

UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE

Faculty of Political Sciences

Belgrade, September, 2017

The Master Thesis Defense Commission (hereby the Commission) appointed by the Department of International Studies, for the candidate Miloš Vukelić consists of the following members: Prof. dr Slobodan Samardžić, prof. dr Radmila Nakarada and prof. dr Nemanja Džuverović.

After reading the master thesis, the Commission is submitting the following report.

REPORT

The Master thesis of Miloš Vukelić (1992) entitled „Compatibility of Main Western Theoretical Approaches to Nations and Nationalism” has 76 pages. Besides the Introduction and Conclusion, the master thesis has five chapters and a list of references.

In the Introduction the author defines his research aims and hypothetical framework. The author’s general hypothesis is as follows: „The main approaches to the concept of the nation and nationalism are theoretically compatible, meaning that the essential theoretical findings in each are not mutually exclusive.” The candidate explains that he found an inspiration for the topic in Peace studies and Johan Galtung’s yin/yang view on contradictions, having noticed that the theory of nations and nationalism is permeated with the efforts to advocate either one or another approach, as if it is impossible to use them all, or at least some of them, in a complementary fashion. In addition, the Introduction consists of an overview of obstacles that the author faced, while trying to define and develop the topic. He underlined particularly the problem posed by the vast literature on these two phenomena, this being the main reason why he limited himself in his research only to the most influential, Western, approaches.

In the first chapter, the author presented modernism, primordialism/perennialism, ethno-symbolism, interactionism and post-modernism, as the most influential approaches in Western literature on nations and nationalism. The key questions and dilemmas that generate divisions, disputes between the approaches are also elaborated. Modernism is presented more thoroughly, since it covers many “sub-approaches” (neo-Marxism being one of those). The author also

argues that post-modernism and primordialism/perennialism are either incompatible with the other three approaches (post-modernism), or outdated (primordialism/perennialism). Following his critical overview of the approaches, he argues that modernism, interactionism and ethno-symbolism have the best explanatory potential of nations and nationalism, when combined. This is the rationale of his content structure, i.e. why he dedicated a chapter to each of them.

Chapter 2 begins his analysis of modernism with the findings of Ernest Gellner, since he is considered to be the most influential author of modernism. The candidate asserts that most other modernists, if not all of them, rely on Gellner's conclusions about the nation being a useful, and necessary part of the industrial society. He also finds that Gellner's structural-functionalist paradigm is substantial, but still lacking a holistic perspective of nations and nationalism. In a similar manner he views Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. His claims are viewed as modernist, yet "unconventional". Nevertheless, the author places the main emphasis on Anderson's contribution to the theory of nation/nationalism, which is by and large based on his emphasis on the importance of analysing the informational infrastructure for the development of a collective consciousness. Finally, Chapter 2 includes criticism of the two abovementioned authors and of modernism in general, as well as an indication in which direction the omissions/fallacies of this theory can be resolved/transcended.

Chapter 3 focuses on interactionism, which is defined as a distinctive paradigm in the theory nations and nationalism. Frederik Barth is detected as the founder of the approach, and his main arguments, as well as later developments within the interactionism theoretical framework provided by Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Iver Neumann, are elaborated. The author points out the key findings of this approach which are the following: ethnicity is a relation, rather than an objective set of features; identities are forged when two groups interact; elites tend to employ identities as political resources; there are similarities between ethnic groups, nations and civilizations; and finally, the similarities stem from the fact that there exists a perennial need for people to mobilize and organize when they interact with "others". A critique of interactionism, elaborated at the end of Chapter 3 comes from ethno-symbolism and peace studies. The author shows that ethno-symbolists noticed that interactionism accepts Fernand Braudel's concept of *longue durée*, yet it does not recognize that culture is not as relative as Barth and others assumed, but that it might be extraordinary durable and crucial for the inter-

group relations. A warning that the extensive usage of interactionism may lead to self-fulfilling prophecies and the creation of new dichotomies, where they did not exist, is also elaborated by the author. He finds the solution for the indicated tensions, shortcoming in “constructive Peace studies”, which argues that every theory, when constructed and used, should be filtered through values. In practice this means that research which only reinforces or scientifically confirms a *self–other* perspective and possible enmities, should not be conducted.

The fourth Chapter gives a critical overview of the findings of ethno-symbolism. This is primarily done by presenting the key claims of Anthony Smith about the similarities of pre-industrial *ethnies* and present-day nations, which led him to the conclusion that nations are constructed out of the material provided by *ethnies*. The candidate notes that Smith claimed nation and *ethnie* have six dimensions in common: A common name; a common myth of descent; a shared history; a distinctive shared culture; and association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity. Smith, according to the author, also provides argumentation that modernism can be improved if the importance of culture is recognized, as well as the strength of the myths and symbols on psychological, political and historical level. The author of the thesis also emphasized the strength of Smith’s argumentation in explaining why the concept of the *longue durée* of cultures, should be employed when nationalism is being analysed. Finally, criticism of ethno-symbolism is given based on the author’s concern that Smith stresses culture too much, at the expense of political features of nationalism. The concern stems from the notion that “culturalism” can lead to self-justifications of potentially malign forms of nationalism. Such criticism is supported by the claims of Johan Galtung that the most dangerous violence is cultural violence, as it is more durable, and it also justifies and rationalizes direct and structural violence.

In the concluding chapter the author assembles the three approaches and tests them through Galtung’s triangle of direct, structural (indirect) and cultural violence or peace. Modernism is described as a key paradigm if one analyses potential structural violence in a society or between societies, or as a potential platform for peace-building. Interactionism is important in explaining how potential direct violence and interaction of two groups eventually led to dichotomization and the creation of boundaries, or how only direct contact can lead to peace. Ethno-symbolism is fundamental in understanding that violence often resides in

collective narratives and interpretations. The author also stressed the need for a cumulative usage of modernism, interactionism and ethno-symbolism, as violence, or peace-building can start in any angle of the direct, structural (indirect) and cultural triangle.

In the conclusion of this Chapter, the candidate noted that his general hypothesis and research aims are verified by the findings. He also added a prediction that people will adhere to their ethnic, national and other identities more than to the class ones, which opens up a space for researches to contribute to the creation and reinvention of more moderate myths and symbols.

In conclusion, the Commission is convinced that the candidate Miloš Vukelić, has shown a mature capacity to understand and critically reflect some of the most important theoretical contributions related to the complex problems of nation and nationalism. The Commission is of the opinion that the thesis demonstrated that the candidate possesses broad knowledge concerning both the dominant theories in the field nation/nationalism as well as in Peace Studies. Insisting on an encompassing approach to the problem of nation/nationalism based on the compatibility of a number of theoretical approaches, the candidate demonstrated openness and interpretative creativity. The thesis is written in very good English.

Having in mind all that has been said, the Commission concludes that the master thesis entitled „Compatibility of Main Western Theoretical Approaches to Nations and Nationalism” written by Miloš Vukelić fulfils all the formal criteria for the public defence.

The Commission:

Prof. dr Slobodan Samardžić,



Prof. dr Radmila Nakarada,

Prof. dr Nemanja Džuverović

