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## Television Role In Development Of Nation State

Drawing on appropriate scholarship and using the relevant contemporary and historical examples, this essay will explain the arguments around the role played by television in the development of the nation state and national identity, and clearly explain both terms.

To understand the role played by television in the development of the nation state we must first explore what the terms nation state and national identity imply. Anderson (2006) links the attributes and origins of nation states historically, traditionally and politically to Europe: examining two common European models that clarify how nation states are created. The French model explains how a nation becomes a nation state by eradicating or integrating all other nations within the state boundaries. The German model depicts how a boundary is drawn around itself (Vick 2002; Wilson 2007). Thus: forming like-minded people who establish a national identity, resulting in the production of a nation state. Although it is a complicated term to define, a nation is a community of people with a similar culture, dialect and values (Anderson 2006; Smith 1991; Quackenbush 2015).

At the end of 1963 the BBC (British Broadcasting Commission) first aired in the UK, reaching 400 households (Sweeney 2008). Today, this figure has dramatically increased and according to the Broadcaster's Audience Research Board (BARB) in January 2019, 28.5 million households, around 95% of all households in the UK (Tv Licence 2020), owned a television set. This enormous rise in television ownership indicates how much television has become an integral part of our everyday life, culture and community and is utilised as a powerful tool to influence notions of national identity: including political national identity (Collins 2002).

According to Husamettin and Feyzullah (2013 p. 224) a national identity is "...not natural and given at birth but [...] constructed within [...] social and historical framework". An example of television's contribution to developing a national identity would be the channel shut down by a Church of England minister at 10pm each night (before the introduction of 24 hour a day cable TV and digital media). The nation, UK wide, would watch as a minister closed the television channel for the night, at the same time each night (although it is impossible to know everyone in the UK would be watching it is presumed a high percentage of the population would be). This helped create a national identity as it sent out a clear message that the whole of the UK nation could unite and had a common bond through television and religion. It did not matter what programmes you received regionally, at 10pm each night the UK nation united giving the public a sense of shared identity, language, values and culture.

Indeed, Collins (2002) believes that for the public to engage in a sense of positive identification there must be an effective democracy in place and the role television plays in promoting this positive identification, what it means to be a unified member of a nation state, upholding that country's culture, politics and national identity, should not be underestimated. Additionally, Price (1995) argues that television promotes, influences and moulds our national identity by generating and encouraging certain images approved by the government in order to stay in favour "...the structure and capacity of communications and the fate of the governments are inextricably intertwined" (Price 1995 p.3).

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However, the BBC introduced a television licence fee in order to be a public funded organisation. The intention behind this was that the BBC would remain impartial and nationally controlled, not affiliated with any other organisation, government or political parties. In contrast, other terrestrial television channels controlled by the nation raised capital by advertising products, product placement and programme sponsorship (BBC 2020). Therefore, television media is controlled and dictated by the nation state. The programmes that are popular are given a series, prime time slots and heavily promoted and are viewed as being good for the country in which they are being implemented. They are also seen as a representation of national and cultural interests internally and externally (Collins 2002).

Nevertheless, Schlesinger (2008 p. 35 - 51) argues that “the image of the nation as a self-contained communicative space no longer reflects the realities of cultural flows in the era of “globalisation”. Similarly, according to Ershov (2015) geographical constraints are no longer a concern due to the arrival and development of the internet. It enables us to access vast amounts of other countries cultural products and content, making it even more challenging to secure cultural sovereignty and due to the diversity of languages spoken in Europe a united European identity is a challenging concept.

Undoubtedly, open trade and the internet has inspired a surge in exchanges of digital media, irrelevant of the language spoken, leading to a cultural exchange as well. Subsequently, allowing foreign markets to shape domestic media products. Yet, the preference of watching television in a native tongue is why nations select national television over European. For instance, America provides Europe with a lot of media content but only a small quantity of European media ever reaches the American market, because of this select American values and cultural traits are slowly adopted by European nation states and become part of their national identity.

Though this is not a new concept, in as early as 1986 Root voiced concerns about the influence of unbalanced media flow. The UK nation were apprehensive that children would grow up with unrealistic views of their future lifestyle and know more about fictional American television programmes than reality.

Similarly, Collins (1990) hypothesis suggests that what we see on television affects our actions. In other words, our behaviour is connected to the values promoted in television programmes and that “language and culture play a crucial role in the formation of national identity and consciousness” (Collins 1990, p. 327). A prime example of this is the British programme *Pop Idol* (2001 – 2003) created by Simon Fuller and aired on ITV. It became an international franchise and in 2005 Afghanistan ran its own version *Afghan Star*. It aired four years after the fall of the Taliban, which had banned any form of entertainment; singing, dancing, television and radio. The youth of Afghanistan welcomed the television show as it was a sign that Taliban rule was over and hope for a more democratic ‘Western’ way of life. Nonetheless, the elders in Afghanistan were completely oppose to the programme because it introduced and encouraged adoption of ‘Western’ ideas and cultures, corrupting their youth and changing their traditional Afghanistan identity (*Afghan Star Documentary* 2009).

Indeed, one of the female contestants featured in the documentary, *Setara*, embraced the ‘Western’ culture and in the semi-finals removed her headscarf and danced. This resulted in a huge backlash in Kabul and surrounding areas. As a result, she received death threats with one male viewer commenting “A lady shouldn’t be liberal like *Setara*” (*Afghan Star Documentary*

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2009). This example compounds the idea that television promotes a nation state – the rest of the contestants upheld their national identity and promoted the common views shared by the majority of the Afghanistan nation. She was ostracised for daring to welcome ‘Western’ cultures and views because they were not an established part of her culture and values.

In summary, it seems that television is used as a powerful tool to aid the development of nation states and that consuming television assists in the re-enforcement of and development of national identity. Television is a beneficial device because it is nationally focused yet the influx of new foreign media through digital services and online streaming does not damage or weaken national identity but makes us more aware, as a nation, of our own cultures, beliefs and values that we want to retain and uphold. Television guides, develops and moulds our views in line with what is acceptable within a diplomatic nation state and evolves with the multi-cultural society in which we live.

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