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NATION FOCUSED POLITICAL CHANGE AS A CHALLENGE FOR EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

In recent years we have observed the meaningful rise of a new nationalism around the world. This neo-nationalistic trend has a significant impact on education. The aim of the article is to indicate the areas of knowledge that should be included in teacher education programs in order to broaden teachers' competences in the field of understanding the relationship between education and politics, visible in the directions of reforming education and creating a collective, national identity, which determine in-group and intergroup relations. In this article I refer to empirical research concerning the attitude towards democracy and the nation as well as some theories explaining the phenomenon of autocracy and nationalism, among others: Integrated Threat Theory, Social Dominance Theory and The Dual Process Motivational Model, and the Cumulative, Structural Model of National Attitudes. Taking into account the recent changes in education, especially in school curricula and textbooks, for example in Hungary and Poland, I will pay attention to changes among the universal aims of education: human values, relationships, individual and collective identity, meaningful benchmark groups and sources of social bonds.

Keywords: Education, national identity, democracy, teacher

Teachers in the education system usually have a threefold role. They are government officials, subjects of a specific school with its rules, and teachers of children and youth who should facilitate learning about and understanding the world as well as help build relationships with others based on humanistic values. The divergence between the political vision of the state and the educational goals of the school creates a conflict between these roles. Do teacher education programs prepare teachers for working in this conflict?

POLITICAL CONTEXT

The theme on which I would like to focus is the consequences of promoting nationalist ideas in the social discourse and in education for the shaping of social attitudes, especially among the young generations. The concepts that I shall analyze – such as ethnocentrism, nationalism, nativism and patriotism – are the subject of research conducted by scientists representing various areas of social sciences. They have been defined in a variety of ways and are often included in complex typologies. At the same time, the boundaries of these concepts are fuzzy and often intersect. Is this an important reflection and research subject for educators? It certainly is. Words such as ‘nation,’ ‘national’ or ‘patriotism’ are found in the contents of documents regulating education (e.g. national core curriculum) and in the public discourse. The development of patriotic attitudes is considered a significant objective of education in numerous countries. They are also important issues in historical education and civics.

In recent years, it is easy to observe the intensification of nationalist tendencies in many parts of the world. Nowadays we differentiate not only ethno-nationalism – a modernist nationalism devoid of hostility – but even the nationalist movements of the 1990s from the radical growth of the so-called new nationalism, frequently associated with the extreme right. The reasons for and the manifestations of this phenomenon are widely discussed, and its consequences are not necessarily considered only as a threat. Both the media discourse and scientific publications point out that the most frequent reason for resurgence of various forms of nationalism is the undermining, during the last few decades, of the social belief that the market economy and liberal democracy were the two pillars of order and prosperity. The financial and immigration crises, and the freedom movements all over the world, the tension and conflicts in the Western land of past prosperity and beyond it led to a situation where the whole world is much less stable, much more variable and – most importantly – difficult to predict. The crises resulted in a decline of the trust in governments in numerous countries and fears about the future, as well as criticism of democracy, especially the liberal variety, as an unreliable political system. Thus, a significant part of the past social values was questioned, such as global solidarity or respect for cultural diversity. This has serious consequences in various areas important for the functioning of society, including education, where these values had been significant until recently.

When we look at the results of the 2017 Eurobarometer survey regarding the perception of fairness, inequality and inter-generational mobility, we see that a considerable

number of Europeans have critical views regarding the level of achievement of these humanistic and social objectives and values. Admittedly, a little over half of the respondents (58%) believed that people have equal development opportunities, but huge differences in opinions voiced in individual countries were noted – the belief was shared by 81% of respondents in Denmark, but only by 18% in Greece. The respondents were not optimistic in their assessment of justice in specific areas. Less than one-third agreed that political decisions are applied consistently to all citizens. Over 80% of Europeans thought that income differences are too large – from 96% in Portugal and 92% in Germany to 59% in the Netherlands. In all countries, with the exception of Denmark, more than 60% of respondents stated that governments should undertake actions to reduce these differences.¹

We can interpret these research results using the relative form of the deprivation theory. The individual, comparing their resources with the resources of others, notices a growing difference between what they actually own and the subjectively desired state.² The resources can be understood in various ways, not only in economic categories, but also as prestige or a sense of identification and belonging. In every case of deprivation, there is fear for one's social position and the threat of exclusion, which can be of various kinds, both economic and cultural. Frustration and anxiety related to deprivation are linked with resentment toward political authorities who do not provide adequate levels of resources.³

Economic and social inequalities are accompanied by a sense of lack of agency in the political sphere and of lack of influence on cultural changes, e.g. those resulting from globalization and increased migration. The political and cultural sources of individual and social frustration can even be more serious than the economic ones. The fight for various goods – not only economic ones – whose supply is limited leads to conflicts, on the individual and collective level alike. The creators of the Integrated Threat Theory propose a model under which the inter-group hostility is caused both by realistic factors (e.g. material) and by symbolic ones (values, moral rules).⁴

The discontent and uncertainty, evident to varying degrees in civic actions, were quickly exploited by politicians and social movement activists. They easily identified the main causes of the crises by selectively using analyses made by academics and journalists. Globalization and transnational financial institutions have been accused of exacerbating economic inequality between countries, destroying national cultures and

¹ European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, *Special Eurobarometer 471. Fairness, Inequality and Inter-generational Mobility*, (v1.00), data set, at http://data.europa.eu/88u/data-set/S2166_88_4_471_ENG, 10 May 2021.

² I. Walker, T.F. Pettigrew, "Relative Deprivation Theory. An Overview and Conceptual Critique," *British Journal of Social Psychology*, vol 23, no. 4 (1984), pp. 301-310.

³ D. della Porta, M. Diani, *Ruchy społeczne. Wprowadzenie*, transl. by A. Szadza, Kraków 2009; M.T. Grasso, M. Giugni, "Protest Participation and Economic Crisis: The Conditioning Role of Political Opportunities," *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 55, no. 4 (2016), pp. 663-680.

⁴ W.G. Stephan, C.L. Renfro, "The Role of Threats in Intergroup Relations," in D. Mackie, E.R. Smith (eds), *From Prejudice to Intergroup Emotions*, New York 2002, pp. 191-208.

limiting sovereignty. Liberal ideas of freedom were deemed destructive to moral and religious attitudes. Ineffective and corrupt governments were condemned as not caring for the harmonious development of state institutions and the well-being of its citizens. Politicians in power were accused of rentierism and of a turn towards oligarchy. The absence of real influence of the people on decisions made by those in power, the neglect of their needs, as well as the progressive weakness of civil society, were negatively assessed.

Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin in their book, *National Populism: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy uncompromisingly point out the reasons for the political phenomenon which they call 'new populism' or 'new nationalism,' linking it with seemingly unexpected events such as the victory of Donald Trump, the Brexit referendum, the electoral victories and successes of Viktor Orbán, Matteo Salvini and Sebastian Kurz, or the protests of Yellow Vests in France.* In their opinion, national populism is the consequence of deep social and political tendencies which they refer to as the four Ds: Distrust, Destruction, Deprivation and De-Alignment (loss of identification).⁵ Distrust refers to a lack of trust in political elites. Destruction means, first and foremost, destruction of identity, understood as destruction of nations and cultures by immigration and multi-culturalism. National populism is, therefore, one of the forms of identity politics for white populations. Deprivation refers to the erosion of living standards of the middle and working classes in First World countries, caused by globalization and neo-liberalism. De-alignment means that voters no longer identify with the main political parties.

Without questioning the validity of this criticism, one must keep in mind its political objectives. Quite frequently, when politicians place the will of the people on their banners, their actions turn into populist practices aimed at seizing power. In recent years, in many countries, political elections have resulted in changes of leadership, with new powers claiming to fulfill the needs and rights of people while veering towards nationalist ideas.

Crises strengthen the populist and nationalist tendencies, both among the government and the governed, but as a rule, the former create conditions for their development. The recipe proposed by opponents of liberal democracy was a simple one, and this is why it rapidly gained supporters. In times of hardship, national interest must be of utmost importance. In order for it to be realized, the country's sovereignty and independence from transnational institutions must be strengthened. The prosperity of elites must be replaced by an improvement in the fate of the poorest. And the weaknesses of democratic dialogue and consensus can be overcome by a strong leader. The public sphere is replaced by a collective sovereign that delegates its powers to those who govern, and whose undemocratic actions are entirely legitimized by election results.

*Democracy and pluralism are under assault. Dictators are toiling to stamp out the last vestiges of domestic dissent and spread their harmful influence to new corners of the world. At the same time, many freely elected leaders are dramatically narrowing their concerns to a blinkered interpretation of the national interest.*⁶

⁵ R. Eatwell, M. Goodwin, *National Populism. The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy*, London 2018.

⁶ S.A. Repucci, *Leaderless Struggle for Democracy*, p. 1, at https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/202002/FIW_2020_REPORT_BOOKLET_Final.pdf, 15 July 2021.

– With these words, Sara Repucci opens the 2020 Freedom House report. The report states that the number of countries which are not democratic and free has been on the rise for the last 14 years. As many as 64 countries have experienced a deterioration in their democratic political rights and civil liberties, among them 25 from 41 established democracies; while only 37 showed improvements, and 16 democratic countries either improved or had no change in their overall score. This data shows the crisis of ideas and practices of liberal democracy. What is it replaced by? Strong populist and/or nationalist tendencies. In some countries, these tendencies become the dominant ones in the changing laws, social discourse, and formal education.

This phenomenon has been and continues to be accompanied by the increasing ideological control of the state over various spheres of social life, including the content of education, its forms, and examination requirements. to the division of people into those who share this vision – and become its beneficiaries – and the rest, who are excluded to varying degrees from the benefits of education.. As a result, education ceases to be the common good. It is obvious that the political authorities rule over – to varying extents, depending on the country. However, education policy is something different from the politicization of education, which I understand as the strong subordination of education to the political agenda of the ruling parties. In countries where parties representing nationalist views have gained power, there is clear political pressure to cultivate national traditions, promote historical narratives that emphasize, for example, a given nation's heroism, and assign special importance to conservative values regarding social roles, religiousness, and distrust of the 'others.' Thus, pluralism, minority rights or multiculturalism are questioned or even rejected as threats to the national identity, sovereignty and security. Division and exclusion are the natural consequences of this situation.

There are many varieties of populism and nationalism. The broad issue of populism is not the subject of my analysis. I would like to focus on presenting the threats (and their sources) that are relevant for educators and which, in my opinion, arise from the resurgence of nationalism and forms of national populism. It appears that both these ideologies have developed on the basis of ethnocentrism.

ETHNOCENTRISM

Numerous papers have been written on ethnocentrism. I shall focus on the research whose findings and conclusions are crucial to understanding group and interpersonal relationships and thus social reality. This knowledge is indispensable to all educators.

Studies of ethnocentrism have developed since the work of William Sumner undertaken in the early 20th century. Sumner described the 'ethnocentric syndrome,' consisting of a strong conviction (certainty) of the superiority of one's own group (nation, culture etc.) over another, considering that this conviction plays a universal role in the formation of groups and inter-group rivalry. Generally speaking, the manifestations of the syndrome included a strong favoritism for one's own group, loyalty and solidarity to it, coupled with rejection of and hostility towards any outsiders.

*Loyalty to the group, sacrifice for it, hatred and contempt for outsiders, brotherhood within, war likeness without, – all grow together, common products of the same situation. (...) Virtue consists in killing, plundering, and enslaving outsiders. (...) Each group nourishes its own pride and vanity, boasts itself superior, exalts its own divinities, and looks with contempt on outsiders.*⁷

This understanding of ethnocentrism has been supported for years and is still supported by numerous analysts of social relations and some politicians. This position is questioned by researchers who believe that the ethnocentric attitude does not need to contain the element of hostility towards others, only attachment to one's own group and favoritism towards it. There have also been many studies that indicate that there may not be a correlation between the preference for one's group and strong identification with it.⁸

The Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979, was one of the first recognized theories attempting to explain complex group relations. Nowadays it is a classic and has been developed in various directions. Tajfel and Turner stated that people treat more favorably those who they perceive as members of the same group.⁹ This results from the psychological, identity-determined need for positive identification. Numerous subsequent studies have supplied extensive knowledge on the ethnocentric patterns for intra- and inter-group attitudes.

An important contribution to this body of knowledge has been provided by psychologists, starting from Theodor Adorno and his associates in the book *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950). And although his simplified vision was quickly questioned, it certainly was – and still remains – a significant inspiration for further studies of attitudes towards other people.

In the early 1980s Robert Altemeyer, developing his studies on the authoritarian personality, or rather on the social attitudes of individuals, coined the concept of Right-Wing Authoritarianism (the RWA scale). Altemeyer understood it as a co-variation of three attitudinal clusters:

- Authoritarian submission – a high degree of submission to the authorities legitimate in society,
- Authoritarian aggression – a general aggressiveness toward 'others,' perceived as excluded by authorities,
- Conventionalism – a high degree of obedience to social conventions perceived as endorsed by society and its authorities.

For the RWA attitudes, the important factors include conservatism, attachment to the past, religious and moral rigorism, glorification of the homogeneity of one's own group and reluctance towards change.¹⁰

⁷ W.G. Sumner, *Folkways. A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals*, Boston. 1940, p. 13.

⁸ S. Hinkle, R. Brown, "Intergroup Comparisons and Social Identity," in D. Abrams, M.A. Hogg (eds), *Social Identity Theory. Constructive and Critical Advances*, New York 1990.

⁹ H. Tajfel, J.C. Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict," in W.G. Austin, S. Worchel (ed.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, Monterey 1979, pp. 33-47.

¹⁰ R. Altemeyer, *The Authoritarian Specter*, Cambridge 1996, p. 6.

In various studies, RWA has correlated with hostility towards other groups and with a tendency toward discrimination, including the discrimination of minorities. RWA also turned out to be a strong predictor of bias and conspiracy thinking. No wonder that the social attitude described in this way was associated by many researchers with ideologies suggesting the supremacy and domination of some groups over other ones, such as racism, ethnocentrism, and nationalism.

In the 1990s, an important step forward in the explanation of attitudes accepting hierarchy and inequalities was the research conducted by Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto, and their formulation of the Social Dominance Theory (SDT), which is still being systematically developed. According to this theory, group-based social hierarchy is created by the effects of discrimination on various levels – individuals, institutions, and intergroup processes. The moral and intellectual justification for hierarchical inter-group relations is provided by ‘legitimizing myths.’ These myths are ideologies (traditions, beliefs, symbols, stereotypes, social norms and practices) that justify broader rights and privileges for the dominant groups.¹¹

A successful attempt to demonstrate the independence of both theories was made by John Duckitt, who constructed the Dual Process Motivational Model (DPM).¹² Duckitt proposed two relatively independent dimensions of social values and attitudes that they define. A high RWA score denoted attachment to objectives ensuring social security, order and cohesion, linked with the belief that the social world is full of threats. Meanwhile, the position on the SDO (Social Dominance Orientation scale) scale resulted from personality traits, described by William James in the classic temperament typology on a continuum between tough-minded and tender-minded. People who are tough-minded perceive the world as a threatening jungle, where the stronger ones win. This justifies the importance of power and dominance over others. Both dimensions of this model show a relationship with the recognition of legitimizing myths that relate to right-wing political views, militarism, ethnocentrism, nationalism – and with the prejudices and social inequalities that characterize them.¹³ The dual process model (DPM) well explains prejudice by referring to the two main and possibly universally human motives: competition-driven power, dominance, and superiority and the threat-driven collective security and social control on the other.

The dual model shows mechanisms that indicate the complex nature of ethnocentrism. It seems to me that for educators, the most relevant conclusions are those of the psychologists’ research on the relationship between the two dimensions (given their differences) – right-wing authoritarian attitudes and social dominance – and the social context (vision of the world), as well as the legitimizing myths that are part of

¹¹ F. Pratto, J. Sidanius, S. Levin, “Social Dominance Theory and the Dynamics of Intergroup Relations. Taking Stock and Looking Forward. European,” *Review of Social Psychology*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2006), pp. 271-320.

¹² J. Duckitt, “A Dual-Process Cognitive-Motivational Theory of Ideology and Prejudice,” *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 33 (2001), pp. 41-113.

¹³ J. Duckitt, C.G. Sibley, “A Dual-Process Motivational Model of Ideology, Politics, and Prejudice,” *Psychological Inquiry*, vol. 20, no. 2-3 (2009), pp. 98-109.

the socialization message, which includes both the official and the hidden curricula of school education. This may include beliefs that justify the existence of social differences between groups for economic or social reasons, or certain ideological (religious, political or cultural) visions of the world and social values. The myths also include intra-group norms (the pattern of the me – group relationship), such as absolute loyalty or obedience, as well as rules for interaction with other (external) groups and individuals (the pattern of us – them relationships), e.g. discrimination and hostility.

Bizumic and Duckitt (2012) identified the key six elements of the ethnocentric syndrome:

- Preference for one's own ethnic group, without hostility and without the requirement for ethnic unity,
- A sense of superiority, especially in the important areas of social life, e.g. history, science, economy,
- Purity of the group (absence of close contacts with others),
- Exploitativeness, or assigning priority to one's own group,
- Group cohesion – cooperation, integration, avoidance of conflicts,
- Devotion – unconditional dedication and loyalty.¹⁴

After numerous empirical studies Bizumic and Duckitt stated that treating the ethnocentric syndrome as a universal one would be a simplification. In their opinion (based on research results), two dimensions of this syndrome can be identified: the inter-group one (preference for one's own people, sense of superiority, priority assigned to one's group and its purity) and the intra-group dimension (consistency and sacrifice). The second dimension clearly stresses the importance of the welfare of the group, which should override individual interests. Using these two dimensions, we can describe various societies and their different social practices and socialization content, including the content of education.

Bizumic and Duckitt consider the connection of ethnocentrism with nationalism and patriotism to be strong and important. They recognize that ethnocentrism can be the foundation of ethnic nationalism, linked with xenophobia – but not of civic nationalism, where positive identification with the nation is accompanied by action for its good, without the tendency to exalt or to exclude others.

NATIONALISM

The discussion about what nationalism is has continued for centuries. Some approaches treat nationalism as a notion so ambiguous that it results in chaos in conceptualization, meaning it contributes little to scientific discourse. The cause of this is the dual nature of nationalism, in which logical theses and statements interweave with the world of values and emotions. As a result, research on nationalism and the nation presents many approaches which differ significantly, making it difficult to combine them – e.g. the

¹⁴ B. Bizumic, J. Duckitt, "What Is and Is Not Ethnocentrism? A Conceptual Analysis and Political Implications," *Political Psychology*, vol. 33, no. 6 (2012), pp. 887-909.

modernistic and cosmopolitan approaches. But in fact, having a variety of approaches is the norm in the humanities and the social sciences, and it is proof of the richness of thought rather than a weakness.

There are many interesting analyses concerning the beginnings of modern nationalism. Anthony Smith focused his attention on the cultural aspect of the formation and endurance of nations.¹⁵ He (along with others, like Caspar Hirschi) attempted to prove that forms of national community come from ancient traditions linked with the feeling of group identity. The historical analyses show that the earliest factors of 'natio' were place of origin, language and customs that are part of lifestyle. Nationalism in the early 19th century was strictly linked with the desire for liberation by nations that were divided, occupied or ruled by a foreign authority. Later it developed with the rise of nation-states

Anthony Smith merged his definition of nation and its pedigree into the lasting discourse. He analysed the works of Izijo Uzelac and Walker Connor from the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, whose subject is the definition of the nation and also the criteria for each nation's existence. Connor believes that nations were created by 'felt history,' not real history. For example, belief in common ancestors is more important than real blood relationships. According to him, the nation is an ethnic group with self-awareness. Ethnic groups became independent nations as a result of the process of modernisation, and their members developed strong bonds and a feeling of belonging.

Other broadly discussed concept, called primordialism, is represented by researchers significant for sociology and anthropology, such as Edward Shils, Clifford Geertz, Steven Grosby, and Pierre van den Berghe. They questioned purely historical and sociological approaches to nationalism that avoided studying the meaning of ethnicity. The concept of primordialism allows for better understanding of people's readiness for great devotion to the nation. Shils differentiated between several kinds of bonds: personal, sacred, civic and primordial.¹⁶ Using his notion of a primordial bond, Geertz studied African nations, explained the tension between the rationalistic civic bond and the striving for democratic order, and the great significance which individuals attach to relationships, habits, religion, language, and territory.¹⁷

For many researchers of nationalism, the process which facilitates or even triggers the formation of modern nations is modernisation, which creates strong states with secular and democratic tendencies. Within this school of thought, a controversial concept (of functionalist, avoided naturalist, or irrational passion) – often associated with Ernest Gellner – has been influential in discourse on nationalism: that nations did not create nationalism, but rather nationalists created nations.¹⁸ According to Gellner, nationalism means the belief that political units (states) should align with national units.

¹⁵ A. Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism. A Cultural Approach*, New York 2009.

¹⁶ E. Shils, "Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil Ties. Some Particular Observations on the Relationships of Sociological Research and Theory," *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 8, no. 2 (1957), pp. 130-145.

¹⁷ C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays*, New York 1973.

¹⁸ A. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, introd. by J. Breuilly, Oxford 2006.

The author of the well-known book *Nations and Nationalism* defines the nation in terms of human will (the need for homogeneity), political borders, and culture.. That is why people, under specific social conditions, strive to create nations. Nationalism is connected with a particular sentiment toward the content of this rule. As a follower of the modernistic approach to explaining the formation of nations and nationalism, Gellner claims that there exist attributes of the modern industrial division of labour, development of technology, necessity for a common general education, and readiness to change qualifications. Gellner linked compulsory public education with the state because the state can enforce it while also providing financial support. His modernistic-economical reductive approach gave rise to criticism.

Hans Kohn introduced the strongly criticized division into Western and non-Western nationalisms. After discussions and modifications, many other researchers referred to this dichotomy as civic nationalism vs. ethnic nationalism.¹⁹

The ethnic version of nationalism, aside from adherence to an autonomous homeland with rights for the 'people,' has several other specific features:

1. Genealogical ties, common ancestry, generational ties,
2. Native culture, specific language, morals, religion and art,
3. A shared history, whose specific interpretation stresses the nation's place in the world,
4. The strength of the people and its values, motivating individuals to create the national culture and statehood.

Under this concept, ethnic nations become political in the course of history. It is worth adding that in political practice, the ties named in the first item are considered natural and most important social ties. In a situation of conflict or deficit, national interests become the priority. The task of the institutions of the national state, including educational institutions, is to nurture and strengthen national identity as the most important group identity.

In contrast, civic nationalism means a commitment of a civic nature to the well-being of one's community. This line of thinking is illustrated by L. Greenfeld's classification, who applies two criteria: an understanding of sovereignty and an understanding of affiliation to a nation.²⁰ Sovereignty may be the privilege of individuals or communities. On this basis, the author defines two types of nationalism: individualist-liberal and collectivist-authoritarian (the collectivist forms tend toward authoritarianism and anti-individualism). If the second criterion – affiliation – is defined in terms of voluntary involvement, we can speak of civic nationalism, if it results from traits that are beyond the control of the individual, such as background, we are dealing with ethnic nationalism.

Researchers of nationalism, apart from its numerous forms, have distinguished its various stages or waves: from the right of nations to self-determination, through imperialism and chauvinism to populism (developed in the last decades of the 20th century) and the ideas of the extreme right (or, more rarely, of the left). In the late 20th and early

¹⁹ A. Smith, *Nacjonalizm. Teoria, ideologia, historia*, transl. by E. Chomicka, Warszawa 2007, s. 58-59.

²⁰ L. Greenfeld, *Nationalism. Five Roads to Modernity*, Cambridge 1992.

21st century, nationalism was considered by various authors either as a chance to build sovereignty, internal cohesion and specific identity for the contemporary nation-states, or as a threat to the idea of democracy and civic societies due to the generation of social divisions and conflicts which frequently led to acts of discrimination and hostile attitudes towards other nations. The first stance was represented, among others, by David Miller, who wrote a controversial and widely discussed book titled *On Nationality*. Miller wrote,

*Nationalism is often dismissed today as an irrational political creed with disastrous consequences. Yet most people regard their national identity as a significant aspect of themselves, see themselves as having special obligations to their compatriots, and value their nation's political independence. This book defends these beliefs, and shows that nationality, defined in these terms, serves valuable goals, including social justice, democracy, and the protection of culture.*²¹

The multiple interpretations of nationalism present both a cognitive and a socialization challenge for education. How can we reconcile the tragic consequences of nationalist politics known from history with the psychological needs of belonging to a specific – including national – group. The consideration of these terms leads to a reflection on two important identity structures: social and group identities.

SOCIAL IDENTITY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

In times of crises, both economic and social, the need for clear group identifications intensifies, especially for those dissatisfied with their position and less autonomous in their assessment of social reality. The need for affiliation with a community also alleviates existential anxiety caused by uncertainty – a state of anomie that often accompanies dynamic socio-political changes. National identity is a very special type of collective identity. It offers a sense of belonging and personal dignity to an individual.

In difficult situations it is easier to manipulate collective attitudes by exerting ideological pressure, primarily of axiological and normative nature. In the case of young people, it is necessary to remember the powerful fear of being rejected by the community. In situations of tension and conflict, opinions and actions radicalize, resulting in the exacerbation of divisions but also in the strengthening of intra-group solidarity, which requires strong conformity. However, as many studies have shown (e.g. the above-mentioned studies by Bizumic and Duckitt), strong group identification, including national identification, does not necessarily cause rejection and condemnation of others. This occurs when the ethnocentric syndrome is activated. It is most often expressed through a focus on inter-group differences and constant inter-group comparisons.²² In the opinion of

²¹ D. Miller, *On Nationality*, abstract, Oxford 2003, at <https://philpapers.org/rec/MILON-2>, 21 July 2025.

²² A. Mummendey, A. Klink, R. Brown, "Nationalism and Patriotism. National Identification and Out-Group Rejection," *British Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 40, no. 2 (2001), pp. 159-172.

researchers of the collective narcissism concept, the idealized image of one's own group, e.g. of the national group, and strong identification with it result in hostility towards other groups, such as bias towards minorities, support for acts of violence (including terrorist acts), and support for populist parties.²³

National identity is a very special case of collective identity. It is frequently strengthened by numerous socialization agendas. National identity is an important and dominant construct, primarily in the cultural, social and psychological existence of nations.

Definitions of national identity usually comprise several components: the cognitive one, i.e. self-knowledge and knowledge about 'others,' which allows one to perceive differences; the evaluative component, defining the attitude towards one's own nation, including an evaluation of the national community and the level of satisfaction from belonging; and the emotional component defining the intensity of ties with a given nation.²⁴ These three factors are the basis for actions undertaken by members of the national group. The norms set by the group and shared by its members play an important role. The failure to recognize their superiority can lead to marginalization or exclusion from the group.

Two approaches can be distinguished in conceptualizations of national identity. The first one is characterized by the emphasis on continuity and cohesion of the group, and by clear cultural transmission from one generation to another. The second approach accentuates differences between national groups and the setting of boundaries that separate one's own people from others. These two approaches are linked by the Optimal Distinctiveness Theory, which, in the spirit of evolutionism, indicates two fundamental human needs: inclusion and distinction.²⁵ Hence the importance of belonging to communities that meet these needs. And the national group meets them to a significant degree.

Elizabeth Theiss-Morse considers commitment to the group and recognition of its distinctiveness, often treated as uniqueness, as the most important identity factors. The boundaries of distinctiveness are defined by two types of norms: normative and civic, and ethnic and cultural ones.²⁶

Henk Dekker, Darina Malova and Sander Hoogendoorn build the cumulative structural model of national attitudes. The first two authors conceptualized and analyzed empirically national attitudes as a relationship with country and compatriots differing in affect – positive, neutral, or negative – and the strength of feeling. Nationalism is one of the components of the whole structure.²⁷ The model shows a hierarchy of six main national attitudes which are ordered according to the degree of extremity: national feeling, national liking, national pride, national preference, national superiority

²³ A. Golec de Zavala, D. Lantos, "Collective Narcissism and Its Social Consequences. The Bad and the Ugly," *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, vol. 29, no. 3 (2020), pp. 273-278.

²⁴ Z. Bokszański, *Tożsamości zbiorowe*, Warszawa 2007.

²⁵ G.C. Leonardelli, C.L. Pickett, M.B. Brewer, "Optimal Distinctiveness Theory A Framework for Social Identity, Social Cognition, and Intergroup Relations," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 43 (2010), pp. 63-113.

²⁶ E. Theiss-Morse, *Who Counts as an America The Boundaries of National Identity*. Cambridge 2012.

²⁷ H. Dekker, D. Malova, S. Hoogendoorn, "Nationalism and Its Explanations," *Political Psychology*, vol. 24, no. 2 (2003), pp. 345-376.

and nationalism. The order of these attitudes is not accidental, they are the next stages of their development. In the cognitive process, including categorization mechanisms, individuals develop their nationalism attitudes as they go through each stage. The first stage – **national feeling** – is affectively neutral and results from simple belonging to a country. The second stage – **national liking** – requires national identification and is therefore emotional. The next stage – **national pride**, born through categorization processes, results in the favoritism toward one's own group and affects education and socialization. It is crucial in this regard.

When group identity dominates over individual identity in the image of the self, and is largely shaped by national identification built on aversion to other nations, the next stage of national superiority develops. Further strengthening of such an attitude can lead to nationalism, understood as a set of core beliefs that constitute it. First, nationalism involves ascribing special status to the nation as a collective, bound together by both blood ties and culture. Second, understanding the state as a national state, ethnically pure, which is linked with discrimination against others, including an aversion to any cooperation with them. Nationalist attitudes offer a particular sense of strength, which makes them attractive to many members of the community. This hierarchical model demonstrates that nationalist attitudes are rooted in an attitude that is called patriotism, on which I shall now focus.

PATRIOTISM

The concept of patriotism is frequently discussed in reflections on and research into nationalism and national identity. It dominates political discourse, especially in the statements of politicians with a nationalistic slant. To stress the distinctness of these two concepts, many researchers defined patriotism as a positive feeling of love for the homeland, devoid of possessiveness and aggression. Patriotism is also frequently considered a moral requirement, shared by members of the national community.

*Educational system explicitly attempt to impact patriotism as a value by glorifying the life of patriots, by presenting history and geography in a way that sheds positive light on the group and country, and by emphasizing the importance of patriotism for the group survival [...] There is a constant call for patriotic sacrifice in every group or a nation. Group member may be asked to give up their personal convenience the pursuit of their goals, and the fulfillment of their needs for the benefit of their country and group.*²⁸

Thus, patriotism often is one of the important education objectives in many countries, included in various legal documents, curricula or mission statements. Neither politicians nor teachers nor most people have ever questioned patriotism as a coveted value. However, patriotism has its opponents – the most famous ones include L. Tolstoy, E. Goldman, G. Herve, S. Veil, M. Violi, H. Arendt. All of them analyzed the negative consequences of specific interpretations of patriotism, although in various ways.

²⁸ D. Bar-Tal, E. Staub, "Introduction. Patriotism. Its Scope and Meaning," in D. Bar-Tal, E. Staub (eds), *Patriotism. In the Lives of Individuals and Nations*, Chicago 1997, p. 3

All of them underlined that patriotism can evoke negative feelings towards others and readiness for aggression, acting to harm those who are considered strangers – and thus, worse. Many dissertations have been written on the threatening versions of patriotism, linked with ethnocentrism, nationalism and chauvinism.

If we define love as a special emotional relationship comprising dedication, care, sacrifice, pride, loyalty, and obligation, the question regarding behavioral manifestations of these emotions becomes significant. Patriotic attitudes, contrary to the concept itself, can be morally ambiguous – differently assessed by various groups (e.g. national or religious terrorism is condemned by some, while for others it is a method of fighting for their supreme values).

Igor Primoratz synthesizes the literature on patriotism and defines five types of patriotism using diverse criteria, from extreme patriotism – close to Machiavellianism, (attitudes like ‘our country, right or wrong’) – through strong patriotism, where the life of the individual is immersed in the group (the country, the nation, its history, tradition, values, symbols, etc.) to moderate patriotism (love for the homeland accompanied by a conviction of the need to observe humanistic principles, human rights and universal good), and finally, to limited patriotism (where love for one’s homeland is not a moral obligation resulting from birth, and patriotism includes care for the prosperity of one’s country and fellow citizens). The first type is the only one that is exclusive.

The last type – ethical patriotism – is different from the others. It is not tied to love for the history, culture or the international position of the nation, but stems from the belief in the moral strength of the society, including the values, such as social justice, respect for human rights, humanitarianism, human solidarity in international and intercultural relations, and accountability for the course of events.²⁹

Edward Staub, in the early 1990s, proposed the dualist, frequently cited division into blind and constructive patriotism. The basis of both types is a positive emotional approach, fondness for one’s nation and country, and positive identification. Blind patriotism is exclusionary – it is built on the belief in the superiority of one’s own group and requires patriots to cherish, nurture, and support only their own values, history, morals, and rights because they are believed to be better and should be imposed on other groups. Criticism towards one’s group is seen as a lack of loyalty. The second type – constructive patriotism – rejects superiority over others and assumes that the sense of community and affinity with the group is expressed in acting for its benefit. Social criticism is seen as concern for the common good.³⁰

The complex structure of patriotism was presented in the research conducted by John Sullivan, Amy Fried, Mary Dietz and Elizabeth Theiss Morse.³¹ Based on the

²⁹ I. Primoratz, “Patriotism,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 1 June 2001, at <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2010/entries/patriotism>, 1 August 2022.

³⁰ E. Staub, “Blind versus Constructive Patriotism. Moving from Embeddedness in the Group to Critical Loyalty and Action,” in D. Bar-Tal, E. Staub (ed.), *Patriotism in the Lives of Individuals and Nations*, Chicago 1997, pp. 213-228.

³¹ J.L. Sullivan, A. Fried, M.G. Dietz, “Patriotism, Politics, and the Presidential Election of 1988,” *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 36, no. 2 (1992), pp. 200-234.

empirical studies conducted among Americans, a five-dimensional model of patriotism was developed: symbolic, iconoclastic, instinctive-environmental, capitalistic and nationalistic-symbolic. The first understanding (symbolic patriotism) means an attachment to and respect for the national symbols, coupled with strong ties to one's country, with a slightly chauvinistic slant. The second (iconoclastic patriotism) refers to working for the good of the country without sentiment for national symbols. The third understanding (instinctive-environmental patriotism) is characterized by ties to the national community and its territory, expressed primarily through care for its natural environment, with strong rejection of those who destroy this environment, including for economic purposes. The almost reverse, capitalist vision of patriotism focuses on economic development, including the exploitation of natural resources. The nationalistic-symbolic approach emphasises patriotic symbolism to the extent of asserting the supremacy of one's own nation as the absolute global leader, not infrequently associated with the belief that the nation is chosen by God.

Despite the similarities between some types of patriotism and nationalism, many researchers claim these two dimensions are distinct. An attempt at differentiation between patriotic and nationalist attitudes was undertaken by German researchers, Thomas Blank and Peter Schmidt. Referring primarily to the empirical studies of many other researchers, they have adopted the following concepts of patriotism and nationalism as markedly different manifestations of national identity.³²

Nationalism

- Idealization of the nation and its history – generalized positive assessment of the nation
- A feeling of national superiority
- An uncritical acceptance of national state, and political authorities
- A great emphasis on national affiliation in the individual's self-concept
- The suppression of ambivalent attitudes toward the nation
- A tendency to define one's own group in terms of descent, race, or cultural affiliation
- A tendency to see one's own group as homogeneous
- A high importance placed on derogating comparisons with groups not considered part of the nation.

Patriotism

- The nation is not idealized, it is evaluated on the basis of a critical conscience.
- Support for the system requires compatibility with humanist values
- Visions of national history may vary
- Rejection of authoritarian culture and supporting democratic principles
- Rejection of the uncritical acceptance of national authorities
- Acceptance of negative emotions toward the nation

³² T. Blank, P. Schmidt, "National Identity in United Germany. Nationalism or Patriotism? An Empirical Test With Representative Data," *Political Psychology*, vol. 24, no. 2 (2003), pp. 289-312.

- A lack of particular emphasis on national affiliation in the individual's self-concept
- One's own group is not defined by objectivist criteria.

Blank and Schmidt, based on the social identity theory by Tajfel and Turner, assumed that national identification is associated with recognition of the goods and values important for the whole national community and shaping its collective identity.³³ Identification with the nation can have either a patriotic or nationalistic nature, depending on the set of values defined as relevant for the national community. A patriotic orientation results from the acceptance of democratic principles, the idea of equality and positive attitude towards other ethnic groups. Meanwhile, anationalistic orientation is associated with strong pride in history, the achievements of one's country, a sense of its uniqueness and justification of its hegemony, and a negative attitude towards other ethnic groups.

Although the era of postmodernism, as some researchers claim, did bring a crisis of the nation-state, the socio-political experience of numerous countries shows that in recent decades, nationalism has gained importance as a social ideology – in both homogeneous and multinational countries. The question remains open as to how strongly these ideas are present in the school system. Do they only promote one's own nation, or are they aggressive toward other nations? Chauvinistic? Or perhaps banal? Banal nationalism – a term proposed by Michael Billig³⁴ – dominates in developed countries. It is omnipresent, although often silent and unnoticeable. In practice, it involves the flying of national flags on state, commercial, and private buildings, and cheering during sports events while dressed in colors associated with the national symbolism of a given country. It appears that in many countries, banal nationalism is promoted in schools. This trend may also include pop-nationalism, which involves the use of narrative about the uniqueness of the given nation, national symbols, traditional and recognizable forms, and stereotypes in popular culture – namely in movies, songs, or for commercial purposes (e.g. printing flags on various products).

Some researchers of the social phenomena discussed here clearly emphasize the ethical dimension of patriotism (as mentioned in Primoratz's classification). Daniel Bar-Tal and Ervin Staub wrote that patriotism has to coexist with other human obligations: *members of a nation should also be committed to moral values that serves safeguards against violations of basic human rights and thus assure that nations do not commit major offenses against humanity*.³⁵ Marcia Baron believes that we should appreciate the national cultural achievements in the same manner as we value the moral standing of our country, which means the right to criticize and to reject loyalty, including political loyalty, when moral principles are being broken.³⁶ Such patriotism is not exclusive – the welfare of one's own country is important, but equally important is the good of other countries and of the humanity as a whole. Similarly, Stephen Nathanson created

³³ H. Tajfel, J.C. Turner, "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior," in S. Worchel, W.G. Austin (eds), *Psychology of Intergroup Relation*, Chicago 1986.

³⁴ M. Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, New York 1995.

³⁵ D. Bar-Tal, E. Staub, "Introduction Patriotism....," p. 17.

³⁶ M. Baron, "Patriotism and 'Liberal' Morality," in D. Weissbord (ed.), *Mind, Value, and Culture. Essays in Honor of E.M. Adams*, Atascadero 1989, pp. 269-300.

a model in which, alongside affection for one's country and a desire for its prosperity, there is no exclusive concern for one's own country or support of morally limited national goals, with conditional support for country policies.³⁷

At the same time, in the recent years we have observed the escalation of more aggressive forms of political nationalism and visions of patriotism, which is reflected in major social spheres, such as education.

EDUCATION

After the fall of communism in Europe in the 1990s, it seemed that education based on the ideas of liberal democracy had excluded nationalist ideas, replacing them with universal values emphasising equality, human rights, and global solidarity. Nationalism can also be defined in a positive manner – as an attitude of care, devotion and involvement – similarly to patriotism, which did not disappear from educational objectives. That is why attempts were made to defend the presence of such 'positive' nationalism in education (White 1997).³⁸ This approach raises doubts among many researchers, educators and teachers.

Are education and nationalism a happy marriage? Hans Siebers asks this while discussing the results of his research in the classes of Dutch faculty of social professions.³⁹ He highlights the disruptive impact of nationalism on citizenship education. Ethno-nationalist discourses in Dutch media and politics, as well as in multi-cultural approaches used in citizenship education, fuel conflicts between non-migrant students and students with a migration background, disrupting education. He concludes that nowadays, states construct the notion of the nation and propagate national identity through public schooling, especially citizenship education. First of all, Siebers reminds us not to duplicate the error known as methodological nationalism – the assumption that the nation/state is the 'natural' social and political form in the modern world. Siebers also questions the known division into civic and ethnic nationalism as functionalist, making critical distance from the nation and nationalism impossible.

Siebers analysed two courses – *Ethics and Citizenship* and *Diversity and Identity* – which provided citizenship education for students of at the faculty he researched. Their contents covers civic behaviour, social responsibility, democracy, and politics, as well as ethical problems that social workers often grapple with in their work. Diversity is one of the main topics in Dutch citizenship education.

Both, students and teachers indicated that during conflicts, students socialize in ethno-nationalist subgroups. Moreover, members of those subgroups refer to each

³⁷ S. Nathanson, "In Defense of 'Moderate Patriotism,'" *Ethics*, vol. 99, no. 3 (1989), pp. 535-552.

³⁸ J. White, "Education and Nationality," *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, vol. 30, no. 3 (1996), pp. 327-343.

³⁹ H. Siebers, "Are Education and Nationalism a Happy Marriage? Ethno-Nationalist Disruptions of Education in Dutch Classrooms," *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, vol. 40, no. 1 (2019), pp. 33-49.

other in ethno-nationalist terms. Students from other nations were often treated as a single group in conflict situations (e.g., as ‘non-Dutch’). Students declared that they sometimes felt that those ethno-nationalist subgroup formations, categorizations, and polarizations were imposed on them – but at the same time, they have embraced these identities.

Dutch students are convinced that they honor civic values such as tolerance, liberal approach to sexuality and gender roles, emancipation, equal rights, sexual freedom, and law abidingness, in contrary to non-Dutch students. Siebers claims that Dutch particularistic appropriation of universal civic and liberal values condemns others to be illiberal and anti-civic. Such an attitude fits – or is the result of – ethno-nationalist discourses in media and politics. Those discourses proved to be the strongest predictor of ethno-nationalist conflicts in class.

Another interesting observation is that some essentialist and multiculturalist theories (Gert Hofstede, John Berry, David Pinto) included in citizenship education curriculum and discussed by students tend to culturalize migrants and non-migrants in different communitarian categories, fueling ethno-nationalist conflicts in class. Such a result is obviously the opposite of the intentions of educationalists. How can we deal with such conflicts? Some teachers found it effective to discourage students from using ethno-nationalist identifications, even though it is not easy.

Siebers concludes that perhaps citizenship education should focus on practical competencies, such as how to identify and succeed in institutions and areas like education, the labour market, and politics. Especially, it is more important to focus on cooperative functioning together than to emphasize cultural and national differences in times of rising nationalism.

Sarah Vritska after the analysing many studies on education in Germany and Japan, affirms: *that the goals of education, concepts of national identity that are taught, history curricula, and control of education have the potential to contribute to the rise of nationalism within a country (...) these goals can be traced to relate to the definitions of nationalism, such as promotion of the nation, love and loyalty to the state and its culture, particularly as a unified group, and the subordination or loyalty of the individual to the nation.*⁴⁰ This conclusion is justified despite content critical of national socialism, Nazism and World War II.

The concept of nationalism itself, or its characteristics, is very rarely found in school curricula, and if it is present, its form is very reduced. However, the adjective ‘national’ and the terms ‘patriotism,’ ‘patriotic’ appear quite frequently. Given the ambiguity of these concepts, their clear definition in the educational process becomes crucial. Here, influence is exerted not only by teachers but also – or perhaps most of all – by recommendations from the political authorities.

In his speech given on Constitution Day in 2020, President Trump said, *we finally restore patriotic education to our schools [...]* *The only path to unity is to rebuild a shared*

⁴⁰ S. Vritska, *Nationalism and Education. A Case Study of Germany and Japan*, 2019, p. 32, at <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1178&context=honorstheses>, 1 July 2022.

*national identity focused on common American values and virtues of which we have plenty, This includes restoring patriotic education in our nation's schools, where they are trying to change everything that we have learned.*⁴¹

Under orders from Viktor Orbán, Hungary introduced patriotic defense education into its school curricula. This concept of education is included in the national core curriculum and must be included in the teaching of all subjects. Higher education institutions have come under the management of a foundation established by Fidesz, the ruling party.

In Poland, there have also been changes regarding the teaching of history and civics. The latter subject in secondary schools was abolished and replaced with a right-wing vision of contemporary history

Strong ideological interference in the sphere of universal education and obvious indoctrination is carried out with patriotic fanfare. The party has on its banners the fight against liberal ideas and external enemies of national sovereignty. The policy of fear is effectively implemented. The threats include the EU, with legislation imposed on member states, 'strangers' – defined broadly, but primarily as immigrants and sexual minorities; as well as all those who oppose political solutions that promote nationalism, authoritarianism and the violation of civil liberties. The call to arms is meant to unite the nation that politicians are appropriating. It is supported by phrases such as: 'the true Poles,' 'the patriotic Hungarians,' and 'the American way of life.' The threat even absolves people from observance of human rights.

Both Polish and Hungarian authorities are attempting to reduce the ranks of non-government organizations whose educational offerings could be used in schools.

All these examples demonstrate that persons responsible for education face numerous challenges due to rising nationalist tendencies, escalating state authoritarianism, attempts at creating negative solidarity – always directed against others, and the use of patriotism for political purposes. They need knowledge and understanding of the following phenomena, irrespective of their own outlook (which is very difficult).

1. An understanding of weaknesses of liberal democracy, the reasons for inequalities in market economies, engaging in criticism and corrective actions, while being aware of the consequences of abandoning or limiting the key democratic values, such as worldwide solidarity, human rights, freedom of religion and conscience, right to choose one's homeland.
2. Knowledge of individual and group identity formation. Understanding the process of development of national identity and the consequences of its domination in the group identity. Understanding the co-occurrence of the two fundamental and competing human needs – the need for inclusion and the need for differentiation (optimal distinctiveness theory).
3. Understanding the complexity of intra- and intergroup processes and techniques for manipulating human groups.

⁴¹ N. Gaudiano, "Trump Demands 'Patriotic Education' in U.S. Schools," *Politico*, 31 August 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/08/31/trump-patriotic-education-406521>, 10 November 2022.

4. Understanding the social concepts and practices of a nationalistic and patriotic character. A well-considered vision of patriotism that one would like to instill in the younger generations. Awareness of threats associated with all forms of exclusive patriotism. Understanding the difference between patriotism and nationalism.
5. Understanding the relationship between education and politics and avoiding 'emigration to the classroom' – recognizing the fallacy of such an escape.
6. Familiarity with extracurricular streams of education and attitude formation, the Internet society, public discourse, formal and informal organizations.
7. Understanding the danger posed by the escalation of nationalist tendencies and not underestimating it. Understanding that the contemporary nationalism assumes various forms, and the related social practices are frequently attractive to younger generations – attractive because they enable young people to overcome their own weaknesses and frustrations through the strength of their own group and denigration of others.

This scope of knowledge and reflection, allowing to understand the complex phenomena and relations which I named in the beginning of the lecture, requires also certain practical skills, strategies and techniques for handling the everyday events, which are frequently very dynamic – especially in conflict situations. There is little space in teacher education curricula to develop such skills. The tensions between political objectives and educational objectives are frequently disregarded or overlooked, pushed aside as unnecessary disruptions of everyday schoolwork. This disregard also includes inter-group antagonisms considered mild, manifested in jokes, the emphasis on stereotypical negative traits, symbolic fights, etc. Such antagonisms do not apply to various ethnic groups only, but are also based on religious or worldview differences. The greatest educational challenge seems to be the reconciliation of the need for strong group bonding and differentiation from others with the avoidance of symptoms of resentment, hostility, and rejection.

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