

BUILDING ON STEIN ROKKAN  
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It is with great admiration that one reads Stein Rokkan's works on differentiation in Europe, and particularly in Western Europe. His task is an Herculean one: to try to bring some order into the tremendous variety, in space and in time, offered by "geo-ethnic, geo-economic and geopolitical" history of Europe. Rokkan was eminently equipped for this task. Trained in philosophy, specializing in political philosophy, later on in empirical sociology and political science, his academic credentials were certainly in order. But in addition to that he had an enormous network of colleagues and intellectual experience to draw upon in his field of inquiry. He was at home like few in Western Europe (and North America), including his affinity to French language and culture, rare for a Scandinavian these days.

Of course many of his exercises are taxonomic, sometimes drawing upon the work of others, cross-classifying, trying to find something empirical that fits the combinations. But Rokkan also had a theoretical approach, although I would not call it a "model" - that is an epistemological construct more able to stand on its own feet like the solar system model of the atom. Basically his theory approach is simple, although he complicates it tremendously with sub-divisions and cross-classifications in order to arrive at a theoretical variety able to match the rich empirical variety he, as an historian with some sense of detail, wants to accommodate. To obtain it he is working with three dimensions for center-periphery relations: one military-administrative (with the judicial-legislative sometimes singled out for special attention), one economic-technological, and one cultural (sometimes referred to as religious-symbolic). Starting with the "primordial local community" role or functional differentiation then takes place along these three dimensions, transforming the system into -- yes, into what?

The nation-state, for sure. There are four phases in its construction: I) the state-building process of political, economic and cultural unification at the elite level; II) the masses are brought into the system through conscript armies, compulsory schools, etc.; III) active participation in the territorial political system through voting, representation, etc.; IV) the welfare state with agencies for redistribution. But in this process asynchronies may appear, asymmetries. As far as I can understand they are of two types. The political, economic and cultural unifications may be out of step with each other. And the four phases just mentioned may not come in the best order. One may perhaps say that Rokkan had an image of the normal process from primordial, local community (his building bloc) to the modern nation-state - and felt a need to account for deviations from the normal, for the aberrations. He is fascinated with the peripheries although (or perhaps because) he sees them as "problems" - and portrays them more vividly than the centers. In fact, I think I

know no better guide to the geo-ethnical, geo-economic and geopolitical reality of Europe than Rokkan's - provided one shares some of his concern with bringing order to the variety. And that concern will come to any social scientist simply by reading conventional a-theoretical history.

In the following I shall not argue with Rokkan. Rather, being I myself fascinated with problems of macro-history, I shall try to identify some differences in approach. Anyone is closest to his own - but that does not necessarily mean any rejection of the approach taken by others. However, I do have queries, presented here in no particular systematic order.

First, Rokkan's explorations stop with today. He wants to account for past and present. For somebody who started with political philosophy and came to empirical, even North American social science with heavy emphasis on statistical (multivariate) analysis, this is perhaps natural. The future has not yet yielded any data. For one, like myself, who has proceeded along the same trajectory but in the opposite direction, that is no major worry. On the contrary, the future has the great advantage of being more open. The past could have been different - not only differently interpreted, rewritten, re-constructed. The future almost certainly will be different. In a sense this is what Rokkan also tells us. From any stage in the process he depicts so well the next stage as precisely that, a "next stage," not just a continuation of the same. So, why not speculate about the possible coming stage? And not only with a view to ameliorism, that it might be a "better" stage, but also in order to understand the past and the present better, as a contrast to possible futures.

Second, and very much related to this: there is something linear in Rokkan's analysis. If he starts with the High Middle Ages and goes on till present, or at least till the 1960s, there are some reasons for that. If he starts after the decline of the Western Roman Empire, with the age of manorialism, gaining a perspective of more than fifteen hundred years, he would have started with so many primordial, local communities that the perspective would have been even more valid. But then linearity is impossible. There was a decline of the Roman Empire, which was based on both political, economic and cultural integration. What happens once does not have to happen again. But it could happen again. From "what is, is possible" it does not follow that "what was, not only was and may again become possible" - but the hypothesis is at least worth consideration. In short, I am missing the perspective that all this unification, all this nation-state building may be a gigantic preparation for its own negation, for disintegration. Rokkan in reverse, so to speak, and along the same dimensions. Where Rokkan emphasizes a secular trend towards higher differentiation, more unification, probably also bigger territorial polities, such as the European Community, I would at the same time see some case for the opposite tendencies.

Third, the reason for this would be in the big analytical cluster of variables named "exploitation," somehow kept under the surface in Rokkan's style of presentation. I have no difficulty at all with Rokkan's choice of three dimensions, for they are

precisely the three dimensions of coercive, contractual and normative power that enter into exploitative relations. By "exploitation," then, I would tend to mean more than just unequal exchange, more like "pushing another entity beyond the limits for autonomous reproduction." This is what the center always did to the periphery, by killing them or repressing them, by making them economically dependent, by absorbing them culturally (particularly linguistically and/or religiously) so that their identity vanishes. This does not necessarily mean in-equality: after having destroyed an autonomous polity so that it no longer can reproduce itself (a possible definition of social death?) the members can be integrated in the nation-state on a basis of equality. But it certainly means in-equity. The local community has to be destroyed, or paralyzed, to be integrated.

However, such formulas do not seem to be so successful in the longer run as the rulers think. National identity and/or the memory of an autonomous polity seem to linger on, and come up to the surface when the center is no longer able to buy off the periphery through better deals than they think they can get on their own.

Fourth, and related to this: there is an outside context to Europe, the rest of the world, most of it an object of European Expansionism. One can view them as Rokkan and many in the nation-building school do, essentially as "primary, local communities" on the way to modern nation-state formation. Or one can view them, as Rokkan also does, as former peripheries of efforts at global empire-building, with centers in Europe; Rokkan actually does both. I would emphasize much more the extent to which these "overseas" polities are destroyed, maimed entities, military-political provinces, economic dependencies and cultural satellites - at least at the elite level. And one expression of this is precisely the tendency to accept the European nation-state model, often lock, state and barrel. In so doing, and particularly in playing the world capitalist market against the (former) center countries, they have been able to weaken the centers of these centers so much that their peripheries in Europe have become more and more courageous in voicing their claims, ranging from equality within the nation-state to full autonomy.

Fifth, why do all these European elites build these nation-states? Or course, they constitute a solution different from feudalism to the old problem of making people in the countryside produce food for the people in the cities - and at prices that are not only affordable for the burghers (and even the workers) but also give them the upper hand in all other relations. Why did not others build the same kind of construction? And why do the Europeans just go on and on? Thus, Rokkan has some interesting comments on the difficulty the European Community had with the peripheral states of Europe - particularly his own country, Norway. Obviously, the whole European exercise would have the EC as its logical follow-up, but not as its logical conclusion. The logical conclusion is the world state, or the cosmic state for that matter, attempted already by some of them (the Spanish and the Portuguese, the British and the French, the USA and the Soviet

Union).

I see this urge as part of a civilizational code. It is neither something found in all civilizations, nor in the human species as such. Nor is it found in all Europeans for that matter transcribing Marx one might say that die herrschende kosmologie ist die kosmologie der herrschenden klasse. Like ants, or termites, they go about building their centers, and centers to encase the peripheries, and empires to support the centers. The horizon was the limit for the primordial, local community - these people know of no limits. Except one, that is, and a rather important one: when they have overstretched themselves, become vulnerable to the external proletariat in the Toynbee'an sense, and get beaten. An expansionist cosmology coupled with a finite universe gives rise to a wave-like history for Western Europe (or for the Occident, to use a more civilizational and more inclusive term) - not to linear history.

Sixth, to what extent is this a model for the Third World? That depends on to what extent one thinks the net benefit of Western civilization is sufficiently persuasive, particularly given the possibility of ending with a nuclear holocaust. It is not that obvious that cancer is a better exit from individual life than malaria, nor nuclear war for collective life compared to, for instance, oblivion - being slowly buried by the sands for archaeologists to dig into in later centuries or millennia - or even to becoming somebody's exploited periphery. On the other hand, it may be argued that the Third World has no choice anyhow, that they are sufficiently imbued with Western cosmology to want to go ahead with their nation-state building schemes, coming what may, regardless of costs. In that case Rokkan's advice, that they may "learn more from the smaller countries than the large, more from the multiculturally consociational politics than from the homogeneous dynastic states, more from the European latecomers than from the old established nations" is interesting.

But not necessarily valid. If what has been transferred to the new nations is that Occidental urge, the elites will generally be much more interested in the big countries than in the small, particularly the dynastic and the old established nations - the latter, since they were their colonizers and taught them something about how to conquer and dominate others. So this is a general point I have difficulty sharing with Rokkan. He seems to see nation-state building as the normal thing to do (and within that framework there is a normal way of doing it). I would rather hope not. And the reasons have to do with the next two points.

Seventh, Rokkan's concern is where the concern of a sociologist and politologist is most likely to be: with the society in general and the polity in particular. Essentially he studies the process whereby local communities, primordial or not, are absorbed by bigger entities, national or not. But this is not all there is to the human condition. There is also a world system, or a least set, of these entities - organized in the United Nations. The world as a system depends on the nature of the units; those units, in turn, have the world as a system, as their context. Unfortunately, when we talk about "development" or the

other word often used, "modernization," this applies to the societal level, not to the global level. We do not even know how to think about world development. But if we knew it better, we might come to the conclusion that it could be constituted by more fortunate units than nation-states pursuing zero-sum territorial games, and competitive, variable-sum, economic games - in addition to rather zero-sum cultural games - if "game" is the word. Any nation-state signifies a measure of centralization (unless it is truly federal with small units at the bottom, like some of the Swiss cantons, not fake federal like the United States or the Soviet Union). How much centralization of military/administrative, economic and cultural power can the global system take? The bigger the units, the more destructive they seem to be.

Eighth, this leads to the immediate corollary of the point just made: what about human development? Rokkan stretched his analysis along his two dimensions of interest, societal and historical. Had international relations been a major concern, and psychology, he would have been equally interested in global development and human development. I am not saying this in any sense to denigrate Rokkan's achievement but to make another point. Because of the specialization of the social sciences from micro to macro, from individual via societal to global, "development" narrows down to one sector of the micro-macro spectrum (and in addition tends to become economistic, but Rokkan is refreshingly a-economistic).

And beyond that there is another point of more substantial importance. A nation-state is big and weighs heavily on the shoulders of those who carry the major burden: the peasants, the workers, the women. At the same time the nation-state loosens up local communities that may also serve as prisons, encasing people sometimes under the tyranny of the local oligarchy. Stadtluft macht frei - perhaps. But in order to sustain cities as anchoring points in individual trajectories, even as points where the individual can say, j'y suis, j'y reste, a social construction much beyond the local community is needed. But that construction, then, becomes a locus of enormous amounts of military/administrative, economic and cultural power, capable not only of deadly games with other nation-states, but also of suppressing its own people, exploiting it in the name of state, and forcing it into the religious/ideological mould. From a cost-benefit point of view there are certainly benefits in the political, economic and cultural production of scale. But the costs at the levels of global and individual development are tremendous.

And that brings me to the ninth point. Rokkan mentions league and federations often. For city networks, with no city being the city, the league may be the natural form. But it is not a society. Who produces the foodstuffs? Of course, the league can get them in exchange - except in times of crisis. But how would the non-cities, the rural communities organize? They do not have a network or a grid. The power of the cities to extract foodstuffs at prices determined by the cities rather than by the producers rests exactly on that point: the networks are controlled by the cities

themselves. Hence, for less exploitative patterns, city and rural Hinterland have somehow to be together, in a system not tilted too much in favor of one or the other. For that to happen the cities probably should not be too big, and some kind of two-way mobility between city and countryside be possible. A collection of such units, well federated together, is an alternative to the nation-state. Switzerland was one case in Europe; there are Low Countries experiences in the same direction.

But why did Europe not produce more of that kind? Why this relentless struggle for something gigantic? Why not more ability to remain within more modest confines, experimenting with forms that could disperse power more, building strength by building strong citizens, not only strong centers and elites? Why not more Switzerlands?

And that is my tenth and final point: probably because of the history that preceded the period of Rokkan's major concern: the period of nation-state building, largely the "modern" period (although Rokkan fortunately starts more with the High Middle Ages, and not with the Renaissance). My point is simply this: whatever came out of this "modern" period had to come to grips with two social forms deeply ingrained in the collective mind of Europeans. One was the Roman Empire as the model construction, as the normal form towards which one might inspire - and many were the efforts. What was new in a pluri-state, poly-centric and not very large Europe was the idea of satisfying such ambitions by going "overseas," building non-contiguous empires. They were also crudely non-continuous in social space, based on a sharp division between conquerors and conquered; the Romans two thousand years earlier probably being better at relating to the periphery than these "modern" Europeans.

And the second was a steeply stratified society, the feudal construction, that lingered on much after the socio-economic basis was transformed into private and state capitalist formations. Very elaborate, very ornate, very commanding. Could this really yield just like that? Or would it have to be reconstituted one way or the other, reappear in other forms? The titles may go, the constant, the very meaning of feudalism likewise. But not the form, the pyramidal construction, strong on vertical and weak on horizontal relations. Hence, when they, the Europeans, went about constructing a state, it had to be pyramidal. It had to have subdivisions and sub-subdivisions, neatly organized like in a feudal pyramid. The country perhaps most successfully feudalized (in Europe that is - in Asia, Japan might have been an even better case) - France - also becomes the country that most perfectly embodies this organization in its nation-state construction. Economically big capitalist corporations take on the same shape. And culturally it was unnecessary in many countries to do anything: the Roman church already had the structure of the Roman Empire, including the location of the center.

This is Rokkan's territory, indeed. He traces in a fascinating way the impact of symmetry/synchrony and asymmetry/asynchrony along his three or four dimensions (I understand why he singled out the legal aspect - the Roman law has

a structure very similar to what has just been mentioned). One can see the tremendous antagonism this type of system develops towards anything locally independent, be it politically, economically and/or culturally. And not in any abstract sense; it is not the "system" that reacts - "systems" never do. People react, and more precisely those that are on top and see their power threatened by unauthorized local action along any dimension. What I would like to add to this is the strong shadow cast by the past into present and future through structures and ideas firmly entrenched - in other words the cosmology, Weltanschauung (except that the German word picked up the idea side only, not the structural, materialized side). Again, like termites, they go to the job, these Europeans. Far from them the Buddhist dream of the locally self-reliant village with the temple and the tank, with the bhikkhu as the top authority, a weak formation far away in something called a "capital" (for "capitalism?"), with no center, no Rome, for the Buddhist orientation to life. And, hence, countless sects. Diversity. Human Growth. And little or no threats to the surroundings, including the nature.

No, not so the Europeans. Christianity was molded in the image of the Empire in what used to be mainstream Europe. In counterpoint Europe, Protestant Europe, Rome was certainly rejected. But the dream of one true, universal faith survived, and when there are in fact many competing christianities, it is not for love of pluralism, but because they did not manage to overpower each other. Even in Switzerland, a pluralistic country where religion and language are concerned, the other religion is not seen as a source of one's own enrichment, whereas the other languages are, for the German-speaking Swiss at least, and relative to French.

Again, why did not Europe produce more Switzerlands? Partly because that overpowering model, the Roman Empire, was not organized that way. Nor was Greece: it could have been federal, had they been better at cooperation than competition and warfare. Then, because of the feudal structure, embroidering the verticality of the Roman construction. The two together legitimized steep center-periphery gradients in territorial and social space as the way of doing things. Most of Europe up to the limes was deeply touched by both constructions. But Switzerland became, perhaps, less feudalized, the peasants having more success with their revolts. The cities were small, the cantons small. Imperial efforts could not emanate so easily from that type of construction at the same time as it was highly capable of defending itself. Ambitious Swiss soldiers had to become mercenaries, eventually also fighting each other. Empire-building took economic, not territorial forms - nor cultural ones.

Of course, other parts of Europe were also peripheral like the small communities in the Alps - although they commanded a strategic position on the North-South axis in Europe. But in their less successful efforts to build centralized nation-states, they may in fact have become the easy prey of stronger constructions in the neighborhood, like Norway and Finland and Iceland to Denmark and Sweden (and Denmark and Sweden to each other, ending with a

geographically commanding shape). Somehow they had to compensate for that and one might argue that it was by basing defense on strong people, not on strong elites or a strong center only. Today that pattern of defense stands out strong, defensive and decentralized as opposed to so many other countries in Europe with their military systems being highly offensive and centralized, and for that reason not very strong, and also highly provocative.

Summarizing my ten points above, I would say they all point in the same direction: expanding the vision, building on what Rokkan did so well, in no way rejecting it. I had occasion to discuss this with him at times, and it was never my feeling that he rejected such queries. They might fit more or less well with his habits of thought, his interests and competence. But Rokkan was never that cheap type of "intellectual" that rejects off hand anything he has never thought through or studied according to the rule "that of which I know nothing does not exist." Thus, I do not think speculations about the future were outside his frame of reference - the interest in the future of the Third World would contradict that. Nor do I think he would object to a possible wave-like pattern in the longer run - only this was not his concern. "Exploitation" might have been difficult for him to accommodate - it would probably end up as the weaker "inequality." But the outside context would not meet with intellectual obstacle. My guess is that he simply did not have that shaking Third World experience early enough in his life that could teach him how the world as a whole works.

Cosmology as the deep program of a civilization might not have been sufficiently operational for him, the empiricist. At any rate, it would only have gained access in Rokkan's thinking through the general methodological approach that was his: comparative studies. But that would mean comparisons of civilizations, and that was not his domain. Rokkan was rooted in the West. Incidentally, this approach may also explain to some extent why Rokkan did not develop the dimension of exploitation between countries (imperialism being one case). The comparative perspective is relative, not relational. This is remarkable because liberation as a process among countries does not enter - and it has after all played some role in recent history! - and in the past equally much so.

But where world development and human development, or global and individual development are concerned, I am convinced that Rokkan would have no objection. It would have been a question of how to do it, not why to do it. And that could easily lead to the question which seems to me to be the crucial one: is there somewhere a social formation that permits societal development while at the same time enhancing individual and global development - or at least not impede them? Clearly, I do not believe in the nation-state as the answer.

This was not Stein's way of formulating the problem. But those whose intellectual appetites go in the direction I just mentioned cannot afford to do so without learning from him. Stein Rokkan - as his two very Norwegian names indicate (stone and rock), constitute a solid basis on which to build.

Stein Rokkan was a very prolific writer. The comments in the present paper are based on his "Dimensions of State Formation and Nation-Building: A Possible Paradigm for Research on Variations Within Europe," from Charles Tilly, ed. The Formation of National States in Europe, Princeton, 1976; and his "Territories, Centers and Peripheries: Toward a Geoethnic Geoeconomic Geopolitical Model of Differentiation Within Western Europe," from Jean Gottmand (ed.) Centre and Periphery. Spatial Variations in Politics, Sage, 1980. I have also found Charles Tilly's "Stein Rokkan Conceptual Map of Europe," University of Michigan, February 1981, very useful.

For a presentation of some of my own views in this connection, see my chapter with Tore Heiested and Erik Rudeng "On the last 2500 years in Western history, and some remarks on the coming 500," in the New Cambridge modern history, Companion Volume, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979.