified for reasonably precise bureaucratic and technological communication requirements. It is the establishment of an anonymous, impersonal society, with mutually substitutable atomized individuals, held together above all by a shared culture of this kind, in place of a previous complex structure of local groups, sustained by folk cultures reproduced locally and idiosyncratically by the micro-groups themselves (Gellner, 1983, 57).”

Gellner's nationalism is mainly contingent on two elements: state and nation. He claims that nationalism is peculiar to industrial society with its distinctive mode of production, resulting in enormous social units. Maintaining these massive social units with high culture requires vast resources. The state becomes necessary to fulfill the needs of resources, infrastructure, and protection of industrialized societies. Gellner views the state as a centralized order-enforcing agency, capable of sustaining a high culture and ensuring its diffusion through an entire population. He uses Hegelian terms to describe that once none (pre-agrarian) had the state, then some (agrarian) had it, and finally, all (industrial) had it. The states can vary in form but remain an essential precondition for the survival of modern industrial societies.

Gellner argues a man can think of his existence without a state, such as in the 'state of nature, but can never think of himself without a nation. A man without a nation is like a man without his shadow. For him, nation originates under two situations: (i) when men share the same culture referring to having a similar system of ideas, symbols, associations, ways of behaving, and communication; (ii) when men recognize mutual rights and duties towards each other under belonging to the same territory and sharing

its membership. He further writes that neither nations nor states have always existed and, in all circumstances, but nationalism holds that they are destined for each other. In modern society, both are contingent. He argues that not all nations can become viable states. There are many potential nations on the earth, but there is minimal scope for independent and autonomous political units. The satisfaction of some nations becoming states leads to frustration in others. Many potential nations still do not live in compact territorial units but are intermixed with each other.

Gellner claims that nationalism is a political principle, meaning that political and national units should be compatible. For him, nationalism is a theory of political legitimacy that requires that ethnic boundaries should not be cut across political ones. Also, the ethnic boundaries within a given state should not separate power holders from the rest. If this principle is violated, it may lead to nationalist movements with unanticipated and disastrous consequences. Violations may result when a political boundary of a given state fails to include all the members of the appropriate nation; when it consists of all of them but also includes some foreigners; or when a nation may live in a multiplicity of states so that no single state can claim to be a national one. For him, one serious violation of the nationalist principle is when the rulers of the political unit belong to a nation other than that of the majority of the ruled. This difference constitutes the most intolerable breach of political propriety. This may occur through the incorporation of the nationalist territory into a larger empire, or the local domination of a foreign group. Gellner witnessed these violations when Prague was under the rule of a German minority, leaving the population torn between two or three nations.

In *Nations and Nationalism*, Gellner examines the emergence and nature of nationalism by exploring three phases of human history. In a non-teleological form of historical materialism, he associates each phase with a specific mode of production, coercion, culture, and cognition. His analysis makes use of three variables to determine the incidence of nationalism in these periods of human history: (i) the distribution of power in a society (access limited to genetically defined or quasi-hereditary groups versus upward mobility); (ii) easy access to 'high culture' of literate and communication through a system of public education against the vertically and horizontally segmented social groups each attached to low local culture; (iii) ethnic homogeneity as opposed to ethnic heterogeneity, as defined in terms of language. The presence or the absence of combinations of these variables determines the existence and nature of nationalism in a particular phase. He argues that pre-agrarian or tribal societies did not conceive of nation or state as cultural unity was unnecessary. In an agrarian society, nationalism had no rationale as it was predominantly hierarchical, segregated, and heterogeneous; and the rulers never wanted a common culture for the masses. In industrial society, nationalism becomes an essential part of its cultural environment with precepts of exo-socialization, whereby educating persons in a common high culture free from familial or corporate ties. Gellner uses Durkheimian analysis of normative orientation through these three ages for a more emphatic distinction. He argues that the tribal societies worship themselves indirectly (as spirits), and agrarian societies worship their rulers directly or indirectly (in monotheistic religion). In industrial societies, people directly worship themselves (nationalism). Finally, we end up with highly centralized nation-states with anonymous mobile populations (individual membership), with a homogenous culture instilled by a major education industry.

Gellner does not deny the influence of reformation, Protestantism, and colonialism on the formation of nationalism. Still, for him, nationalism can be defined as typical of the transition to the rational tradition. It expresses the societal thrust toward homogenous perception, social organization, and behavior. Gellner argues that the process of industrialization, in its earlier stages, engenders very sharp and conspicuous inequalities, accompanied by painful turmoil for the less advantageous groups. It creates a big gap between the life chances of the well-off and the starving people. The conflict between them can take any disastrous form and escalate indefinitely; unless both identify themselves and each other culturally 'ethnically.' In this way, a new nation is formed, which can be organized around the high or previously low culture. Gellner examines the development of nationalism in various contexts. He

concludes that the appeal of the new education-transmitted ethnicity comes from both push and pull: the attraction of the new employment opportunities and aversion arising from the erosion of the old security-giving kin groupings.

Gellner further uncovers some distinctive features of modern society. It is more of an egalitarian society; the cultural homogeneity forms the basis for its egalitarianism. He writes that industrialization engenders a mobile and culturally homogenous society with egalitarian expectations and aspirations. It was absent in earlier stable, stratified, dogmatic, and absolutist agrarian societies. Another significant feature, which Gellner encounters, in modern society, is a kind of entropy quality, which is a shift from pattern to randomness. There is no serious binding of any organization at any level between individuals and the whole community. The nation becomes most important because of the erosion of sub-groupings and the increased importance of shared and literary-dependent culture. However, it cannot be denied that some entropy-resistant elements in industrial society may endanger the prospects of nationalism. Entropy resistance creates fissures and sometimes chasms in industrial societies. He discusses a range of entropy-resistant traits, physical or genetically transmitted, and religious and cultural habits often resistant to the industrial 'melting pot.'

The uniqueness of Gellner's conceptualization of nationalism lies in his elaboration of a typology of nationalism that he claims corresponds to realistic historical situations. He distinguishes between the 'nationalism inducing' and 'nationalism thwarting' situations. His classification depends mainly on three dimensions: (i) power holder from the rest; (ii) those who have access to modern education or a viable modern high culture from those who do not have; and (iii) polity in which the powerholders and the rest, the educated or uneducated share homogeneous culture and from one in which they do not. These three dimensions generate eight possibilities of nationalism, amongst which four are nationalism engendering models, and four are nationalism thwarting models.

Gellner's four 'nationalism engendering' models are: (i) Satisfied nationalism which is a characteristic of mature homogenous industrialism in which the power holders and the non-powerholders share the same education and are co-cultural co-nationals where we have the least conflicts and problems. Japanese or Denmark falls under this model. (ii) Classical liberal nationalism where some have power and others do not, and this difference correlates with a cultural difference even though people of both classes have been equipped with modern education. He puts 'unification nationalisms' of Germany and Italy under this category. (iii) Ethnic nationalism where power holders have access to a central high culture which is their own and powerless are educationally deprived, sunk in their own low cultures. In these situations, conflict arises when the small intelligentsias of the powerless spearhead efforts to make their low culture into high culture. This situation historically corresponds to the nationalism in Eastern Slavic and Balkan Europe, and (iv) Diaspora nationalism can be described as 'middleman' nationalism, which arises in societies transitioning from an agrarian to industrial. It is characterized by groups that previously had access to commercial and educational high culture, often through their caste roles as pariah 'middlemen' in the agrarian economy. These groups are better equipped economically for modernization than others, ethnically distinctive, but lack political and military power. They are likely to be victimized during genocides or mass expulsions when economic competition grows within a modernizing polity and generates Diaspora nationalism. Gellner puts Jews, Armenians, overseas Indians in Africa, overseas Chinese in south-east Asia, and Ibos of Nigeria. This typology rests with the theory of social conflict. Conflicts can occur where there are marked 'ethnic' differences. These differences lead to the differences in access to modernization and power. In short, it can be said that the blockages in social mobility, when tied to any ethnic or diacritical markers and exclusionary control of cultural capital, may give rise to nationalists' conflicts. Gellner's example of Classical liberal Western nationalism in the unification of Italy and Germany and his remedies of a few battles along with some diplomacy to correct the problems of right political roofs for the previously subordinated high culture is not very sustainable. In Eastern Europe, the nationalist movements were mobilized behind a high culture and have resulted in serious

consequences like ‘ethnic’ population expulsions, liquidations, coercive assimilation, and other horrors. Gellner’s typology of nationalism is essentially cultural rather than political and is a crude distinction between powerholders and non-powerholders.

Finally, Gellner examines the future of nationalism and its possibility of survival in an age of advanced industrialism. What if this society again transforms into a stable or immobile society like previous societies? However, he is confident that the possibility of wealth saturation in a capitalistic society is very distant. He is hopeful that in the future, conflicts in nationalism will cease when communication gaps engendered by cultural differences would become insignificant. He concludes that in such a hypothetically global continuum of basically homogenous industrial culture, differentiated by languages that are distinct only phonetically and superficially but not semantically, the age of nationalism would be a matter of the past. Gellner sees it as a distant reality.

III. Gellner’s Perspective on Nationalism: An Analysis

Gellner has given new perspectives about nationalism with some distinctive attributes. It is the first serious effort to provide a universal understanding of the phenomena of nationalism in the context of the socio-economic paradigm. However, Gellner’s nationalism is subjected to diffuse criticisms by many writers. This section will attempt to examine a few of them.

One of the inconsistencies Ernest Gellner’s concept of nationalism suffers from is its over-dependence on the structural-functional paradigm. His nationalism has been explained in terms of its beneficial consequences (functionality) for modern society. The functionalist paradigm in social theory has been attacked for having teleological inconsistencies when any cultural usage is readily attributed to its function. After going through his arguments, one is left confused about what causes what and why. In his appraisal of Gellner’s works, Leary comments that Gellner’s arguments display the vices of functionalist reasoning in which events and processes occur wholly beyond the understanding of human agents, in which consequence precede causes (‘O’Leary, 1997, 191-222). Perry Anderson also complains that the ‘most arresting feature of [Gellner’s] theory of nationalism is its single-minded economic functionalism (qtd. in ‘O’Leary, 1997, 203). However, even if his concept is a work of a functionalist, it cannot be denied that nationalism benefits modernization. Gellner’s functionalist attribute can be discerned when he writes:

“So the economy needs both the new type of central culture and the central state; the culture needs the state; and the state probably needs the homogenous cultural branding of its flock....In brief, the mutual relationship of a modern culture and state is something quite new, and springs, inevitably, from the requirements of modern society (Gellner, 1983, 140).”

Gellner’s interpretation of nationalism from a historical-philosophical perspective has also been questioned. On what basis is his division of human history into three phases justified? It may just be a matter of an individual’s choice that does not fit into empirical realities. Gellner’s nationalism is essentially a modern phenomenon that is possible only in the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment. Leary questions this aspect. In his review, he questions Gellner’s historical account of nationalism on two grounds: (i) what if there have been nations before nationalism, and if so, can Gellner’s theory cope with such anomalies? (ii) can there be post-industrial conflicts, and if so, how do they fit into Gellner’s general theory? After examining the works of John Armstrong’s *Nations before Nationalism* and Anthony Smith’s *The ethnic Origins of Nations*, which strongly criticize the modernist interpretations of nation and nationalism, Leary is forced to defend Gellner’s thesis. He comments that these critiques were confused and admitted that nationalism, both an ideology and movement, is wholly a modern phenomenon. No talk of nations or national consciousness existed before nationalism (O’Leary, 1997, 207). However, one can historically determine the relationship between industrialization and

nationalism. For the second objection raised by Leary, it can be argued that Gellner, in the last chapter of *Nations and Nationalism*, reflects upon the future of nationalism in the advanced industrial society; but has not dealt with the problems of identity and nationalism in detail. However, by making a passing reference, he does not deny the possibilities of issues of identity and nationalism in post-industrial states.

Gellner's theory of nationalism has been criticized for being too reductionist and simplistic in treating the complex phenomena of nationalism and nation-states. His ideas about nations, nationalism, and states based on economic determinism, the selection process of nations based on endogenous factors, qualification of possession of high culture, and transforming low culture into high for the formation of nations, are highly reductionist in approach. Most of the time, the selection process of cultures becoming nations or nations constituting states is determined by exogenous factors. Power politics play a more significant role than socio-economic modernization, and great powers have always been decisive arbitrators of nation or statehood. Leary argues that nations and states are formed 'by permission' rather than as a by-product of the strength of indigenous mobilization for nationhood. French helped the birth of the American nation, the Allies decided the fate of nations at the Versailles, and the departing colonial powers shaped the frontiers of new nations they left behind ('O'Leary, 1997, 212). The typology of nationalism is another example of simplistic treatment of the subject, which takes just two variables, culture, and education, between the powerholders and non-powerholders to classify nationalism of the world. Power politics and power resources provide an alternative selection mechanism for determining nationhood which Gellner's theory has wholly ignored.

Another criticism from the earlier one is that Gellner's theory of nationalism is highly apolitical and rests primarily on cultural and materialist premises. This charge is substantiated by his typology of nationalism, a politically insensitive account that depends mainly on cultural and material accounts of political motivation. He completely ignores the political implications in forming nation-states and selecting which cultures become nations. He visualizes egalitarianism in modern societies but ignores developing its relationship with nationalism or democratization. He simply enumerates two options for modern society. His ideas are stuck with just two choices: nationalist homogenization through assimilation; and nationalist secessionism, which provides another nationalist homogenization. Gellner is a strict historical materialist when he asserts that nationalist politics is a byproduct of cultural fissures shaped by the uneven diffusion of industrialism. Many scholars suggest that the genesis of nationalism and its maintenance owe much to military success rather than economic performance.

Gellner limits his vision to one culture, one nation theory, and completely overlooks the realities of the nation-states. He oversees the realities of the countries having multicultural and pluralistic structures. His blatant remark that genuine cultural pluralism ceases to be viable under current conditions of industrial society is not objectively plausible. Political integration often does not result in cultural assimilation, which Gellner very easily assumes that political nationalism must be (high) cultural nationalism. Modern political entities have formulated newer strategies to manage national and ethnic differences which counteract national homogenization. The systems of control, arbitration, federation/autonomy, and consociation have been discovered to manage pluralism in modern societies. In most multi-ethnic and multicultural countries, it is political nationhood rather than cultural. His theory treats political and cultural nations as one and completely ignores the role of nation-builders or constitution-makers. Gellner's other claim that co-nationals should rule nations opens a plethora of severe consequences for modern nation-states. By accepting nationalism as the doctrine of 'one culture, one state,' his theory leaves nations with only two extreme choices: assimilation on the one hand; or genocide or forced expulsion or emigration on the other. He completely ignores the range of political options open to modern political systems.

Despite some inconsistencies in Gellner's theory about nationalism, it remains one of the most potent and plausible accounts in the modern perspectives on nationalism. His argument about the

association between nationalism and modernity has a universal appeal and empirical promise. In modern times when the issues of identity and nationhood are troubling many parts of the world, his work provides a reliable source for understanding the phenomena. The deficiencies one finds in his ideas stem from his being non-political rather than anything else. It may be because of the developments during his times, his disposition, and the status of nationalist doctrines which forced him to tread on a simple and non-controversial path of nationalism.

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