

NATION, JUSTICE AND LIBERTY

A nation is not a creation of the brain but a collective experience. It does not equal the sum of the individuals that compose it but transcends that sum like a global personality that is not only juridical (although there once was a “League of Nations”) but also moral in the highest sense of the word.

We may ask ourselves if liberty is indetermination, non-alienation and autonomy in its accomplishment; if it is congenial in the genetic code of the nation for its entire existence or, on the contrary, if there is not a sort of dialectic, that is, historic, aleatory and problematic relationship between these two realities. In fact, there is danger in the desire to find a similarity, even by analogy, between the life of nations and a biological process. The nation is a historical phenomenon appearing through a chain of circumstances in 19th-century Europe, theorized by Europe and often born elsewhere as a reaction to European imperialism. The Nation is largely a bourgeois idea and reality.

It is thus necessary to relativize the concept of nation that in addition is united, balanced and confronted with realities that are not neutral for liberty—Statism, Tribalism, Internationalism, Socia-

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lism, and so on—and that accompany the erratic union of nation and liberty.

I. LIBERTY AS MOTHER AND DAUGHTER OF NATION

Very often Nation as a collective personality is in opposition to itself: it is the act of Spartacus liberating himself; it is the decision to knock down walls and break yokes.

The main idea and principal motive of this collective birth are varied. Generally, the first liberty demanded is juridical and political. It is the right to be oneself and act for one's self, to possess exclusive title to appear in court and negotiate, in short, to dominate one's own history. "The assembled nation cannot take orders!", Sieyès curtly replied to the emissary of Louis XVI. This political liberty thus implies the access to the stature of subject and no longer object of universal history. This is why it is a question of equality as much as liberty.

Another fundamental province of refusal and the liberating explosion of a nation is its specific culture. The feeling of belonging and of indissoluble physical attachment, festivals, rites and symbols, flags and banners that exact national sentiment, the sumptuous monuments of epic and lyric words united to music, dance, even to cooking, are so many anchors without which a people will no longer find the pith and essence that come from the collective spirit. All this flow of motivating and vital representations that a nation founds in the hearts of all its children irrigates the social body through the means of language. Through it, integration is crystallized at the same time as the exigency of the right to difference in culture. Language is the impenetrable barrier of the most tender and most secret intimacy of a people. It directly establishes darkness and spiritual secession through a refusal to communicate with the exploiter and the murderer. It is the burning of bridges with the other; the negation of the one who denies us.

Truly, here as elsewhere, "In the beginning was the word." A people that retains its language is never conquered, because of the living force it conceals. The vital energy, the transcendent spiritual charge of culture, causes its metabolism to release a phenomenon of rejection when major aggressions are encountered. It is a

patent historical fact that internationals and transnationals have not entirely prevailed against the strength of national feeling. The African Negro culture transplanted overseas within the heart and spirit of the slaves continues to astonish the world and soothe its fevers and terrors, its search for liberty elsewhere. The last World Wars were essentially national wars, and those that are manifested in the North or in the South seem not have lost this character. Through culture, man is allied with God and is endowed with a sort of intrinsic autonomy with regard to matter. This is independence itself, that causes a song to burst from the lips of a being crushed by strong individual torture as well as by collective ethnocide, a song that gushes like a spring inaccessible to the torturer, an irrepressible song that is identified with conscience. It is through culture that a nation is most strongly united with liberty.

In this regard, religion is an unbreachable bastion of the resistance of nations, as is shown by the independent churches of Africa in colonial days (Kimbanguism, Matsouanism and others, in Central and Southern Africa). In the same way, it suffices to recall the mobilizing role of the Islamic faith against the foreign, "unbelieving," settler during the Algerian war of liberation. Finally, the religious institutions and strong faith of the Poles have for a long time constituted the granite base for patriotism in that country.

In effect, religious particularism of a struggling nation prefigures, announces, calls for and attracts the absolute possibility to differ, that is, liberty.

However, one often realizes that political and even cultural liberty are in vain without the economic basis that fixes and puts an official seal on the national structure. We remember the role of the Zollverein in the case of Germany. Famine often has mastery over independence, and begging authorizes only a shameful and mortgaged liberty. When exterior aid is no longer solid support but a series of uncertain remedies, liberty falters and is in danger. From this comes the demand for economic liberty, the right to live that is conditioned by the right to choose. The most exemplary cases of these fundamental struggles for national liberty and dignity in the contemporary world are the anti-colonial and anti-imperialistic national movements and, above all, the long march of the Negro peoples against the inhuman regime of apartheid. There, in effect, ethnocide is doubled by genocide, and the struggle for indepen-

dence is purely and simply the equivalent of a demand for the right to breathe. Nevertheless, the collective liberty of a nation does not automatically bring about the establishing of individual or class liberties. National liberty once conquered at the high price of the sacrifice of all under the egis of a motivating group, it happens that the latter monopolizes the essence of its fruits. It is the tragic result of confiscated independence.

II. SEPARATIONS OF NATION AND LIBERTY

It is in the same vein, but no longer solely on the social plane, that nationalism in all its forms is situated. Nationalism is the nation plus the desire for power; we may ask ourselves if it is not related to the defensive or offensive aggressivity that lies at the heart of all living organisms that try to keep alive. Nationalism is the uncontrolled proliferation of the national spirit. It is a greedy return to what the collective group has but lately condemned: subjugation of others. Victorious liberty becomes the exterminating sword against weaker nations.

All nationalisms dig the grave of liberty, but apartheid, like National-Socialism, is particularly distinguished in this debasing activity. The same remark sometimes applies to the ideologies of the "chosen people" or "holy war" that mobilize religion not to free but to enslave. Iconoclastic fury against "indigenous" religions (and arts), conquerors claiming to be liberators, even in their vocabulary joining the paranoid hysteria of Hitler when he claimed to liberate Czechoslovakia.

Cultural imperialisms are particularly to be feared. The neutralization of individuals is here obtained by the subterfuge of voluntary self-censure which gives a semblance of liberty and legitimacy to the chains encumbering oppressed minds.

Is there a sort of immanent and perverse logic of collective expansion that, behind each national structure, stands out as a sinister shadow? Certainly not, but the menace is there, waiting for the means and the occasion to act. The strength of the nation thus founders in the violence of the predator. Preying nations are legion in the register of history. The French Revolution, begun in the fulguration of immortal principles soon, under Jacobin leadership,

achieved ascendancy over particular cultures at the heart of the Hexagon, before erupting through the hegemonic fury of Napoleon's grand design. The veterans of Napoleon's Old Guard had almost nothing in common with the heroes of Valmy. A nation does not become great blamelessly.

Here we must ask ourselves what the role of a national State is in this almost fatal inclination and if in each nationalistic enterprise it is not the nation that liberates and the State that enslaves. In sum, to the beneficence of the nation would be opposed the heaviness of the State. "States are cold monsters," said a great contemporary man.

In effect, the State is the armature, the armed body of which the nation is the soul. When, either through the megalomania of one man or through the brutality of interests at stake, the State imposes its priorities on a nation, the separation between the latter and liberty is effected.

A nation becomes a value in itself, absolutely sovereign, crushing the values it had engendered itself. The aberrations of nationalism are very difficult to check from the inside. They develop monstrously until they are stopped by another nationalism or by an awakening nation that takes up the torch of liberty. How does pride develop in nations? This is an immense field of research that deserves thorough investigation by historians, anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers and theologians. Material interests are undoubtedly a necessary, but insufficient, explanation. There is a self-rapture, a blind conviction of being invested with a mission, a vertigo at the heights, that submerges reason itself. Irrational pulsations have often transformed entire peoples into enthusiastic flocks, ready to exterminate the others but also ready to march happily to the slaughterhouse themselves.

III. AND TODAY?

Since the 19th century national movements seem to have passed from the North to the South, which remains the most exploited part of the planet. Latin-Americans who began this search for liberty with Bolivar are far from having achieved the struggle for freedom.

Are we in the presence of a curse on the species?

First of all, we must remember the great principles: liberty is indivisible. As the members of the French Convention said, "A people that oppresses another people cannot be free." The United States also began their national odyssey by the proclamation of the same principles of a universalist nature.

In its ascendent and positive phase, every nation for some years or decades incarnates the entire collective ideal of humanity, whose light it splendidly reflects. However small the nation, it speaks for past and future nations. It legislates for Man and for eternity.

Today, incontrovertible opportunities, but also grave risks, govern the positive expansion of all nations, large or small. The most important opportunity for humanity is that some countries seem to have really drawn lessons from the shipwreck of nations and liberty during World War II. This is true of the Scandinavian countries, Austria and especially Yugoslavia which, after having heroically preserved its independence, decided to autonomize its people to the maximum within the framework of a very elastic federation. The federal formula, in fact, decentralization and regionalization, asserts itself more and more to liberate everything by reinforcement and by integration. This policy is possible today because of the development of intercommunication and the appearance of small computers, as well as receivers and senders of messages emitted on a planetary or regional scale. Through this physical bringing together of nations that also are seated in the United Nations, we may say that they are actually camping side by side under the same tent that could, of course, be transformed into an atomic umbrella.

In addition, the advances realized in learning languages makes the specter of the Tower of Babel less agonizing. Finally, young people and women who animate pacific, if not pacifist, forces are a hope for a world that is less the victim of the sadism of the nationalistic Moloch. "Make love, not war!", an impertinent slogan that expresses the anguish of this era very well.

Perhaps more serious risks weigh on the future of the free will of nations, among them the refusal to really internationalize certain cases and sectors of power. Space, for example, and the ocean depths have already been thoroughly examined by ships, missiles and various instruments of national provenance.

States come more and more to the forefront to the detriment of people. Some of them take the lion's share (the right of veto, for example, in the Security Council and control of financial organizations on a worldwide scale). These are the same countries that accumulate the means of destruction that menace the future of humanity. A general ethnocide would thus bring about a general genocide: the Apocalypse of nations.

Moreover, the technical means that bring people closer together physically do not have in themselves an automatic political virtue. The *Mundial*, world championship of soccer, an experience shared by the entire planet, served to revive national prides. Technical means that are not governed by reason and humanism reinforce the aggression perpetrated against dominated peoples, whether through publicity or the ideological messages, through the invasion of consumer products as vectors of culture or through the dissemination of educational models. Some societies are thus condemned to reproduce foreign socio-cultural blocs in an aberrant way, so contributing to the engenderment of a leveled-off humanity that is at the antipodes of the multiple and rich landscape of national territories. From the height of a stationary satellite, through manipulating the waves, we can see the substance of our souls being modeled away little by little.

In addition to the levelling action of State ideologies erected in absolute models, particularly the Manichean dichotomies that oblige a choice of for or against, thus denying the right to difference, we must emphasize the impact of the transnationals whose omnipresent ramifications effectively contribute to the flattening and homogenizing of the world. From this comes, to the north as well as to the south of the planet, a resurgence of the national or even regional phenomenon, with the view of eluding reduction to the anonymity of a punched card or a number and to banish the specter of a world in which ghosts of nations advance without a face or a voice.

If everyone is ready to plunge into the universality of science and techniques, no one is ready to drown in it. Everywhere and always as long as man keeps his status will remain inscribed in people's consciences the refusal not to be Other but to be The Other.

Nations are still living, even if here or there, as in Africa, they

are built on the disputable bases passively inherited from colonization. The problem of the nation is sharply evident in today's Africa where fifty or so states generally having a mediocre revenue with small markets try to remain standing and assume their sovereign responsibilities.

Just as the kings in Europe primed the national movement by breaking up the feudal system, we could anticipate that African states would liquidate their traditional ethnic structures to establish a "desire to live in common," on a national scale. However, in doing so, they would have swept away the bases themselves of the different historical cultures, with no solution in exchange and with, moreover, serious risks of social instability. This is why the nation often vegetates between the decay of single cultures and the omnipotence of the State, a tropical Leviathan that, with some exceptions, does not find a partner in any structured civil society (intellectuals, contractors, unions, journalists or clergy).

Usually, the states that have the most success in the transition toward a nation in the Western sense of the word are those that achieved independence by armed force, which brought about a fusion of energies in a total collective project. To these may be added monolingual countries, especially if the common language has a written cultural tradition. Multilingual states often handle their national handicap by using the language of the ex-colonial power. We may also mention countries endowed with a mobilizing ideology. This must be adjusted to the realities, interests and values of the concerned societies. If not, it becomes a rigid caste that paralyzes liberty. Finally come the countries that are most integrated into the dominant capitalist system and have achieved a mimetic and rapid growth, matching the acceleration of the process of formation of social classes. These countries that distribute to a privileged minority the essential of the fruits of economic progress succeed in developing a feeling of belonging tied to the conscience of sharing the same profits and participating in the same collective success. However, without counting the exploitation of the poor working classes (often coming from "less-advanced" neighboring countries) whose low standard of living is the ransom and condition for this type of teleguided flight, we must say that the local middle class is rarely national. It insures by simply subcontracting *in partibus infidelium* the management of peripheral markets of a

system whose centers of decision are exterior to the "nation."

In addition, economic dilapidation joined to the weak coherence of the constituting elements of the "national" entity (the case of Chad being caricatural in this regard) has often brought about authoritarian regimes, even dictatorial and hostile to liberty. Military regimes in particular have brought to the direction of the state their own concept of nation and liberty. To the degree in which the territorial situation of states is arbitrary and the frontiers delineated sometimes for thousands of kilometers coincide here and there with the imaginary lines that are parallels and longitudes (for example, between Ghana and Upper Volta) the attention of the military is easily polarized on the defense of markets. From this arise the many frontier wars paid for by people belonging to the same ethnic group. Millions of African refugees, specially in the Horn of Africa, are witnesses to the bitter separation between nation and liberty on that continent. For them, it is an inexorable submersion below the historical horizon.

African national states thus know tardily, but with weapons that are much more murderous and purchased at the price of gold from northern suppliers, the calvaries and holocausts of European countries.

Many African leaders, to build a nation, present as a dilemma with no alternative the choice between development and liberty. Democracy is sometimes presented as incompatible with the rapid development of the country: thus there is a pretense of not knowing that the road to national development, even economic, leads through liberties.

In short, African nations are extrovert often beyond the threshold of alienation that we have said is at the antipodes of liberty. For example, African cultures are indirectly menaced by the structure itself of exterior commerce. Northern countries send manufactured products to Africa that are the condensed cultural values of European or other countries, whereas African countries export raw and natural products that are culturally empty. It is the unequal cultural exchange, more destructive than the other, by which African countries sell their being to insure their having.

In conclusion, it is important to remember that in no case can a nation be an absolute value. It has value only through the liberation of human energy that it mobilizes in the minds and

hearts of its nationals. Thus liberty is a higher moral principle than the nation that is only one of its historical expressions. Liberty, but also justice, without which it would be “the liberty of the fox within an open chickenyard.”

In other words, justice between nations is today the other name for liberty.

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