

End of the era of political dominance of the nation state

And how this does affect missions

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Introduction

The question for this essay is as follows. *Do you believe that 'the era of the political dominance of the nation state is now effectively over'? In what ways might the practice of mission be affected by this debate?*

To my opinion the nation state still has power but it is declining. In this essay I try to explain why I believe this and then I describe how this affects mission.

Because of the word limit of this essay I won't give a definition of the nation state¹.

Is the political dominance of the nation state over?

To answer this question I will look what the *hyperglobalists*, the *sceptics*, and the *transformationalists*² think of this question. After that I will give my own opinion.

The hyperglobalists think that it is the era of the decline of the nation state. They say that politics is becoming more and more a global matter than a national matter. They say that the economic flows are transnational and governments do not have the power to control them. Held et al (2000, 4) explains the opinion of hyperglobalists as follows:

Since the national economy is increasingly a site of transnational and global flows, as opposed to the primary container of national socio-economic activity, the authority and legitimacy of the nation-state are challenged: national governments become increasingly unable to control what transpires within their own borders or to fulfil by themselves the demands of their own citizens.

The sceptics believe that globalisation is something that is not real. They argue that the nation state made internationalisation possible and they argue that due to

¹ For a definition of the nation state see: Cohen et al (2000, 38); Held et al (2000, 38ff); and Steger (2003, 35).

² I assume that the terms *hyperglobalists*, *sceptics* and *transformationalists* are known. I am will to explain those terms but because of the limited word count I left this explanation out of the essay.

internationalisation the nation state became more powerful. Held et al (2000, 5) says the following about the sceptics:

Far from considering national governments as becoming immobilized by international imperatives, they point to their growing centrality in the regulation and active promotion of cross-border economic activity.

The transformationalists are somewhat in the middle between the hyperglobalists and the sceptics. They argue that globalisation transforms state power and world politics.

From my reading I believe that the nation state is still in power because I cannot deny the fact that there are nation states. Held et al (2000, 47) shows that between 1975 and 1995 more countries became democratic. And since 1945 the number of nation states is increasing. Even authoritarian countries are partly democratic, for example the former Soviet state Belarus. If a country does not have a democratic system, or they don't give space to opposition or freedom of opinion, the major world powers, such as the US and the EU undertake action. In the example of Belarus, the EU welcomes students from Belarus to study in Europe so to that they can take the democratic concept back home, and form opposition to the authoritarian government.³ Looking at the example of Belarus we see three major players, there is the US, the EU and Russia. All have major power in the world or at least Belarus is dependent on them. But if a minor nation state would do something against this dictatorship then Belarus would probably ignore it. Therefore the evidence would show the major world powers have more influence than probably a globalized institution such as the UN. Collins et al (2005, 256) says about Immanuel Wallerstein and his world-system the following:

In Wallerstein's model, individual societies do not control their own fates. To understand the development of any particular society, we must place it in the context of the world-system... To be more precise, the world is divided into a network between areas which are *core* and those which are *periphery*...

So I think that the core still has the power to control the states or societies who are in the periphery. In our example of Belarus, the US and EU are the core⁴ but Belarus and other nation states, such as the Netherlands are part of the periphery.

³ I use this example of Belarus because I have some friends from Belarus and my home church in the Netherlands has a partnership with a church in Minsk. And I have been involved with the International Committee of Perspectief, which is the youth party of the ChristenUnie a Christian political party in the Netherlands. Within this international committee we had a network of Christian political parties from Europe and one of the members of this network was an opposition party from Belarus.

⁴ In the example of Belarus probably Russia is a core state as well. But I won't discuss that in this essay.

But I also believe that the nation state is loosing power compared to previously. I would say that the political power of the nation state is declining.

There are too many transnational flows. Such as economic flows, information flows, and migration flows. When a nation state wants to fully control the flows, they have to cut all the transnational flows. That means that they have to create an isolated state. With an economy which fully operates on its own, they need to stop the people flow, that is not only migration but also international students, tourists and everybody who travels in and out of the country. They need to control the information flow, so they have to cut off modern communication technologies such as: radio, television, phone and internet. Thinking of those flows I think of current flows in an electric circuit. There is a possibility to control the flow just by the law that the flow or the current takes the way with the lowest resistance. So to control the flow you can lower or higher the resistance of the sub-circuit. And that is how you can control the flow. So if we see the world as an electric circuit with lots of flows going on, and a particular nation state or society is a sub-circuit. The nation state can control a bit of the flow, to lower or higher its resistance to this flows and this control affects in the end the whole circuit, because the amount of current is divided over all the sub-circuits⁵.

So my opinion is that the nation state has lost some power and I think this process is still continuing, but there are major powers in the world with more power than nation states in the periphery.

In what ways might the practice of missions be affected by the power of the nation state?

Thinking about the practice of mission and the power of the nation state the first thing which comes to my mind is about visa. A lot of mission work is done overseas, wether it is a missionary coming from England and working in China, or wether it is a missionary from Korea working in England. Both of them need a visa to enter the country and in both situations the nation state is in power to accept or reject the visa. On the other hand it is easier to enter most countries than it was before, or at least when you enter the country in a special profession.

⁵ This thought came to my mind when I was reading about the nation state and flows because I already have an Engineering degree.

In this section of the essay I want to focus on two main areas. The first one has to do with the structure of the nation state and that most nation states are based on a rational economic system; the second one is about the flow mentioned earlier.

Most nation states are based on a democratic system. And their organisational structure is based on a rationalised society, based on the Enlightenment whereby there is no place for religion. Church and state are separated. As Lechner et al (2004, 91) says.

As a number of commentators have noted, in our time the religious elites of Western Christendom have given up on the belief that there is no salvation outside the church. That postulate has been replaced by the belief among almost all elites that salvation lies in rationalized structures grounded in scientific and technical knowledge – states, schools, firms, voluntary associations, and the like.

One may argue if this is true I think that secularism could be a religion on its own but to my opinion it is good that there is a separation between church and state. Because the church has only one mission and that is tell the people that there is only one way of salvation and that is through Jesus Christ. So how does this affect missions as even a democratic rationalised state is not the way to salvation? The church has an answer to the citizens who are looking for an answer to this question. The church must be ready to answer

The other area in which missions might be affected by the political power of the nation state, are the flows which the nation states controls. The flows where I want to focus on are the flow of people and the flow of information. The information flow is easily affected by mission. We could use the radio, internet and all modern media to evangelise. So mission can use modern media to evangelise without entering the country. Of course you still need to learn the language and the culture to communicate through the media effectively.

The other flow, the flow of people is more complicated. I think of the following situations: when you go abroad for a holiday, as a tourist; or when you meet international students in your home city; or when you meet international contacts at your work. So mission should use the flow of people. People travel everywhere on the world and they study and work everywhere. So even in your home country you can evangelise to people from other country. I know that this is a general issue of globalisation.

Conclusion

I do not believe that 'the era of political dominance of the nation state is now effectively over' but I think we are in the process whereby the power of the nation state is declining. I would like to say that we are in the end of the era of the power of the nation state because the nation state is still there in still in charge and can still have a big influence. Although I believe that the power of national governments on national issues is declining because of all international flows, such as information, economics, and people, which could not be regulated by the governments or are not fully under control of the governments.

The practice of mission is not really affected by the power of the nation state. It might do on the subject of entering a country. But still then the practice of mission is more complex than only entering a country.

The flows of people, information and economics have influence on the power of the nation state. We can use those flows to evangelise. We can use modern media to evangelise and we don't need to enter a country anymore. We can make a website, radio program, or broadcast a television on the satellite, from our home.

The other thing whereby the practice of mission is affected is about the rationalised nation state which shows that the people are looking for salvation in a rationalised structure of the nation state. As a missionary this gives us a link to the gospel. The nation state will not solve the problems, nor does the structure of the nation state, nor does a rationalized view on life, but Jesus Christ will bring salvation. As a missionary, as a church, that is the answer to rationalized structures which are held for salvation but are human made.

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