

# Nationalism in Contemporary Europe: Issues, Frameworks & Approaches

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## Symposium in *Ethnopolitics* 17 (5) 2018

- “The end of nationalism has been predicted many times  
...
- Yet, ... over the past years rising nationalism is seen everywhere and in everything”
- Florian Bieber ‘Is Nationalism on the Rise? Assessing Global Trends’, *Ethnopolitics*, 17, 5 (2018)

## Symposium in *Ethnopolitics* 17 (5) 2018

- ‘Like air, nationalism is both ubiquitous and **elusive**’
- ‘It permeates the global system, states, peoples’ behavior and can be seen as **both conservative and as a revolutionary force, threatening the status quo.**’
- It can represent an endemic, ‘banal’ condition shaping society, or a forceful ‘virulent’ assertion of claims
- Florian Bieber ‘Is Nationalism on the Rise? Assessing Global Trends’, *Ethnopolitics*, 17, 5 (2018)

# Latvija 100

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- ‘As [the collapse of the Soviet Union] was legalised, ... the Russian nation became one of the biggest, if not the biggest ethnic group in the world to be divided by borders’
- Vladimir Putin, 18 March 2014





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**BBC NEWS**

## Brexit plan will stop EU migrants 'jumping the queue' - May

19 November 2018 | UK Politics

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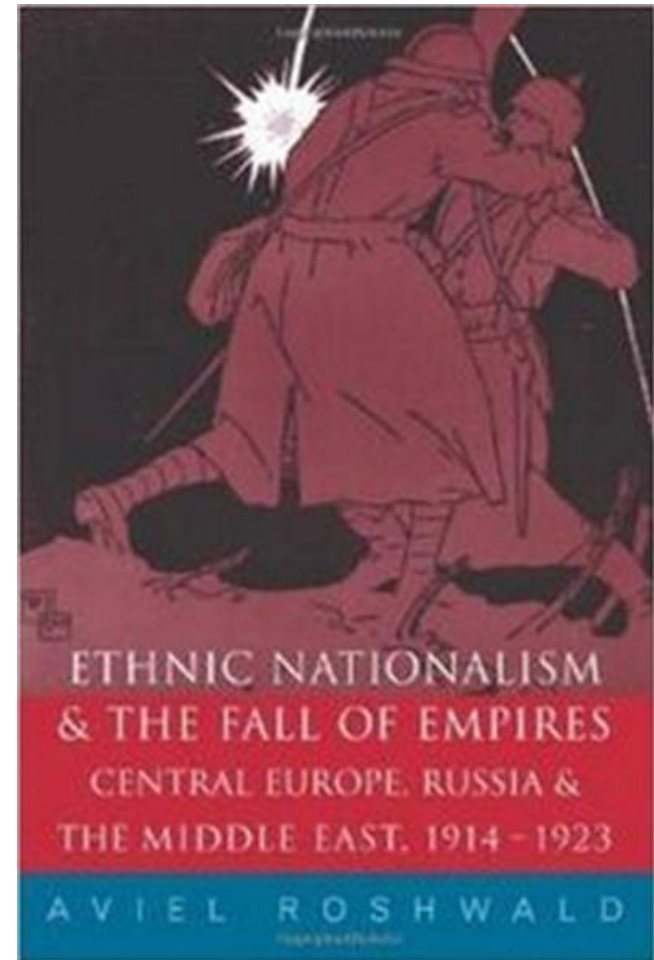
Theresa May has renewed her efforts to sell her draft Brexit withdrawal agreement - arguing it will stop EU migrants "jumping the queue".







‘Nationalism and the **idea of the nation-state** are among the most pervasive political phenomena of our age and among the least well understood’





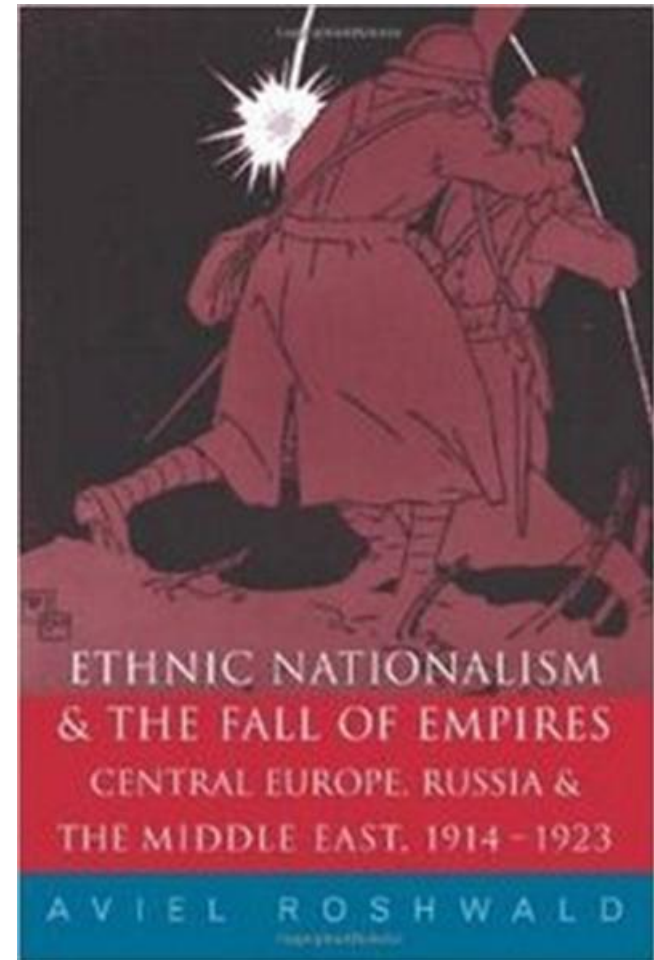
Is [nationalism] an ideology or an anthropological phenomenon?

Is it an outgrowth of liberal democracy or is it inherently intolerant and conducive to authoritarianism?

Is it an aspect of modernity or a reaction against it?

Each [question] can be answered both in the affirmative and in the negative, depending on what historical context and which manifestation and form of nationalism one has in mind’.

(Aviel Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires* (2000), p. 1)



## Themes of the Class

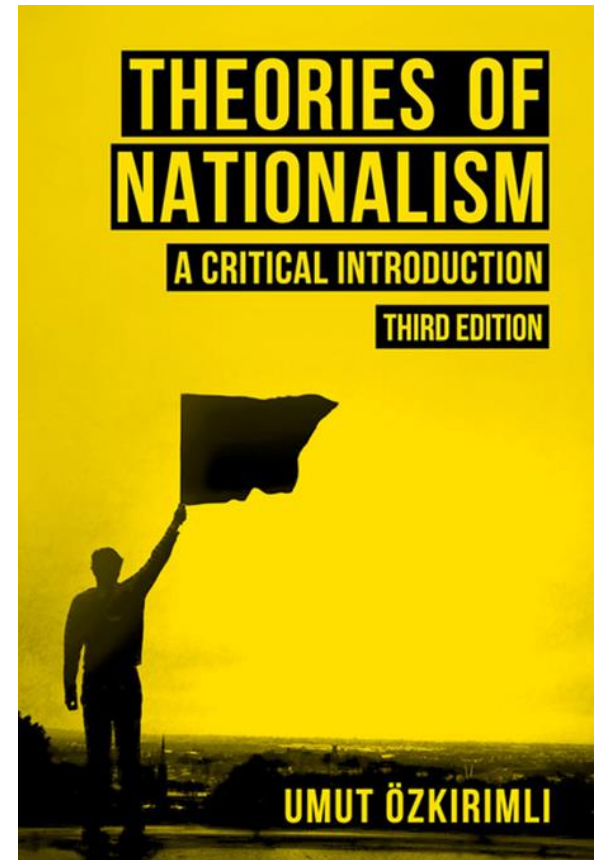
- What is nationalism?
- How to account for the recent rise of nationalist politics?
- A review of issues, frameworks and approaches, followed by discussion

## What is Nationalism?

- ‘A modern movement and ideology which emerged in the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Western Europe and America’ (Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism* (1999), p.1)
- A ‘strategy for the attainment and preservation of political legitimacy’ (Harris 2009)
- A discourse - ‘a particular way of seeing the world, a frame of reference that helps us to make sense of and structure the reality that surrounds us’ (Özkanlı 2017)

## Identity, Sovereignty, Territory

- Nationalism:
- It defines a group of people in *national* terms, i.e. as
  - having a shared cultural, historical and political **identity**
- It seeks to achieve or preserve distinctive boundaries and **sovereignty** for the national group
- It (typically) legitimises rule over or claims to rule over a defined **territory**





# Identity

- Nationalists present national identity as homogenous and fixed
- In reality, it is socially **constructed, contingent and politically contested**
- Rogers **Brubaker** warns against ‘Groupism’ – assuming ‘nations’ are substantive entities and homogenous actors in their own right:
- Don’t ‘take as categories of analysis what are in fact categories of political and social *practice*’ (Brubaker 1996)
- “Soviet and post-Soviet “national struggles” were and are not the struggles of nations, but the struggle of institutionally constituted national elites” (Brubaker 1996: 25)

## Nationalism and Collective Identity

- ‘State of the Art’ lies in deconstructing national myth-making, demonstrating the complexity and fluidity of individual identity
- But, how to explain the persistent **power** of nationalism?
- The ‘Nation’ is “a **symbol** with multiple meanings, ‘competed over by different groups manoeuvring to capture [its] definition and its **legitimizing** effects’” (K. Verdery, cited in Özkirimli (2017): 218)
- ‘Legitimizing’ because nationalism:
  - is rooted in social structures & everyday practices
  - has strong emotional appeal & ‘real’ consequences
  - situates the individual ‘self’ within wider frameworks of meaning and belonging

## National Identity and Ethnic Identity

- Many authors (e.g. A.D. Smith) stress similarity between national identity and **ethnicity** - group belonging or solidarity based on kinship and cultural attributes (language, shared history, myth of origin)
- Ethnicity is about uncertainty reduction:
- ‘It is **one means of making sense of an impossibly complex social world** so that [people] can then successfully navigate it. [It] provides no motivation for behavior, [but] is a **powerful determinant** of the strategies people use to pursue the things that do motivate them – wealth, power, security, status, self-esteem, “life chances”’ (H. Hale, Foundations of Ethnic Politics 2008, 2)

## Nationalism and Sovereignty

- Nationalism linked to rise of democracy / popular sovereignty:
  - ‘The proposition that political legitimacy is derived “from below”, from the will and interest of the governed’ (E. Harris, *Nationalism* (2009): 4)
- *Democracy* requires a *demos* (people), in whose name power is exercised. This implies some form of collective identity – the idea of a ‘nation’ with a shared history, culture and political destiny provides this



## National Sovereignty and Territory

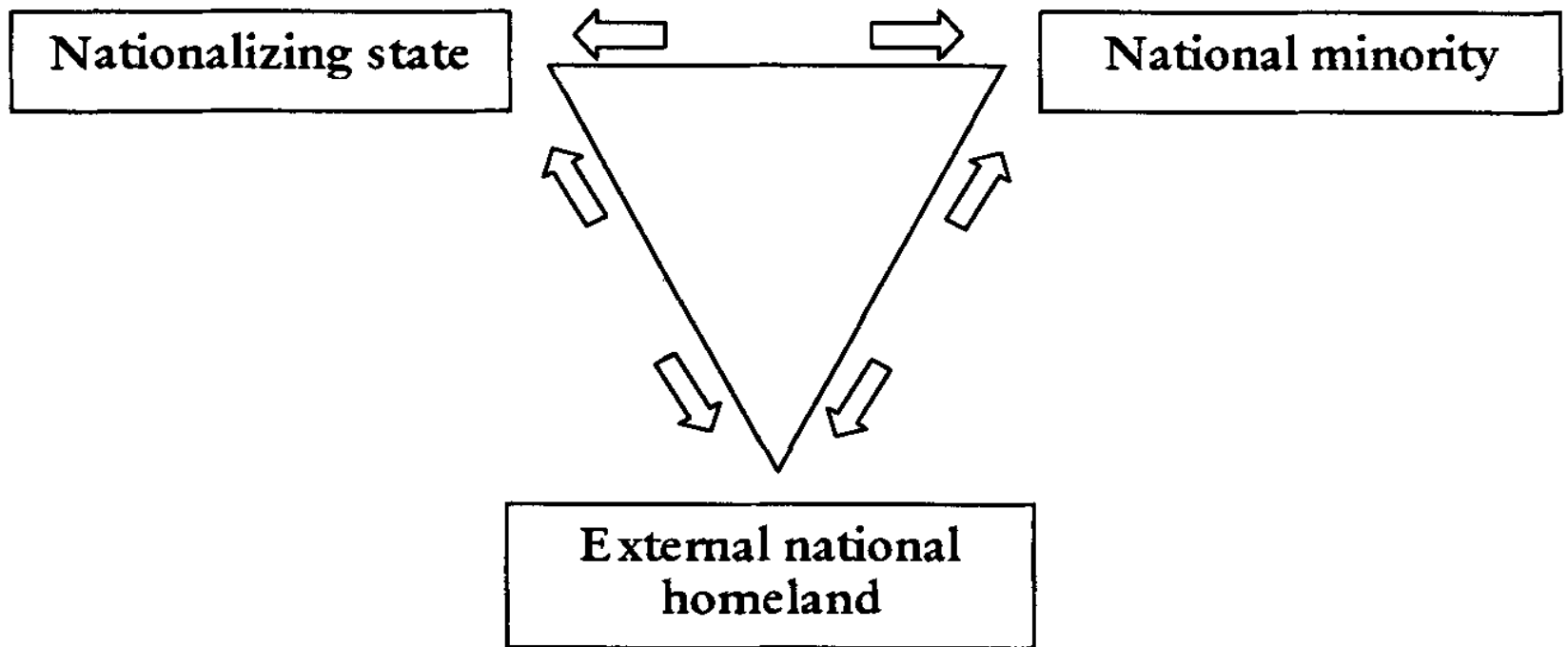
- ‘Nations’ are sovereign, but how is sovereignty realised and exercised?
- Emergence of Nationalism coincides with rise of modern states with clear territorial borders and centralised governments
- The two come together in the modern concept of ‘nation-state’:
  - ‘A nation-state consists of two disparate parts: a nation, defined by non-political similarities between men [sic], and the state, or political order, that is to rule it. ... **Nationalism is the opinion that when the nation and the state are congruent**, a good political order will result.’ (Anne Cohler, Rousseau and Nationalism, (1970), p.4)

## Western Europe: the state defines the nation

- Western Europe: Nationalism took root in what were already prototypical modern states (France, England)
- A single people (*demos*) with a common identity already starting to emerge
- 'Nation' defined first in civic -political terms, as a territorial community of equal individual citizens under legal jurisdiction of the state
- States then use their power to build a national identity from above, through standardisation and cultural homogenisation

## Eastern Europe: the 'Nation' defines the State

- 'The pattern of development in the East was the reverse. There, the sense of cultural identity had come first, and it demanded a nation state for its expression'. (A. Webb, *Routledge Companion to Central and Eastern Europe since 1919* (2008), p.14)
- Empires: multiple *demos* defined in ethno-cultural terms
- 1918: no clear match between ethnic and territorial boundaries: nation-state model problematic
- Efforts to build new states in image of a single, dominant ethnic nation (Brubaker: 'Nationalising Statehood')
- Provokes counter nationalism of politically excluded minorities
- Inflamed by 'kin-state' nationalism where the ethnic group extends beyond the borders of the 'national' state (Germany)

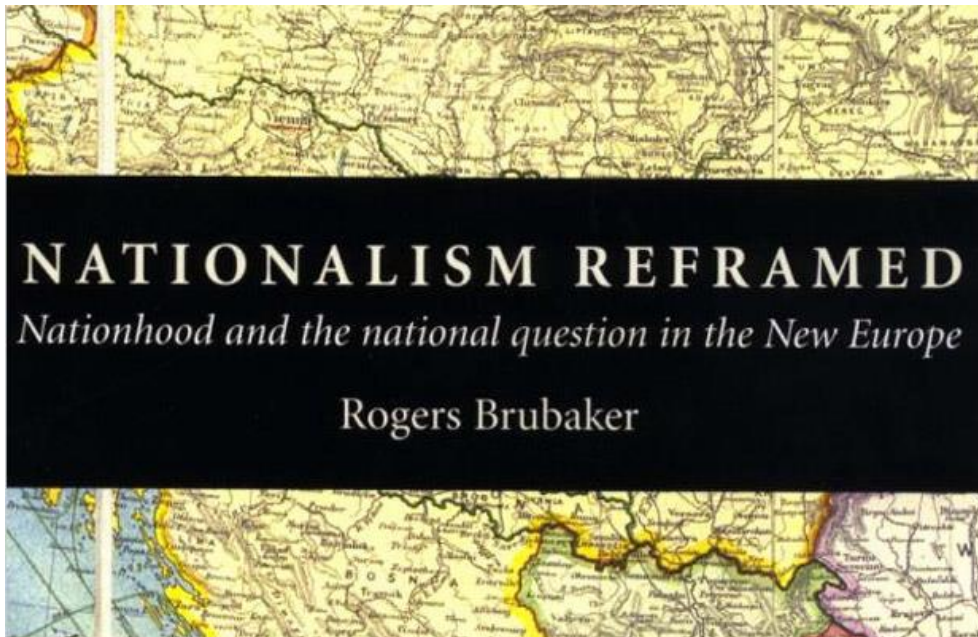


**Figure 1: The Triadic Nexus.**

From: Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in Central and Eastern Europe* (1996)



## Nationalism & the ‘National Question’ post-1991



‘Nationalism remains central to politics in and among the newly created nation-states ... Far from ‘solving’ the region’s national question, the most recent reconfiguration of political space ... has only reframed the national question, recast it in a new form’  
(Brubaker, 1996, pp.3-4)

## Nationalism and European Integration

- Assumed that nationalism no longer an issue in Western Europe after 1945 due to integrative power of national democratic and supranational institutions
- ‘Eastern’ nationalism could be ‘tamed’ by ‘export’ of liberal democracy & pluralism through processes of ‘Europeanisation’:
- EU enlargement, European Neighbourhood Policy and partnership with Russia
- But: “Contrary to conventional wisdom, nationalism remains alive and well across an increasingly integrated Europe” (Csergő & Goldgeier 2004)

## Nationalism and European Integration

- Csergő & Goldgeier (2004): 4 varieties of nationalism
  - **Traditional:** ensure congruence of political and cultural boundaries (nation-state)
  - **Substate:** strengthen political representation for 'homeland' (region) in relation to state
  - **Transsovereign ('kin-state'):** create institutions to link (ethnic nation) across state boundaries
  - **Protectionist:** Preserve 'national culture' in face of immigration/social change



## Nationalism and European Integration

- Post-Cold War Europe more geopolitically stable and open to multilateral cooperation than inter-war Europe
- But: last decade has brought *Europe-wide* (global?) resurgence in nationalism
- ‘Triadic nexus’ still apparent in Central and Eastern Europe
- But also strong trends towards sub-state and protectionist nationalism in Western Europe

## Trends and Factors

- Nation states no longer control a globalised, transnational market economy
- Growing socio-economic imbalances and inequalities both *within and across* European states
- Exposed by 2008 global financial crisis, Eurozone crisis (austerity) and 2015 refugee crisis
- Growing insecurity, disempowerment and alienation: particular groups ‘feel disadvantaged and fear or experience a loss of status’ (Bieber 2018)
- Generalised resonance of anti-elite discourse [**populism**]; sense that power delegated to non-elected technocrats at national and EU level
- ‘Crisis of liberal democracy’ (Bieber 2018): gives greater legitimating force to nationalist discourses emphasising identity and popular sovereignty
- Nationalism an effective elite strategy for gaining or maintaining power

## Trends and Factors

- Growing **authoritarianism** in Europe's neighbourhood
- Geopolitical contestation between Russia & the 'West': Russian 'civilizational nationalism' as a 'traditional', conservative alternative to liberalism in crisis
- Possibility of external alliance with populists using 'ethno-nationalist strategies to deconstruct democratic institutions' (Csergő 2018)
- 'A shift toward ethno-nationalist politics in countries that were earlier considered as norm-setters of democratic policies and practices of nation-building has global significance.
- A prominent actor in this shift is the Trump administration in the United States, which has turned ethno-nationalism into a core feature of domestic and international politics' (Csergő 2018)