Stefano Bianchini, *Liquid Nationalisms and State Partitions in Europe* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2017): A Response to Robert M. Hayden and Tvrtko Jakovina

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With great interest and pleasure I read the constructive and insightful comments that Robert M. Hayden and Tvrtko Jakovina so generously articulated, starting from the topics I raised in my book and often expanding them to additional, broader considerations. Therefore, I am deeply grateful to both of them – as well as to *Southeastern Europe* – for the great opportunity they offered me to debate nationalism and state partitions, while elaborating these notions further.

Both effectively captured the key narrative of my concern, since I was for years in search of a theoretical framework able to grasp either the transformative character of nationalism or its crucial role in promoting partitions in the modern world, even if partitions are not necessarily, and not always, inspired by nationalist ideas. However, the adaptability of this ideology in the historical perspective and its impact in defining the borders and the collective identities of political communities have shown, in many respects, a *unique talent* in mobilizing dynamically political strategies, social emotions, and cultural self-perceptions. Nationalism, in fact, has produced a high variety of alternative projects, sometimes inclusive, sometimes divisive, and sometimes even overlapping both these options. Comparatively speaking, the Yugoslav/Serbian and Croatian relationship as well as the Commonwealth/Polish and Lithuanian experience are, in my view, extraordinary examples of the coexisting and, simultaneously, conflicting nationalist narratives, whose interactions require an in-depth analysis.

Both my commentators have broadened this aspect with their useful insights, although Robert Hayden seems not convinced about the effectiveness of my reference to the notions of "liquidity" and "fluidity",

because, he says, such an approach suffers from "the limitations of the scope: central Europe in the 20th century". However, before explaining my views, I think it is worth explaining to the reader why I focused my study on Europe (not only central Europe), although I am fully aware that nationalism and partitions are not a peculiarity of Europe.

Actually, Europe was, and still is, affected by a wide range of aspirations for independence in connection with its cultural varieties of territories and populations. Despite a well-rooted mythology, which pretends that the current states (or nations) have a long-term origin and tradition, their modern establishment – in terms of borders and identities – stems rather from the processes of fusion and amalgamation that have marked the transformation of pre-existing social links into new ones during the last two centuries. During this period of changes, multiple (national) options existed (and still exist and operate). Therefore, the consolidation of one of them is the outcome of a series of factors, not necessarily all of them predictable during the time of change. Meanwhile, even the self-perception of the local élites and/or the population has evolved, redesigning the geography of belonging according to a complexity of social, cultural, and economic mechanisms. In this respect, European history seems to me an extraordinary laboratory of changes that deserves special scrutiny, at least since the enlightenment expanded Europewide.

Furthermore, the European concomitant nationalist dynamics explain, in my view, why the opposition to being ruled by other peoples or religions within imperial frameworks (when perceived as forms of tyranny) coexisted with (1) aspirations of partitions, (2) prospective federal reforms of the empires and (3) new geopolitical (in part also federal) arrangements. In this sense, I am not convinced, for example, that Austro-Hungarian fears of independence movements were the only, or even the main reasons behind the declaration of war on Serbia, because the military component of the Empire was aiming at strengthening the imperial policies in South-East Europe, believing in the power of eugenics and superiority, while – on the opposite side – Austro-Marxism was promoting a federal transformation of the Empire, and even local nationalist elites were attracted by larger autonomy roles, rather than independence. This trend was, among others, produced by the decline (or the failure) of the federal geopolitical projects that were elaborated, and intellectually pursued, between the 1850s and 1870s. Moreover, similar dynamics were recorded among the nations of the Tsarist Empire, either after the 1905 or the February 1917 revolutions, when the desire for large autonomies was still predominant among the national political élites. Instead, to what extent did the developments related to WWI

(including the Bolshevik revolution) dramatically affect the evolution of these beliefs, imposing unexpected turns in the political disputations not only in continental Europe, but also in Ireland? War is always a key change accelerator and there is no doubt that orientation still in support of imperial reforms quickly vanished as soon as new geopolitically inclusive arrangements began to appear seriously achievable.

In other words, it seems to me that the recent history of Europe is marked by a number of similar examples influenced by unexpected accelerations, starting from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth partition to the Irish experience, from the collapse of the empires (Central European, Russian, Ottoman, or colonial ones) to the post-communist liquefaction of the socialist federations. Most recently, similar trends are affecting the EU (with Brexit), the United Kingdom, Spain, and Ukraine, just to mention a few, and despite a long tradition of political projects based on geopolitical inclusiveness, as occurred in the Balkans in the first half of the 1930s, in the period between 1944 and 1955, and in the broader European context, with the European Community, later transformed in the European Union.

Still, despite such an intense dynamic of inclusive/divisive options which impacted the development of nationalism and partition in the European context, it seems to me surprising that the category of "state partition" is not popular, if not entirely neglected by the European literature, while it is extensively elaborated in India, South-East Asia, or among British scholars of Indian origin, who apply the category mainly to the post-colonial events in Asia. If one looks universities' syllabi for courses that refer to "state partitions", he/she will see how the focus is on Asia, while Europe is rarely mentioned. In the last two decades, I had the chance to carry out joint research with colleagues and friends interested in scrutinizing the concept of partition with interdisciplinary approaches, but to a large extent these colleagues were of Indian origins and gave priority to Asian studies, with a few exceptions that concerned the bloody collapse of Yugoslavia and, more recently, Scotland. For this reason, I decided to concentrate on Europe with the aim to bridge what I see as a crucial gap in the international literature.

Following these considerations, the notion of "liquid nationalism" was definitely inspired by Zygmunt Bauman. As mentioned above, nationalism in fact is not a static ideology or a mere political program; rather, it is a notion, which has produced opposite views in interpretation as well as a plurality of diversifying impacts during its historical trajectory. As a result, like the ice melting into the water under specific conditions, similarly nationalism – in distinct historical circumstances – liquefies pre-existing social links, a sense of belonging, cultural awareness of individuals and groups, by re-establishing

new forms of solidification that might again liquefy, following further unexpected mechanisms and legal, geopolitical, institutional, and cultural demands.

According to the contexts and the power politics developments, nationalism has encouraged either integration of regions and micro-states or secessionisms and ethnic or regional separations; nationalism has produced demands for freedom and equality, as well as claims for collective "purity protection", or rejections of otherness, racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia. Both my commentators emphasize this complexity of nationalism and partition aspirations and I do agree with their thoughtful suggestions.

On the other hand, Robert Hayden disagrees with my belief that the British *divide et impera* hindered the transfer of civic values to its colonies. Particularly, he mentions India as a crucial and successful example, where "the leadership of the independence movement … drew explicitly on civil values and worked seriously to establish a democratic constitutional state". Personally, I am not an expert on Indian events, but I am aware that civil values were deeply encoded in the strategy of the Indian National Congress (INC). In this sense, I do accept Hayden's criticism. Nevertheless, I am not so sure about the strength of his argument when the prospected post-colonial arrangement became a harsh matter of disputation. Despite Gandhi, in fact, the INC failed to preserve the unity of the British India: the imaginations of other geopolitical constructions were spread from Britain to India already during the 1930s, even before Jinnah. Furthermore, the extent to which the British policy in India and the behavior of Lord Mountbatten had an impact on the progression of events has been (and still is) a subject of vibrant debates. In the end, however, the process of partition did not merely concern India and Pakistan, but also Bengal (starting already from 1905), Punjab, and Kashmir (and later Bangladesh from Pakistan). In other words, partition became a complex mechanism, that not only violently affected the division into two states of British India in 1947, but also triggered a chain of territory fragmentation. This explains – at least in my view – why partition is a deep political trauma, still so vivid in people with South East Asian origins and among the scholars I met.

As a result, I assume that nationalism (and its role in state partition) is a complex phenomenon that can be explained only if we regard it comprehensively and diachronically. Given its mutable nature, it (still) affects forms of communications, traditional habits, social relations (in a broader sense, from rural life to gender, from families to classes). By liquefying their social meanings, it creates the conditions for new solid

bodies, strengthening – what a paradox for an homogenizing political idea! – a plurality of diversities, well beyond ethnic minorities, even if promoting a "plural monoculturalism". Consequently, these bodies establish new interactions (which, in my view, include also new forms of identity and requests for new civil rights), whose qualities, however, may again liquefy owing to time-space compression.

In other words, nationalism is a liquid form of politics, which encompasses state ideologies and yearnings for liberty, revolutionary ideas, and endless claims for independence worldwide. Under the new, global dynamics, nationalism has to cope with intensifying claims for diversities that challenge its policy of homogeneity. At the same time, in many occasions, it has justified (and still legitimizes) violence, racial superiority, ethnic cleansing, and incorporation of territories by coalescing with patriotism and religiosity, even at the cost of distorting their values. The interaction of these multiple flows, I think, can effectively be represented by the concepts of "liquidity" and "fluidity", which – nevertheless – are increasingly affecting, in a broader sense, the social transformation effects of globalization.

Here is also the frame under which the issue of democracy and nationalism is becoming an intriguing factor. Tvrtko Jakovina questions whether democracy can be considered a "glue" of society, even when it is "under prolonged economic crisis and inadequate governance", stressing that I did not give clear answers. Actually, I have to admit, this is not an easy exercise. Probably because this relationship is widely taken for granted, due to the rooted belief that national freedom is, or should be, an expression of democracy. Nevertheless, this nexus is also contested, because it is unclear who or what is granting the respect of the "democratic will" of a group, particularly when we address the issue of the respect of minority rights. The recent, contested arguments about the referenda in Crimea and Catalonia are a patent evidence of that. And I do agree with Robert Hayden that this is a pure political, rather than a legal issue (the case of the Supreme Court of Canada about the referendum in Québec is, in fact, appropriately cited in his remarks). Moreover, the example of the Croatian uncertainties about the assessment of the Catalan aspiration to independence, that Tvtko Jakovina so effectively describes, is a crucial confirmation of the controversial relation between the democratic practice, the "state partition" reality, and nationalist appeals. To what extent the latter affect the "nature" of democracy is, therefore, a matter for a broader and insightful debate, since it concerns not only the intersection between collectivity and the individual rights to express dissent, rejection of homologation, and homogeneity, without being treated

as "enemies of the people", but also the relations of state, individuals, and borders. In the latter case, in fact, partitions design new, often rigid, borders by imposing on individuals a choice in their own identification, at the price of painful breakups in family/friendship and the exclusion from the access to welfare and other civil rights.

Such an aggressive and intimidating behavior of nationalism powerfully operated in British India as well as in the Balkans. Similar behaviors are still alive, for example, in Croatia, in Kosovo, or Bosnia-Herzegovina. In more general terms, Jakovina appropriately describes this ambience by mentioning the controversies about languages and multilinguism, the historical revisionism, the search of new group standardizations, the persistent reluctances to relax and even develop the relations with neighbors, be they EU member states, candidate countries, or external subjects, like Russia. These approaches follow the significant impact the controversies had on intellectuals and ordinary people on the eve of the Yugoslav collapse and even more during the conflict. International diplomacy never invited anti-war organizations to peace negotiations, nor did Western leadership request free and fair elections at the federal level in Yugoslavia in 1990 in order to peacefully negotiate the future of the country within a democratic institutional framework.

My answer to these unexplored questions is that anticommunist biases were so deeply rooted in Western politics, that its leadership did not care about the prospective impact of the precedents they were legitimizing. Therefore, the political claim to a "return" to homogeneity has been reinforced during the 1990s and exploded again Europewide in the new millennium as a "defense barrier" against migrations, the presence of multiple religions, new non-ethnic minorities, and the cultural diversification of the societies. Not surprisingly, these trends have been seen by new nationalists as a threat to the "cultural origins", the "Christian roots", and "natural family" of the existing nation. By firmly opposing inclusiveness, they think, at best, that democracy can work only within homogeneous societies. State borders, however, are regularly threatened by unexpected, newly emerging claims of partitions, which reproduce similar patters within new, restricted geopolitical frameworks. The risk is that such a behavior can easily lead to new authoritarian forms, including dictatorships, as the recent "sovranist" movements are in some cases revealing.

Furthermore, the unilateral universalism of the West is now producing counter-balancing effects and rejections, therefore increasing world disorder, while neo-nationalist stances and a general decline of international governance are encouraging aspirations to new geopolitical designs and

demands for partitions, not necessarily only in Europe (see, for example, the Kurds, Uyghurs, Kashmiri, Tamil, Berbers...). As a result, I believe that the "nation-state" formula is facing a long, painful, and contentious phase of re-adjustment and liquefaction.

The challenges of globalization have a crucial impact on this process. Suffice here to mention the implications of the demographic decline of the northern hemisphere of the earth, the migration flows, climate change, the economic and energy interferences, the unbalances between the declining Western moral authority and the rise of multiple geopolitical players. All of these events have a crucial impact on existing societies, whose heterogeneity is doomed to growth, in patent conflict with the alleged homogeneity of the "nation-state". Furthermore, the mobility of people, IT connections, medicine developments, multilinguism, the new geographies emerging from low-cost flights and high-speed railways, the diversification coupled with coexistence of religious beliefs, all this does contribute to minimizing the role of state borders, while increasing the diversity of existing societies. However, these changes will not be accepted peacefully.

Evidence shows that resistance is growing. This can lead to transnational conflicts and severe social polarizations between globalized and neo-nationalist stances, between highly (and transnationally) educated people and local monolingual, poorly educated populations. Such a potentially conflicting dichotomy may affect not so much the relations among states (as was the case in the hitherto historical experience), as the domestic stability of the societies and the peaceful development of democracy. In fact, democracy will be increasingly expected to come to terms with its profound nature, that is whether it should remain limited within culturally, ethnically, and/or religiously homogenous communities (to be, however, still re-imagined and constructed), or should expand to answer the needs of diversified societies, by managing diversities, granting syncretism, intercultural interdependence and evolution, métissages, neo-nomadism, multi-religious faiths, gender and sexual orientations, and the multiple lifestyle rights that globalization is stimulating worldwide. Admittedly, the evolution of this dichotomy remains unpredictable. It may lead to wars, social unrests, and new state partitions, even if the existing patterns of dependencies and the current social links are under liquefaction. It will take time, with a long updating of evidence and data, before we are able to forecast when and how new solid bodies will replace the current fluidity.

To conclude this passionate discussion, that offered to me a fervent opportunity to discuss my ideas with my esteemed colleagues by expanding the debate to some additional topics that my book has suggested to them,

I want to clarify a couple of "minor" issues, as Tvrtko Jakovina critically mentions in his comment. The first one concerns the status of the Serbs and Croats as constitutive nations of Bosnia-Herzegovina: I do know that they are not minorities, but actually in that sentence I wanted to stress that *the fear* to be treated as such, exactly in the moment when Yugoslavia collapsed, and particularly in 1992, contributed significantly to expanding violence and military operations. I am sorry if I was not so clear, but personally, I do believe that the events of 1992 could have triggered serious threats to peace in Europe and, to my surprise, I have to admit that their risk potential has been deeply underestimated by the international literature so far. In the end, as for the Hungarian annexation of Prekmurje from Slovenia, I thank Jakovina for specifying this detail, I simply missed it.