

A new sociology of nationalism: the sociology of property and nation

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Key words: property, sovereignty, nationalism, nation, historical sociology, Ernest Gellner, Karl Marx

Property rights and the return of nationalism

People are again starting to take note of nationalism. Academics pose questions such as why nationalism has “not run its course?” (Harris, 2016), or “why has nationalism revived in Europe?” (Hosking, 2016). The Economist wrote as early as 2014 that “nationalism [was] back”, and it asserted that, in recent years “any writer who predicted that nationalism was the wave of the future would have been regarded as eccentric—at best” (The Economist, 2014). For scholars of nationalism this so-called revival of nationalism is hardly surprising, because they knew that nationalism was, in fact, always there (Malesevic, 2019). Nationalism was always there in various forms; what has changed is that many now see it as a problem again. In 2016 The Economist stated that “the new” nationalism” was a “dangerous nationalism” (The Economist, 2016). In February 2019, a group of intellectuals published a manifesto in major European newspapers who claimed that “Europe is being attacked by false prophets who are drunk on resentment”, and they pointed also to the populist nature of this nationalism: “let’s reconnect [...] with our “national soul”! Let’s rediscover our “lost identity”! This is the agenda shared by the populist forces washing over the continent” (The Guardian, 2019). There has, in other words, emerged a different form of nationalism in Europe and America than the one that has been dominant for the past generation. The liberal nation-state that has dominated Europe and America since Francis Fukuyama’s “end of history” in 1991, is now under pressure. How do we understand this change in nationalism? Do we actually fully understand nationalism as historical changing phenomena? One is tempted to answer no. As one of the leading sociologists on the field recently put it: “Curiously we still lack an adequate theory of the rise of nationalism” (Hall, 2019: p 51). In this essay, I will suggest how a historical focus on property rights and property regimes can add better understanding to the workings of nationalism. A double focus on the conceptual ideological function of property rights, and on the actual changes and relations of property and their relation to nation-formation during the course of history, can yield new insights into the study of nationalism. Property rights and property structures define relations between individuals and objects, between individuals, society and the state, as well as relations between states. The right to property is a ‘bundle of rights’ that confers powers and freedoms to those that have them, while they exclude others (Reeve, 1986). A property rights focus goes to the core of a key aspect of the current nationalist upsurge: the rise in economic inequality, and its (often) geographic divide between the rural and the urban. The legitimacy of current liberal nation-states has to a large degree been founded on their

ability to provide perpetual economic growth based on a particular property rights regime, and some degree of distribution of this wealth between classes and between geographic areas (Macpherson, 1962, Gellner, 2006, Hall, 2019). Now they seem to be gradually failing at this fundamental task (Hall, 2019, (Scheidel 2017, Piketty, 2013, Guilluy, 2019). In this article I suggest that a property rights perspective that emerged in the writings of what we can call proto-sociologist (enlightenment thinkers such as Adam Smith and Rousseau) in the eighteenth century is essential for a comprehensive sociology of nationalism. Combined with later materialist perspectives on historical development, this may provide a fruitful property rights perspective for the study of nationalism. First, however, I shall give a review of some key modern perspectives on nationalism, noting how they have not dealt sufficiently with the issue of property.

Marxists, a Marxist in reverse, and modernist perspectives

As readers of this journal are well aware, we can say that the current debates about nationalism starts with Ernest Gellner's book *Nations and Nationalism* (1983). Gellner set out an abstract historical sociological analytical model of the emergence of nationalism. The basis of the argument is the transition from agrarian to industrial society. For Gellner, nationalism (and nations) are very much the work of industrialism. Industrial society requires certain features, such as cultural homogeneity, social mobility, and universal literacy, which nationalism (according to Gellner) provides. Since we are discussing property rights and the materialist foundations of nationalism here, a note must be made on the similarity of Gellner's theory with that of the Marxist perspective on history. Gellner's different historical stages and the emphasis on different modes of production (agrarian, industrial) is similar to Karl Marx's view of historical development with his focus on productive forces and modes of productions. Indeed, John Hall once wrote that Gellner: "is too much of an economic materialist, almost a Marxist in reverse, in imagining that history is structured simply by evolution from foraging-hunting to agrarian production and then to modern industry" (Hall, 1993, p 16). Despite this, in Gellner one can hardly find mentioned property or property relations, or any analysis of how property relations affect the rise and development of nationalism. This is, of course, old news: Gellner's argument has been much criticized over the years for being too functionalist, ahistorical, and too sweeping and deterministic (Mandelbaum, 2014). Regarding the relation between Gellner and Marx's theories and the subject of nationalism, we can put it like this: If Gellner's Marxist-like theory of nationalism lacks historical materialist explanations, Marxist historical materialism lacks explanatory power when it comes to nationalism. As V. G Kiernan states in *A dictionary of Marxist thought* "nationalism is a subject on which Marx and Engels are commonly felt to have gone astray" (Bottomore et al 1991, p 394). Later Marxists did write about "the national question", including Otto

Bauer, Rosa Luxemburg, Leon Trotsky, Lenin, and Stalin. These accounts were generally preoccupied with political issues, and focused on the cultural aspects of nationalism or the relationship between capitalism and nationalism (Bottomore, et al, 1991, Vanaik, 2018). Property rights and the potential role of property in nationalism was largely untouched. The same goes for modern Marxist accounts of nationalism. Benedict Anderson's thesis of the nation as an *imagined community* connected nationalism to the rise of print capitalism (Anderson, 2006), but did not mention property relations. Nor did the Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm pay any attention to the nature of property or property regimes in his account of nationalism (Hobsbawm, 1992). We can also mention the model for nation formation developed by Marxist historian Miroslav Hroch. This is a complex three-stage model of nation formation based on historical evidence, and framed by historical materialist theory on modes of production and the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Hroch does consider the class composition of the members of the national movement, but does not focus on property regimes or the role of property (Hroch, 1985). Indeed, most modernist analyses of nationalism (Marxist or not) have largely omitted the role that property rights and property regimes might play in the emergence of nationalism, although some have touched upon it.

One of the most impressive recent works of historical sociology is Michael Mann's four volume *Sources of Social Power*. Mann mainly focuses on modernizing states from the seventeenth century onwards and contributes much to understanding the rise and development of nationalism from the eighteenth century onwards. Within this frame, Mann does focus on class struggle and economic relations but he does not, as I see it, pay sufficient attention to the central role changing property regimes play in the emergence of nationalism, nor to the place that property rights occupy in national ideology. This is also true for other approaches to nationalism. These tend to focus on the making and reception of symbols (Greenfeld, 1993; Smith, 1991), on language and communication (Gellner, 2006, Anderson, 2006, Hastings, 1997) and on class based policies and state formation (Hobsbawm, 1992; Marx, 2003; Breuilly, 1993). Recently, Rogers Brubaker has published works that re-emphasise the linguistic-religious (Brubaker, 2013; Brubaker, 2015) and civilizational-identitarian (Brubaker, 2017) aspects of nations and nationalism. Andreas Wimmer has emphasised the ethnic and linguistic aspects of nations and nationalism, intertwined with the role of war and the state (Wimmer 2018, 2012).

I propose that a sociology of nationalism should look beyond (but not away from) linguistic, religious, ethnic and state building concepts, examine the material foundations of historical social processes. In particular, we should see these embedded in property rights and property regimes, while at the same time looking at how the notion of property as ideological and cultural is integral to nations and nationalism. It has long been established that connections between property rights and sovereignty,

between ownership and freedom, and transformations in agrarian property structures were at the forefront of politics and political thinking in the late eighteenth century, when nationalisms and nation-states first emerged (Linklater, 2013; Skinner, 2007; Aston and Phillipin, 1985; Wood, 2012; Macpherson, 1962; Arendt, 1958; Metzger and Engerman, 2004; Pocock, 1975). Nonetheless, these connections and transformations remain largely unexplored in their potential relations to nations and nationalism. This is why it is important to read the late seventeenth century proto-sociologists, because they were describing those changes in property that were central to the emerging world of nationalism – and this perspective may be useful to understand changes happening to nationalism and nation-states also today. To understand the central mechanisms of any nationalism and nation-building process, we need to look at how property rights work at the deepest level of the nationalist logic: one thesis is that it is the way in which nationalism and nation-states connect legality and identity through property and sovereignty that has made nations and nationalism viable.

The early proto sociologists' analysis of property and sovereignty

The sociologist David McCrone has pointed out that if we ask if there is a systemic sociological theory of nationalism, we would ask largely in vain. This is because: “the discipline [sociology] grew with another agenda, namely to explain the great transformation from pre-industrial, pre-modern to industrial, modern societies” (McCrone, 1998: p 17. Of course, this transformation and the emergence of nationalism are closely related, perhaps therefore, those sociologists who *have* written about nationalism very often tend to be sociologists of a particular inclination, namely historical sociologists. Nationalism first emerged as a social phenomenon at the same time in history as the great grandfathers of sociology composed classical texts which helped establish modern sociology. Thinkers such as David Hume, Rousseau, Montesquieu and Adam Smith, wrote large-scale analyses of real (if sometimes idealized) historical developments (Sulkunen, 2014). These authors were displaying sociological imagination as they considered the structure of society as a whole, analysed its components, and situated it within the larger history of humanity (Mills, 1967). Theirs was a rapidly changing time: by the late eighteenth century/early nineteenth century, America and Europe stood in flames and were soaked in blood from the American and French (national) revolutions and the Napoleonic wars. Yet nationalism – neither the word nor the concept – was not a concern in the work of these proto-sociological writers. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, nationalism was something happening in the Americas and Europe, pervading the air, a new force altering and reshaping society as guillotines swung, as declarations were made in the name of the people, and as Napoleon's *Grande Armée* – arguably the first national army – swept over Europe.

Nationalism was so close that perhaps it was difficult to point to it, although Hegel came close when he claimed, at Jena in 1806, watching Napoleon on horseback, that he had seen the spirit of the age manifest before him. For the spirit of the age was indeed nationalism. Yet, the word nationalism was not mentioned as such, neither by Hegel nor by other major writers at the time. Of course, the word *nation* figures frequently in writings from the eighteenth century and before. But this word did not then mean what academics today mean. (Greenfeld, 1993, Hobsbawm, 1992). Instead, the writers of this time employed terms inherited from antiquity, such as sovereignty, the people, rule of law, and property. However, when the authors of the late eighteenth century were discussing these concepts, I would argue, they were actually discussing nationalism and nation-formation.

The early analyses of the late eighteenth century proto-sociological writers tended to focus on the conditions for freedom, both individual and collective, and on the nature of sovereignty. Through their analysis of such topics, these writers lay important foundations for how to understand nationalism because one of their central concerns was the relationship between property and sovereignty. In the late seventeenth century, changes in these two concepts were central to the transformation of the old society of orders into the modern mobile society of capitalism (and nationalism). Nationalism was a key part of this because it altered the rules of political legitimacy from kings and gods to the people, and a fundamental aspect here was transformations in property rights. It has been the central point in my earlier works to demonstrate how the pristine forms of nationalism that emerged in Europe and America in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century were essentially about the securing of property rights, and, through this, creating independent individuals from which popular sovereignty emanated (Fuglestad 2018a, Fuglestad 2018b, Fuglestad 2018c). It was in this way, by basing sovereignty on individual and (in theory) universal ownership of property, that nationalism (that is, its agents) debunked the sovereignty of absolutist monarchs and placed it in the people, at the same time laying the foundation for modern society. It worked like this: ownership of property – primarily land – had for more than 2000 years been the basis of imperial and monarchical power in the Western political tradition, and at the same time, ownership had been a privilege bestowed upon small groups of aristocrats. Ultimately this system was legitimized by religious authority. With the coming of nationalism, ultimate legitimacy resides in the people – they are the holders of sovereignty – but sovereignty does not come out of thin air, it must be founded on ownership of property as it had always been from Roman dominium, to feudal titles, and to absolutist power (Wood, 2012, Anderson, 1974, Linklater, 2013). Thus, the sovereign people must be made up of individual proprietors. This gives the sovereignty of the people weight in something “real”: material property in land.

There is not enough space here to go fully into detail on how this transformation happened, but I will make brief comments on the cases I know best: the US and Norway, focusing on the US. In these two cases, the transformation from absolutist forms of sovereignty came about in a two-stage process. First, landed property gradually started losing its feudal character, by which I mean that it was stripped of extra-economic powers and privileges, becoming an economic commodity to be bought and sold. This, amongst other things, led to the emergence of a more widespread ownership structure where many small and middling farmers became owners of the land they farmed, in what were agrarian societies). About 70 percent of farmers in what would become the US owned their land by the eve of the American Revolution in 1776 (Cogliano, 1999). In Norway, 60 percent of farmers owned their own land by 1814 (Sevatdal, 2017), when the country gained its own constitution. The processes by which this happened and the preconditions for this development were different for the US and Norway, but the result was the same: the emergence of a substantial group of independent farmers; and the emergence of a discourse of historically based arguments of freedom based on property (propagated mostly, but not exclusively, by the elite) based on this. Thus, in the US, for instance, the members of the national movement started asserting their right to property against the British Crown and Parliament based on their perceived historical rights to land. Principal author of *The Declaration of Independence*, Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), for instance began the pamphlet “A Summary View of the Rights of British America” by invoking the first settlers, America’s ancient ancestors: “Our ancestors, before their emigration to America, were the free inhabitants of the British dominions in Europe ...”, from which he continues:

America was conquered, and her settlements made, and firmly established, at the expense of individuals, and not of the British public. Their own blood was spilt in acquiring lands for their settlement, their own fortunes expended in making that settlement effectual; for themselves they fought, for themselves they conquered, and for themselves alone they have right to hold (Boyd, 1950, p 122).

This was an argument against feudal or absolutist forms of property holding, instead promoting individual rights to property by invoking an idealized past;

Our Saxon ancestors held their lands, as they did their personal property, in absolute dominion, disencumbered with any superior, answering nearly to the nature of those possessions which the feudalists term allodial. William, the Norman, first introduced that system generally ... America was not conquered by William the Norman, nor its lands surrendered to him, or any of his successors. Possessions there are undoubtedly of the allodial nature (Boyd, 1950, p 132)

“Allodial” signifies that property was individual, that it belonged to the owner without any dues or restorations to a lord or a king. Because Americans held their land in this way, or so felt a large part of the elite, they were their own masters. The American, as the French immigrant and public intellectual

Crevecoeur (1735-1813) put it: had gone “from being the slave of some despotic prince, to become a free man, invested with lands” (Crevecoeur, 1971, p 41). And because they thought that so many in America were property owners (which was largely true), their power was popular as a collective, it was popular sovereignty based on property. Sovereignty was popular because property was popular – it was based on every individual’s right to property. As Jefferson wrote:

Everyone, by his property, or his satisfactory situation, is interested in the support of law and order. And such men may safely and advantageously reserve to themselves a wholesome control over their public affairs (Looney, 2009, p 556).

Lexicographer and political writer Noah Webster (1758-1843) also pointed this out directly:

A general and tolerably equal distribution of landed property is the whole basis of national freedom: The system of the great Montesquieu will ever be erroneous, till the words property or lands in fee simple are substituted for virtue, throughout his Spirit of Laws (Sheehan and McDowell, 1998, p 400)

It is no coincidence that Webster mentions Montesquieu – many Americans at the time were well read in his and other enlightenment philosophers’ works. More importantly, as I have indicated, enlightenment thinkers like Montesquieu understood well the changes that were happening to property and sovereignty in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Without knowing it, they lay the grounds for understanding the fundament of modern nationalism through their writing on property and sovereignty.

Examples from four early proto sociologists

Montesquieu and his *Spirit of the Laws*, Rousseau’s *Social Contract* and his *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, the historical and political works of David Hume; all in their own way describe the logic of how property ownership is to be legitimized as an individual and universal right, how sovereignty is to be vested in the people, and how, at the same time, ownership of property is a precondition for individual freedom and sovereignty. In other words, the foundations for modern nationalism. Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s (1712-1778) concept of the general will is an interesting starting point. For Rousseau the “will, when declared, is an act of sovereignty and has legal authority.”(Rousseau, 1994, p 64) The general will was based on the idea of the existence of free individuals: “we have to consider,” he wrote, “the private persons of whom it [the general will] consists,” because the individuals had “natural rights they should enjoy as men” (Rousseau, 1994, p 67-68). Individual freedom was thus achieved by partaking in the process of national legislation which expresses the general will. This means that sovereignty is based in the collective of the people, understood as composed of free individuals. In regards to property, Rousseau’s assertion in *Discourse on the origin of Inequality* that the introduction of private property is the origin of inequality is well

known. This does not mean, however, that Rousseau favoured the abolition of private property. Property was legitimate for Rousseau if it was based on the mixing of individual labour with land. The existence of private property is, for Rousseau, an inevitable outcome of the transition from the state of nature to organized society, and the point for Rousseau is not to abolish it, but, through the general will, to organize it in the most egalitarian way possible. In fact, landed property seems to have had special significance for Rousseau. This was because only a nation that was self-sufficient in food could be truly independent; agricultural production was thus seen as essential. Rousseau suggested in his *Constitutional project for Corsica* making landed property the basis of the rights and the status of the citizens (Boucher, 2003). We find similar ideas in Montesquieu (1689—1755) who is best known as an apostle for the division of the powers of the state. For Montesquieu, this idea was a part of his broader critique of despotism and his advocacy for political liberty based on the rule of law, and in his most famous work, *The Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu set out to find the legitimate basis of law. Through the exploration of the legitimacy of laws, Montesquieu comes to deal with the issue of modern sovereignty, understood as the supreme right to make binding laws. One of the conclusions of *The Spirit of the Laws* is that legitimate laws (and therefore sovereignty) is different for each country, and that the legitimate form of government thus depends on the specific circumstances of each country. This means, in effect, that supreme legislative power must be in the hands of those who are familiar with the local circumstances, and that sovereignty cannot be based *a priori* in the will of a single body – sovereignty must, in one way or the other, be checked by those over whom it is exercised. The key to secure political liberty was to restrict and balance powers. As Montesquieu explained regarding political liberty:

Political liberty does not consist in doing what one wants. In a state, that is, societies where there are laws, liberty can consist only in the power to do what one should want to do and no way being constrained to do what one ought to do. One must put oneself in mind of what independence is and what liberty is. Liberty is a right to do whatever the laws permit, and if one citizen could do what they forbid he would no longer have liberty, because the others would have the same power (Montesquieu, 2008: p 155).

It was crucial for the securing of liberty to also have a balance and restriction of power. The individual's right to property was closely connected with political liberty and the public good for Montesquieu. He wrote:

It is a fallacy to say that the good of the individual should yield to that of the public good... it is always in the public good for each one to preserve invariably the property given to him by civil law ... civil law is the palladium of property (Montesquieu, 2008: p 510).

Yoshie Kawade writes about Montesquieu and his views on property that: “we might safely describe security of property as one of his cardinal principles of justice”(Kawade, 2003, p 231). Across the English Channel David Hume (1711-1776) was also preoccupied with property and political liberty. For

Hume a man's property "is some object related to him. This relation is not natural, but moral, and founded on justice"(Hume, 2004, p 315). Property is furthermore, for Hume, seen as an exclusive relation that "forbids any other, the free use and possession of it" (Hume, 2004, p 202. Hume suggests the origin of property is to be found in the impetus that humans have to satisfy their needs – in order to fulfill our needs, we take possession of various things. Ownership (thus the property right) arises from the mutual recognition of all to enjoy the right of possession. It is this that gives rise to the idea of public interest – all have the same interest in the protection of property. However, Hume says that humans have a tendency to think more of the immediate private needs rather than long-term ones, and because of this, the public good might be neglected. This is why we need government: government is instituted to sanction violations on the right of property, and to foster virtues that are favorable to the protection of property (Kelly, 2003). This was also the view of Adam Smith (1723-1790). Douglas Long quotes Smith and elaborates on his idea of justice: "The first and chief design of every system of government," Smith held, "is to maintain justice – justice in the sense of the peaceful maintenance of the citizens' perfect rights to property"(Long, 2006: p 301). Smith distinguished between four historical ages in which property and government had been differently constituted and where propertied justice had been variously achieved. The four stages were the age of hunters, the age of shepherds, the age of agriculture, and finally the age of commerce. About property, Smith wrote in *Wealth of Nations* that:

The property which every man has in his own labour, as it is the original foundation of all other property, so it is the most sacred and inviolable. The patrimony of a poor man lies in the strength of his hands; and to hinder him from employing this strength and dexterity in what manner he thinks proper, without injury to his neighbor, is a plain violation of this most sacred property (Smith, 1979: p138).

Property was a right all individuals held that was derived from their labor, according to Smith. The four historical ages secured this right in varying degrees. Smith held that at the shepherd stage, large inequalities of property began occurring, and these became even more manifest and evident in the agricultural age. In this age, Smith writes, using feudal Europe as his example, "the greater part of the citizens had no land; and without it the manners and customs of those times rendered it difficult for a freeman to maintain his independency" (Smith, 1979, p 557). Wealth here was dependent on land, and land was secured to the few by rights of primogeniture and privileges, and there was no government to secure justice of distribution. This, however, may change with the age of commerce – the age in which Smith understood himself to be living. In the age of commerce, it was possible for individuals to secure wealth through other forms of property than land simply by investing their labour, and the rules governing the rights of property tended to be more favorable to justice. Smith wrote about the possibility of an individual to acquire wealth through his labour:

In the present times, though a poor man has no land of his own, if he has a little stock, he may either farm the lands of another, or he may carry on some little retail trade; and if he has no stock, he may find employment either as country labourer or as an artificer (Smith, 1979: p 557).

For Smith, the coming of commercial society can represent a positive event that has greater chance of producing justice in the distribution of wealth because individuals could more easily acquire wealth by investment of labour.

The property rights issue restated.

These excerpts from leading enlightenment writers indicate how property rights and sovereignty were discussed and analyzed in the writings of these proto-sociologists. Such analysis and rethinking of age-old concepts of property, sovereignty and liberty was very much what the first nationalisms were about. Such concepts should be a focus of sociology when seeking to understand nationalism. It is important to note that when the proto-sociologists were rethinking the concept of property, they understood it as what we today call private property. On an abstract level, we can note two points about private property that make it central to nationalism (at least in its western form): 1) private property is a political claim and is thus different from possessions in that property is socially enforced by society or the state through laws, custom or convention; and 2) private property is a social relation, because private property implies the more or less exclusive right of one person in relation to another (A owns B against C). For these reasons, the right to private property always implies a power relation, because it represents an exclusionary relationship between individuals, between states and individuals, and between states. Private property makes the agent upon which the property right is conferred sovereign over his or her property. The early twentieth century American Lawyer Morris Cohen gives a clear explanation of this in his essay "Property is sovereignty." Cohen explained:

The essence of private property is always the right to exclude others ... if, then, somebody else wants to use the food, the house, the land or the plough that the law calls mine, he has to get my consent. To the extent that these things are necessary to the life of my neighbor, the law thus confers on me power, limited but real, to make him do what I want. If Laban has the sole disposal of his daughters and his cattle, Jacob must serve him if he desires to possess them. In a regime where land is the principal source of livelihood, he who has the legal right over the land receives homage and service from those who wish to live on it ... Property law does more. It determines what men shall acquire. Thus, protecting the property rights of a landlord means giving him the right to collect rent, protecting the property of a railroad or a public-service corporation means giving it the right to make certain charges. Hence the ownership of land and machinery, with the rights of drawing rent, interest, etc., determines the future distributions of the good that will come into being (Macpherson, 1978: p 159-169).

Historically, this has been particularly clear in relation to private property in land. Andrew Reeve has pointed to this:

Land provides the territorial dimension of the political unit. Modern states, at least, are defined in part by legal jurisdiction which they claim over a particular territory ... land mediates, in this sense, between political power and individuals subject to it (Reeve, 1986: p 82).

The fixity of landed wealth and its territorial dimension provides a direct link with political sovereignty in early agrarian societies: the way in which most European medieval states grew from the landed property of kings is a case in point. In addition to the sovereignty/power connection, Reeve notes further that landed property has a connection to freedom because all action has a spatial dimension; land may thus provide the spatial dimension for action. Jacob Metzger and Stanley Engerman have also noted this connection between property in land, sovereignty and nationalism through the early national property-based democracies:

While the ownership of land as prerequisite for enfranchisement has long been abandoned in modern democratic states ... this may reflect some kind of an accommodation between nationalism, whose basic attitude towards land as a place – a homeland belonging to the nationals – made the thinking often blur the distinction between sovereignty and ownership (Metzger and Engerman, 2004: p 10).

The idea of a connection between ownership, property and sovereignty was not, however, new –for a long time western thought had proposed a connection between ownership and freedom through sovereignty. Ellen Meiksins Wood has suggested that one of the decisive features of Western development since antiquity has been making a sharp distinction between two sources of power: the state and private property (Wood, 2012). Finally, and most importantly, as I have sought to demonstrate, there is also a connection between nationalism and popular sovereignty. Property regimes, and the way in which property is ideologically functional to nationalism through sovereignty, has decisive effects on how processes of state formation, democratization and ideology formations take place within nation-states and nationalisms. This is true both for nationalism in its agrarian and its industrial phase. In the agrarian phase of nationalist development property rights and sovereignty were, as we have seen, bound together through national democracies where ownership of land was fundamental, and the concept of property became key for how the nation was defined, and how national and individual freedom was understood. In the industrial phase, property rights continued to be central for democratic expansion and integration of the working class into the nation, but in this phase the property rights element became widened to include individual's ownerships of their labour power (Fuglestad, 2018a). Thus, labour becomes central to issues of power and sovereignty. As Karl Marx stated in his political and economic manuscripts:

The antithesis between lack of property and property, so long as it is not comprehended as the antithesis of labour and capital, still remains an indifferent antithesis, not grasped in its active connection, in its internal relation, not yet grasped as a contradiction (Marx, 1959: p 42).

At the same time private property rights regime became strengthened as nations industrialized and democratised.

This property rights perspective has only peripherally been the concern of sociological studies of nationalism – although in the first generation of sociologists after the enlightenment proto-sociologists Marx does engage in extensive discussion of property relations. Marx was inspired by the perspectives of some of the writers referred to above. He called Adam Smith the “Luther of political economy” (Giddens, 2014, p 35). But whereas Smith was describing and analyzing changes in property and sovereignty that were part of the logic of nationalism, Marx had little to say about nationalism, and much of that turned out to be quite wrong. For example, Marx saw nationalism as a temporary product of the bourgeoisie soon to be rendered obsolete by the global expansion of capitalism:

The executive of the modern [nation] state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie [but] The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere (Marx and Engels, 1908: p 11)

Marx also claimed that the worker had no country: “Modern industrial labour, modern subjection to capital, the same in England as in France, in America as in Germany has stripped him of every trace of national character”(Marx and Engels, 1908, p 27). However, although Marx was wrong about nationalism, that nationalism has been one of the dominant forces of modernity, and that workers have chosen nation over class (Gellner, 1996), should not let us forget that Marx and other Marxists considered property rights to play a fundamental role in social change. As Ellen Meiksins Wood writes:

Human beings enter into relations with each other and with nature to guarantee their own survival and social reproduction. To understand the social practices and cultural products of any time and place, we need to know something about those conditions of survival and social reproduction, something about the specific ways in which people gain access to the material conditions of life, about how some people gain access to the labour of others, about relations between people who produce and those who appropriate what others produce, about the forms of property that emerge from these social relations, and about how these relations are expressed in political domination, as well as in resistance and struggle (Wood, 2008: p 12).

Nationalism should be understood against the background of the basic conditions of survival, and the forms of domination and appropriation in the society in which it emerges. Property and its relation to

sovereignty is key here, as the early proto-sociologists knew. Later Marxist and materialist perspectives can help us understand nationalism today.

Concluding remarks

If the task of sociology is, as C. Wright Mills once wrote, to unite biography and history in an attempt to understand the forces that shape society (Mills, 1967), then this is also the sociologist's task when looking at the current nationalist moment. Doing this means imbedding current nationalism in its larger historical trajectory from the late eighteenth century onwards. If we follow the materialist assumption that the conditions of appropriation and property are essential in understanding the sociological developments of any time and place, then analysis of such relations must be a central part of this task. Particularly important is the concept of property and the workings of property regimes. The work of the proto-sociologists in considering these concepts have been mostly ignored by later sociologists. If we go back to the age-old concepts of property and sovereignty that the early proto-sociologists used, and if we imbed them in contemporary relations of property and labour and production, we can reveal mechanisms of change at work today; how changes and challenges to sovereignty and property may create and transform nationalism. Property rights issues may lay at the very core of the structure of nationalism because it may be what drives its striving towards sovereignty in its various forms, and what influences and informs the way in which it is realized as ideology, as well as being a decisive structural cause for its development. Is this also the case with the intensification and change of nationalism happening today? Can we better understand the current nationalist moment if we look at its relationship to property, property regimes (which must include the way in which labour and capital is organized) and political sovereignty? The field is open for exploration. Materialists such as Marx and his intellectual descendants devised theoretical maps of the material, propertied and structural mechanisms that formed modern society. Recent sociology and scholarship have established nationalism as key component of modernity, and the early proto-sociologists of the eighteenth century long ago brought in the concepts of property and sovereignty in understanding what we now see as nationalism. A future task of sociology in understanding nationalism is to bridge these traditions in an integrated property rights perspective for a sociology of nationalism in the 21st century.

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