

Nationalism and Ethnicity

Numerous studies on nationalism and ethnicity (notably by Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, Yael Tamir, and many others) generally find that the meanings of these terms differ, as do their impacts within specific state constructions that encompass different cultural identities as well as self-reflections of them. This also means that translating the meanings of these terms and notions from one linguistic space to another is problematic. In order to explain briefly the usage of these complex terms in this chapter I suggest taking into account that in most cases the term “nation” as used by (post-) Yugoslav scholars refers to “ethnic group” and more or less corresponds with the federal republics based on the country’s ethnic structure. The reason for this is the historical fact that the linguistic and ethnic groups that formed their identities under Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires perceived themselves as “nations” despite lacking their own states throughout the nineteenth century, at which time the custodians of culture (“national” intellectuals: poets, scholars, scientists, and artists) in the Balkans also appropriated typical romantic ideas about the “national” (ethnic) roots and identities of their peoples. Yugoslavia was a specific case, in which these historical investments in the meanings of identity acquired some special traits during the course of history. One can understand this specificity better if one considers the fact that “Yugoslav nationalism” was unthinkable, and that the Yugoslav federation was not perceived as a “nation” from within, but rather as “only” a state. Political, cultural, and other meanings of the notion of nationalism within Yugoslavia were attached to some political and cultural attitudes of members of ethnic groups in a variety of articulations, from “acceptable” concern for one’s own identity to adverse or vicious viewpoints on the superiority of one’s own “nation” over others. As much as I can try to avoid confusion by marking the meaning of *nation*, *national*, and so on, as “ethnic” in some cases, other readers (English and American ones in particular) may still have some difficulty grasping the various nuances due to the specific genealogy of this terminology in the Balkans. I prefer not to just simply use the term “ethnic” in order not to lose sight of the political content of the phenomena in question. Moreover, as we know, the political content of these meanings contributed to deadly consequences in 1990s. Still, I hope that with this explanation international readers will come closer to understanding the splits within social formations in the cultural space under discussion.