

PROCESSES OF STATE FORMATION AND NATION BUILDING

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One of the strangest aspects of the development of sociology during its first century and a half or so as a relatively autonomous discipline is the change from a long-term perspective to a short-term perspective, a kind of narrowing of the sociologists' interest to contemporary societies - and above all to their own societies - as they are here and now, and a withdrawal of interest from the problem how and why societies over the centuries have become what they are. The narrowing of the focus has found its most striking expression in the change in the dominant type of sociological theory. For the greater part of the 19th century the most representative sociological theories were centred on the long-term development of society, those of the second part of the 20th century - except a few, among them my own - have completely abandoned the concept of social development. For a time, it has disappeared from sociological text-books. Instead, the concept "social system" has moved into the centre of sociological theories and other concepts related to it, such as "social structure" and "social function," conceived in such a manner that they can only serve as theoretical tools for a study of society in a given state, at a given time, whose changes are perceived as unstructured or, in other words, as historical changes. The shift of interest from the long-term dynamics to the short-term statics of society has many reasons which need not be discussed here, at least not explicitly (I have discussed some of them elsewhere (1)). But the fact that the plans of the 7th World Congress of Sociology include a Round Table discussion on the theme 'Grand Theories of Development' may perhaps be regarded as a straw in the wind. There are a number of signs that the problem of the long-term development of societies - sometimes mistakenly called evolution, for this development is a sequential order sui generis and has nothing whatever to do with the biological sequence called evolution - begins to move once more into focus.

However, the restructuring of the sociological imagination that is needed in order to redress, on a new level of the spiral, the balance between static and dynamic approaches to the theory of society once more in favour of the latter, is quite a formidable task. We have now many more facts about the long-term development of societies to go on than ever before. To build integrating theoretical models which fit all of them closely is far from easy. Moreover, many current concepts, among them the concepts 'structure' and 'function', will come to mean something very different from what they mean today among structural-functionalists and other schools of static sociology if they are used within the context of a developmental sociological theory.

On the empirical level studies in the development of societies have been on the increase for some time, at least with regard to those societies which are called today 'developing' or 'underdeveloped'. But the interest in the development of 'developing' societies as an empirical sociological problem has as yet hardly found a response on the theoretical level. One can see why. Expressions like 'underdeveloped' or 'developing' societies themselves point to the peculiar twist in the perspective of those representatives of the wealthier, the more developed societies who habitually use these terms. For their use implies that the more highly industrialised societies themselves are not developing or, for that matter, not 'underdeveloped'. In their case the present stage of the development of society is widely perceived as a stage without a future, as an end-stage. The customary restriction of the term 'developing' to the poorer countries suggests that representative sections of the wealthier countries, who thus perceive a development only in others, are satisfied with themselves. Except in a very limited sense they do not attach any value to the further development of their own society; hence interest in its development up to their own time, too, has receded. While they can perhaps see that in the case of the poorer countries their development

is the structured backbone of their history, the wealthier countries, the highly industrialised nations of this world seem to have only a history, but not a development, most certainly not a development that goes on, and 'history' seems only marginally a sociologists's concern/ Among the many reasons for the change from long-term developmental to short-term static theories in sociology, this is certainly one: The present conditions of 'advanced' societies are in sociological theories treated almost as if they were an unchanging final state. The short-term perspective of many of the most prestigious sociological theories of our time finds its expression in law-like abstractions from selected aspects of contemporary "advanced" societies presented with the claim to be applicable to societies of all ages and regions. Sociological theories woven around concepts such as "social system" are an example. They reduce the long-term processes of structured and directional changes, to which the concept of development applies and of which processes of industrialisation, bureaucratisation, scientification, urbanisation or state and nation building processes are examples, to an unchanging state as its permanent condition, while these changes themselves are perceived, at the most, as an unstructured flow, as 'history'.

A few preliminary remarks, I thought, might help clear the decks. For in order to contribute to a Round Table discussion about 'Grand Theories of Development' one has to decide what it is one sets out to discuss: historical theories à la Toynbee or Spengler or sociological theories of long-term development. As one can hardly take it for granted today that the difference between an approach to changes of societies as history and an approach to these changes as development is well understood, I thought it might be useful if I state explicitly that I am concerned with the latter. It might help the discussion along, I thought, if I set out, in continuation of my theory of long-term state formation processes, some of the problems which one encounters if one studies nation building processes, the latest phase of a long line of state formation processes at least in the development of European societies.

The problem itself is not uncharacteristic of the change in one's perception implied in the change from a static to a developmental sociological paradigm. One gains access to previously neglected problems. With the exception of Reinhard Bendix, few sociologists have looked into the problem of nation building and none, as far as I know, into those of long-term state formation processes and their relevance for sociologists both on the empirical and the theoretical level. The evidence for this type of processes is all around us. But in order to bring it into one's conceptual net one requires a type of theoretical paradigm which does not abstract from the flow of time and reduce, in reflection, to static chunks that which one observes as a continuous movement. Many contemporary sociological theory builders appear to take it for granted that a type of abstraction modelled on classical physics, abstractions in the form of law-like generalisations which exclude from the result of the abstraction all that happens in the sequence of time is the true badge of a scientific enterprise. Perhaps it has not been stated clearly enough that the abstractions one encounters in biological theories and concepts are very different from the law-like generalisations of classical physics. Some of them include spatial figurations and time sequences of long duration. One can already see very clearly that, in its own way, sociological theory making will have to move in a similar direction. The difficulty is that the type of theory which emerges in that case does not correspond to the ideal image of a theory which the most prominent theoretical sociologists of our time appear to take for granted and which is a kind of philosophical hangover from the time of classical physics.

Take one of the best known examples of an essentially static sociological theory of our time, the theory which tries to come to grips with the problems of society by presenting society as a "social system". I am glad to find that the leading exponent of contemporary social system theories, Talcott Parsons, is among us. I am critical of the intellectual system he has built up.

A Round Table discussion at a World Congress of Sociology is, it seems to me, the right place for stating some of the reasons for my critical attitude, - only some, for my time is severely limited, and I like to combine by critical remarks with at least a few hints about the positive aspects of a developmental sociological theory which alone can justify criticism. Moreover, my critical attitude towards Parsons' intellectual system is qualified by my respect for his person. One may disagree with him, but one cannot doubt his intellectual sincerity and integrity. Nor the width of his power of synthesis which is one of the qualifying gifts of the distinguished theory maker. However, I cannot persuade myself that this gift has been used in the right cause. Even for analytical purposes, the assumption that 'actions' form a kind of atoms of human societies appears to me one of those barren formal generalizations too remote from research tasks to be either confirmed or refuted by reference to observable data. Why put 'actions' in the center of a theory of society and not the people who act? If anything, societies are networks of human beings in the round, not a medley of disembodied actions. Nor is it easy to see how the atomism of such a sociological action theory can run in harness, as a horse from the same stable, with a decidedly not atomistic theory according to which everything in society is a dependent part of a highly integrated and normally smoothly functioning whole. This, too, the model of society as a 'social system' a normally well oiled social machinery where all parts are harmoniously geared to each other, is rather remote from the rough and tumble of men's social life, as one can actually observe it.

It is certainly difficult to apply to the larger societies of the past which were more integrated in terms of regions of social strata and even of immigrants, than most of our contemporary European nation states. Parson's theory of society as a normally well and highly integrated system appears to claim the status of a general sociological theory applicable to all societies of men. One cannot help wondering whether it is not in fact an over-extended and rather idealising generalisation abstracted from modern nation states and projected in all the world. Can the Parsonian model of a 'social system' with its supposedly integrating unity of values and of culture really apply to the slave states of antiquity where social distances, inequalities of social strata and differences in their culture and their values were often very much greater and regional integration often very much less great than our contemporary industrial nation states? Does it apply for instance to the Assyrian or the Roman Empire? Or to the Confederate States of the 18th and 19th Century with their massive slave population? Or to dynastic Russia with her hierarchy of privileged landowners and state officials and the mass of her peasant serfs?

If one looks around in the sociological literature of our time, it can easily appear that nation-states as a specific type of social formation have no place at all in the sociologists' field of enquiry. It takes some time before one discovers that nation states make their appearance as a topic of contemporary sociology in a characteristic disguise. The references to them are masked by a specific type of abstraction. They are hidden behind such concepts as 'the social whole' and 'total society' and above all 'the social system'. Although these concepts can be applied to other relatively highly integrated social formations, such as tribes, much that is said about society as a "whole" or as a "social system" in sociological theories, such as that of Parsons, is selected, abstracted and distilled from the most highly and closely integrated societies of our own time- from nation states. As problems of nation states form the main topic of my contribution to this discussion, I thought it might be useful to indicate the connection between these problems and the most prominent of the contemporary system theories. The latter have a purely descriptive character often with strong teleological undertones. In Parsons' model the maintenance of a unified, equilibrated and well functioning social system often appears as the purpose and aim towards which all part-events are directed. An example - one of many - is the description of power as 'facility for the performance of function in and on behalf of the society as a system'. Sentences such as this

show very clearly the abstraction in the service of a specific ideal. As in many other cases, ideal types such as these, purely descriptive law-like abstractions serve - without doubt unintentionally in this case - as disguises for subject-centred values. Teleology serves as a substitute for explanation. If one brings the 'system'-concept down to earth, if one asks how and why long-term processes of integration of which state formation and nation-building processes are examples, actually occurred and occur, one prepares the way for an explanatory sociological model; one directs attention to the problem why, in the course of time, relatively large 'systems' became and become in these cases more highly integrated and their 'parts' functionally more interdependent.

However, this type of question comes to life, it gains substance and relevance only if one has at one's disposal a sufficiently wide and vivid long-term knowledge which enables one to look back through the centuries and to perceive the continuity of the development of societies which led, say, from the multitude of relatively small, relatively loosely integrated dynastic states of the 11th and 12 centuries, by way of a great number of integration and disintegration spurts, gradually to larger, more populous and more closely integrated social units in the form of the larger dynastic states and then to the - so far - most highly integrated and interdependent large societies, the industrial nation states, - unless one is able to perceive this long term process, one does not become aware of the problem. How is it to be explained that a development of societies went in this case for centuries, through all the fissions and fusions, all the disintegration and integration spurts, in the direction towards the formation of larger and more closely knit societies? How can one account for the fact that, over the centuries, this change had a specific direction, although it was unplanned? For who was there to plan it, and to execute such a plan? I have given a part answer to this problem elsewhere.⁽²⁾ It must be enough here, as a contribution to our problem of sociological theories of long-term developments, to concentrate on a few problems of the latest phase in this process, of nation-building processes.

By neglecting long-term processes of integration and disintegration as a theoretical and empirical topic of sociological enquiry, sociologists have steered their discipline into a well known dilemma; the neglect has cemented their division into two diametrically opposed schools, one of which places collaboration, functional integration and interdependence into the center of its model of society, the other tension, fission and conflict. Whatever the ideological reasons for this division are, any long-term enquiry into state formation and nation building processes can show that every spurt towards greater interdependence, towards closer integration of human groups which were previously independent, or less dependent, or less reciprocally dependent, on each other, runs through a series of specific integration tensions and conflicts, of balance of power struggles which are not accidental, but structural concomitants of these spurts towards greater functional interdependence of 'parts' within a 'whole'. For if two groups become more, or more reciprocally, interdependent than they were before, each of them has reason to fear that it may be dominated, or even annihilated, by the other. The struggle may result after many tests of strength in a fusion. It may result in the complete disappearance of one of them in the new unit emerging from their struggles. There are many more possibilities. The complexity of these integrations need not concern us here. It is enough to point out that every move towards greater functional interdependence between human groups engenders structural tensions, conflicts and struggles, which may or may not remain unmanageable.

Nation building processes show that very clearly. Two main types of integration processes stand out in their course, each with its specific integration struggles: processes of territorial or regional integration and processes of strata integration. Although one can distinguish them, they are structurally connected. In discussing some of their aspects, therefore, one

often has to move from the one to the other. One of the first and one of the few people who have asked directly and without circumlocution: "What is nation?" was the great French savant Ernest Renan. Some of the observations and reflections contained in his lecture, "Qu'est-ce qu'une Nation?"⁽³⁾ are of significance here. He saw, for instance, quite clearly a fact which today is often concealed or forgotten, he recognized, that nations are something quite new.⁽⁴⁾ National ideologies usually represent the nation as something very old, almost eternal and immortal. In fact, state societies assumed in Europe the character of nation states, broadly speaking, from the second part of the 18th century on. Renan pointed out that none of the great powers of antiquity had the character of nations. There were, he stated, no Chinese citizens. He could have pointed out that even much later people were treated and in general perceived themselves as subjects of Princes, not as fellow citizens of a nation. The term 'citizen' itself had for quite a time an oppositional, if not an outright revolutionary ring. States assumed the characteristics of nation states, in other words, in connection with specific changes in the distribution of power within a state society. It was, on the one hand, a change in the distribution of power between social strata as well as in the nature of social stratification itself. It was, on the other hand, a change in the distribution of power between governments and governed. The change in the nature of stratification is usually conceptualised as a change from stratification in terms of different estates each with legally entrenched privileges and disabilities to a stratification in the form of social classes whose members were equals before the law and unequal only socially and economically. This transition, like the nation-building process as such, was far more gradual than is usually seen. Privileged groups of noble landowners with a strong monopolistic foothold on the commanding positions of their country's military forces, diplomacy, civil service departments and foreign affairs, retained in most European countries their distinguishing character as a powerful social stratum sui generis, as the European upper class, up to the First World War in spite of the growing power of sections of the middle classes. The power equation changed during the 19th century slowly in favour of the latter. But the former, the European aristocracy and related groups bound together and distinguished from other groups by a specific tradition, a stratum culture of their own, retained until 1918 and in some countries, above all in England, much longer not only their position as the highest status group, but also a special access to privileged position within the country's establishment which secured for them at least a modicum of their former power surplus in relation to middle and lower classes.

It is useful to keep in mind the leading part which representative sections of the traditional European upper classes continued to play in the affairs of European societies at least up to the First World War, if one wants to understand the gradualness with which dynastic states transformed themselves into nation states. Following Marx and perhaps slightly misinterpreting his model of the development of European societies, many people have today an over-simplified picture of the change in the stratification of European societies which plays so large a part in the change from dynastic to national states. According to this picture the French revolution represents an absolute caesura between an order in which what Marx called a 'feudal class' of princes, landed aristocrats and related groups, formed the 'ruling class'⁽⁵⁾ of society and a social order in which the bourgeoisie broke the power of the 'feudal class' and took its place as the ruling class of society. In actual fact princes and aristocratic agrarian groups of one kind or the other continued to play a very decisive part as specific foci of power in most European societies after the French revolution. For the greater part of the 19th century, the main axis of social tensions and conflict of European societies was not that between workers and capitalists. The 19th century was and remained a period of three-cornered struggles between landowning aristocratic and court elites, rising industrial middle class groups and, behind them, the rising industrial working classes. The expression 'middle class' as a classifying term for the entrepreneurial classes, which is hardly any longer

appropriate today, refers to their position in this three-cornered battle. As the industrial working classes were during the first part of the 19th century and often much longer, still very ineffectively organised, often hardly literate and very poor, the struggle of the urban entrepreneurial classes for stronger participation in state affairs and against the dominance of the traditional upper classes was for a time more acute on the state level than that between groups of workers and entrepreneurs which still remained often latent, which, if it came into the open, remained largely sporadic, diffuse, intermittent and which was hardly fought out above the local level with any degree of effectiveness prior to the second half of the 19th century. The slowly rising power of the organised industrial working classes greatly contributed to the rapprochement between landed and industrial interests. The decrease in the tension between them, often leading to compromise and alliance in a common struggle against working class representatives, took a different form in different societies; but it was usually the prelude to the rise of men representing the traditions of the urban industrial middle classes to the commanding positions of the state and the gradual retreat from these positions of members of the old upper classes, who preserved a modicum of their tradition and ideals. Whether the former had the face of Gladstone, Thiers or Stresemann, their advent was symptomatic of the advance of sections of the former middle classes, of the urban industrial classes, towards the position of the core group of the state. The middle classes, one might say, had become integrated into the state, or, as Parsons has put it, 'included'. But this conceptualisation is not wholly adequate. It gives the impression that a new stratum has been 'included' in a 'social system' which as such remains unchanged.⁽⁶⁾ In actual fact the rise to a position of greater power within the state society of representatives of the entrepreneurial classes was symptomatic of a transformation of 'the system' itself. It marked the point of no return at which the vestiges of the dynastic-aristocratic order of society slowly faded into the background and at which the state entered its first phase as a fully-fledged national state - the first phase because the broadest strata of the nation still remained largely excluded and outsiders. Disraeli speaking of 'two nations' found a telling word for it. It is perhaps not uncharacteristic of the three-cornered tension figuration of societies in the second part of the 19th century that in Germany as in England the leaders of conservative groups with strong agrarian interests, Bismark and Disraeli, each in their own way tried to improve the conditions of the working classes partly in the hope of winning them over as allies in their struggle with parties more representative of urban manufacturing and liberal groups, partly in order to counter the growth of working class parties.

One can say, thus, that industrialisation and nation building are two facets of the same transformation of societies. But one cannot clearly indicate the connection unless one links both these processes to an overall change in the distribution of power chances in society. There is a simple way to demonstrate this change although it would require much greater elaboration to do it convincingly. Dynastic states are characteristic of a stage in the development of societies at which the resources of power are very unevenly distributed between ruling elites and the mass of the population. In many cases 90% or more of the population of a country have no institutional means, no regular channels of communications which enable them to influence decisions of groups with access to the commanding positions of the state which affect their lives. Even access to estate assemblies, with very few exceptions, is, in practice, open only to small elite groups. In many cases princes and government are able to rule for long periods without allowing estate assemblies to meet. Nothing is more characteristic of the change in the distribution of power indicated by the transformation of dynastic into national states than the emergence of mass parties as a regular institution of nation states. The widespread discontent with mass parties which do not ensure a genuine participation of the groups which they nominally represent obscures the basic sociological problems with which one is faced by the great regularity with which mass parties are formed as standing institutions in all the more advanced and even many less advanced

societies of our time. One usually fails to ask which developments, which structures of societies account for the emergence of nation-wide political parties and of party governments as regular institutions in the 19th and 20th centuries? Ineffective or not, nation-wide parties and party government are symptomatic of a stage in the development of societies, at which the integration of a state-population has become closer, at which it is no longer possible to take decisions affecting the lives of the population of a country entirely without regular channels of communication between decision-makers and those affected by their decisions. The balance of power between groups with access to positions which enable them to take decisions over the lives of others and groups with little or no access to these decisions is no longer quite as uneven as it was in earlier stages of social development. The reciprocity of the dependence of government on those they govern and of the governed on governments, though still uneven enough, has become less uneven than it used to be. The balance of parties in different countries is a fairly exact indicator of this balance of power and its fluctuations.

One can see the connection between the social institution of parties and the properties of nation states. Societies assume the characteristics of nations is the functional interdependence between its regions and its social strata as well as its hierarchic levels of authority and subordination becomes sufficiently great and sufficiently reciprocal for none of them to be able to disregard completely what the others think, feel or wish. Government by party leaders and the adoption by both, governments and parties, of ideology designed to convince the mass of the population that they regard the improvement of their conditions, the advance of the welfare of the nation as their central task are symptomatic of the very pronounced change in the balance of power between governments and governed of which I have spoken. There is no doubt that even the most advanced of our contemporary industrial nation states are still in the early stages of these processes of nation building. I have not been able here to explain the reasons why they have got under way. Nor would I preempt the future and say they must and will go further in that direction. But perhaps I have clarified some of the connections between events which are academically often classified under different headings. Political parties and even nations may not appear as a sociologists' concern, social classes not as that of a political scientist, while industrialisation may be regarded as the economist's preserve, and dynastic states as that of the historian. Yet the connections are there for all to see provided one has a longtime perspective and focusses attention on the changing power relations between different social groups.

For the time being I have simply tried to put into perspective the problem of nation building. The self-images of nations, for reasons about which I have to say more, usually give the impression to themembers of each of them that their nation existed, in essentials, unchanged for many centuries if not for ever. What is today taught as history of one's own country, however many changes it may show which have occurred among the inhabitants of that country over the centuries, can usually be accomodated to the requirements of a national self-image which represents one's own nation as unchanging throughout the ages in its basic characteristics. Contemporary state-societies which are still in the early stages of a state formation and nation building process, in many cases are already beginning to construct a similar image of themselves - an image of the national past with which present generations can identify themselves, which gives them a feeling of pride in their own national identity and which can serve as a catalyst in a nation building process that usually includes the integration of disparate regional groups and different social strata around certain dominant core groups.

There is much to be said for studying these processes factually. But in order to do so, one must be able to distinguish between national ideologies which make a nation appear as an unchanging and well integrated social system of great value, and the observable longterm

processes of [284] integration and disintegration in the course of which tensions and struggles between centrifugal and centripetal tendencies and between established and outsider groups occur as a regular feature characteristic of the structure of these developments. One must be able to perceive nations as a specific type of integration which requires explanation and which cannot be explained unless one recognizes state formation processes, and, as one of their phases, nation building processes, as long-term processes in the sequence of time, and considers that nation building processes, far from representing the last and ultimate spurt of a state formation process, may be followed by integrations on a higher post-national level of which one can see the beginnings, for example, in Western and Eastern Europe, among groups of Arab states and some of the African states. Sociologically speaking the scientific exploration of these contemporary integration and disintegration spurts can throw light on past spurts of this type, on earlier state formation processes and vice versa. The notion that sociological problems of our own time and those of past ages must or can be pursued, as it were, in separate compartments by different academic disciplines is greatly misleading. In fact, the study of long-term social processes and especially of processes of integration and disintegration shows very clearly the need for a unified and integrating theoretical framework for the social sciences. Their present boundaries and their incessant status struggles, together with the effects of these struggles on theories and conventions of research, have increasingly hampered their advance towards greater certainty and adequacy of the knowledge they produce of their special field, of human society. These boundaries and struggles reinforce the tendency towards short-term perspectives that prevail in most of them. Sooner or later a re-examination of their traditional relationship will become necessary.

1. See N. Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*. Berne and Munich, 1969, Introduction to the second edition.
2. N. Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*, *ibid*.
3. Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une Nation?*. Paris, 1882.
4. *ibid*, p. 2.
5. Marx does not yet clearly distinguish between early medieval types of nobles with no or little income in the form of money and the dominant 18th century types, the court aristocracy, living largely on a money income. To call both 'feudal' is rather misleading. I have shown some of the differences and some of the reasons for the transformation of a late feudal nobility into an aristocracy centred on a Court, in 'Die Höfische Gesellschaft'. *Soziologische Texte*, Neuwied and Berlin, 1969.
6. Parsons recognises very clearly that a 'system' can be divided into superior and inferior classes. One can see, this, that system is a sophisticated shorthand for a country such as France, England or the USA. He explicitly mentions cases in which an upper class monopolizes the status of real membership, treating a lower class as second class citizenry. But he evidently shrinks from the harshness of the struggles and conflicts which form an integral part of the rise of the 'second class' citizenry, of which the struggle between the rising industrial middle classes against the aristocratic upper classes is a good example. This is how Parsons formulates his concern (in 'Societies: Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives', Prentice-Hall, 1966, p. 22): "For these reasons differentiation and upgrading processes may require (my italics - N.E.) the inclusion in a status of full membership in the relevant general community system of previously excluded groups which have developed legitimate capacities to "contribute" to the functioning of the system."

Once more Parsons' teleological perspective asserts itself. The 'functioning of the system' is the end. If formerly excluded groups have developed 'legitimate capacities' which enable them to contribute to the functioning system, then they should no longer be excluded. As one can see, the 'system' does not change. Newly admitted groups merely fit into it. No explanation is given as to the people who judge whether an excluded group has developed 'legitimate' capacities for fitting into the existing system. One does not know what to admire more, the patent sincerity and good will or the disarming naivety and incomprehension which one encounters here.

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