

Summary of the paper *Rethinking nationhood: nation as institutionalized form, practical category, contingent event*, Rogers Brubaker

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Brubaker's paper reminds that nation is not a real entity but a social category. Author insists on separating categories of practice from categories of analysis – concept of the nation is a frame, certain kind of device through which people see and understand the world, not the world itself. Still, many analyses in social sciences treat nation as an entity which has its own will, as “collective individuals, capable of coherent, purposeful collective action” (p. 14). The implication of this argument is that the world does not have to be imagined as divided into separate and bound nations.

However, even though nations should not be understood as real, enduring entities which have essence of their own, they are not unimportant: “To argue against the realist and substantialist way of thinking about nation is not to dispute the reality of nationhood. It is rather to reconceptualize that reality” (p. 16).

The author repeats that nation should not be regarded “as substance but as institutionalized form; not as collectivity but as practical category; not as entity but as contingent event”.

Understanding nation as institutionalized form and practical category implies that political processes and state decisions are the most important elements for reproduction of the nation. Nation should be viewed as a result of political and state actions, not as its cause. Author gives an example of Soviet regime and its relation to national categories – nationalism flourishes today in ex-Soviet republics not despite of, but because of the regime. (Soviet state was divided into national territories, ethnic nationality was category which state ascribed by birth on the basis of descent, etc.) According to the author, even though nationalism was suppressed, the national was one of the main criteria which determined social place of the person. It was “the cognitive frame along which action was pushed by the dynamic of material and ideal interests” (p. 18).

“Nationness as event” resolves the idea that nation is present as some kind of potential of a group, and that it will naturally achieve its realization when the time comes. Brubaker

suggests that the nation “suddenly crystallizes rather than gradually develops” (p. 19). It is not a “stable, underlying cause” but “a sudden and pervasive” process of shaping of the public and private life.

In other words, the author argues for careful change of key analytical categories – whenever scientists imagine nation as something with inner meaning, essence or core, they depart from social analysis and enter the space of reproduction of the national.