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# Not So Civic: Is There a Difference Between Ethnic and Civic Nationalism?

Yael (Yuli) Tamir[1,2]

[1]Shenkar College, Ramat Gan 5252626, Israel; email: yuli@shenkar.ac.il

[2]Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford, Oxford OX2 6GG, United Kingdom

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## Abstract

There are reasons why some political ideas fit better into a theoretical framework than others. This article analyzes attempts to detheorize nationalism, arguing that they serve three major functions. First, they free nationalists from universalizing their arguments and from the ensuing rights and obligations. Second, they allow its rivals to present nationalism as morally inferior to other political standpoints. Third, they lead to the singling out and legitimization of one specific form of nationalism that is principle driven. Drawing a line between forms of nationalism—those motivated by primordial feelings and those motivated by rational and universal principles—lays the groundwork for a distinction between ethnic and civic nationalism. Though in theory these are two distinct forms of nationalism, in reality the boundaries are blurred. And yet advocates of civic nationalism keep the distinction alive, wishing to distance themselves from the other form of nationalism and promoting a vision (some would say the illusion) of a nationless nationalism. Assuming that Western democracies have transcended their national and ethnic elements encourages politicians to ignore social schisms, avoiding the need to cope with their consequences. The civic language therefore not only is theoretically inaccurate but also motivates avoidance where action is needed.

## DETHEORIZING NATIONALISM

In contrast to other political theories, theories of nationalism are few and far between. Many scholars define nationalism as a social, political, and cultural phenomenon so deeply rooted in the particular that it cannot and need not be generalized or theorized. In one of the most constitutive texts on nationalism, Gellner (1983, pp. 123–25) admits:

> A conspicuous feature of our treatment of nationalism has been a lack of interest in the history of ideas and the contribution and nuances of individual nationalist thinkers.... This does not spring from any generalized contempt for the role of ideas in history. Some ideas and belief systems do make a very great difference.... Yet it seems to me that, generally speaking, we shall not learn too much about nationalism from the study of its own prophets.... Nationalism as a phenomenon, not as a doctrine as presented by nationalists, is inherent in a certain set of social conditions; and those conditions, it so happens, are the conditions of our time.

Nationalism is thus taken to be a series of events motivated by a set of social, economic, and political circumstances, and not by theory. Gellner (1983, p. 124) writes bluntly that nationalist thinkers "did not make much of a difference. If one of them had fallen, others would have stepped into his place.... [T]he quality of nationalist thought would hardly have been affected by such substitutions." We political theorists paid little attention to nationalism, Yack (2012, p. ix) confesses, perhaps because "we have few canonical examples to follow. No Marx, no Mill, no Machiavelli. Only minor texts by first-rate thinkers, like Fichte, or major texts by second-rate thinkers, like Mazzini." Consequently, nationalism has received much less analytical inquiry than liberalism, democracy, or socialism (to mention just a few modern ideologies that dominate the theoretical discussion).

There is another reason why nationalism managed to stay outside the theoretical spotlight for so long. In the last part of the twentieth century, nationalism was conveniently replaced with a more benign term: community. In his groundbreaking critique of Rawls's (1972) *A Theory of Justice*, Sandel (1982) challenges the ruling liberal paradigm and marks the emergence of a plethora of communitarian discussions, but never mentions nationalism. The author explicitly criticizes the liberal individualistic conception of the self, asserting that we are "conditioned beings 'all the way down"' (Sandel 1982, p. 11) and openly acknowledging the fact that for individuals, "community describes not just what they *have* as fellow citizens but also what they *are*, not as a relationship they choose (as in a voluntary association) but an attachment they discover, not merely an attribute but a constituent of their identity" (Sandel 1982, p. 150). Nonetheless, he chooses to ignore one of the most important communities of all: the nation. This opened the door for a wave of communitarian discussions that celebrated culture and identity but left nationalism on the sidelines.

Books like Taylor's *Human Agency and Language* (1985) and Kymlicka's *Liberalism, Community and Culture* (1989) soon followed, bringing the Canadian sensitivity to culture, identity, and language to liberal attention. It is not surprising that scholars of nationalism were often outsiders: immigrants, members of minority groups, or simply those living on the frontiers of the liberal West who could see through the pretense of state neutrality. In the preface to *Nationalism and the Moral Psychology of Community* (2012), Yack shares his difficulties as a Canadian living in the United States in the 1980s to connect academic debates about Rawls's idea of "the unencumbered self" with everyday life experience:

> How could anyone think of individuals chanting "U.S.A., U.S.A." at the Los Angeles Olympics of 1984 as "unencumbered selves"...? How could social and political thinkers talk so much about whether or not American individuals could live without a community and yet show no interest in Americans' intense and noisy attention to their nation? (Yack 2012, p. x)

The flourishing of communitarianism in the 1980s and 1990s and later of multiculturalism and the politics of recognition offered ways of discussing burning moral and political issues related to culture and identity without ever mentioning the "N" word. There was, however, one exception. In *Spheres of Justice*, Walzer (1983, p. 42) discussed political membership (of much relevance to the contemporary discussion on immigration) and admitted, softly but resolutely, that considerations of membership must reflect the fact that states are "the political expression of a common life and (most often) of a national 'family.'" Nationalism was finally outed.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 shook Western political and ideological foundations. The unprecedented wave of new states founded on the basis of national self-determination left its mark on the theoretical world. In 1992, Taylor opened and closed his discussion of "the politics of recognition" by acknowledging the need or the demand for recognition, which "is one of the driving forces behind nationalist movements in politics" (Taylor 1994, p. 25). The politics of nationalism, he added, "has been powered for well over a century in part by the sense that people have had of being despised or respected by others around them" (Taylor 1994, p. 64).

The 1990s saw the theoretical revival of nationalism; it started to appear on the covers of books written by political theorists and political scientists (e.g., Greenfeld 1992, Ignatieff 1993, Tamir 1993, Miller 1995, Guibernau 1996, Taylor 1997). For a short while, it seemed nationalism was about to enter the mainstream of theoretical discussions, this time depicted in a more positive light, as theorists attempted to make room for it within the liberal democratic discourse. This wave of interest died quickly and had limited influence on the theoretical discourse, which continued to be dominated by liberal democratic arguments. Tribute was paid to the contextualization of the self by giving way to identity politics, which did not compete but rather completed the liberal way of thinking. Nationalism was once again deemed relevant (if at all) only outside the developed world. Recent political developments, however, have brought nationalism back with a vengeance.

## PRACTICE BEFORE THEORY

Whereas liberal, democratic, socialist, and Marxist theories preceded actual implementation of these systems, theories on nationalism lagged behind. Consequently, much of the literature on nationalism is historical and sociological; it follows events and tries to build a theoretical framework to fit social and political occurrences. Each wave of analysis thus echoes the spirit of the age: Post–World War II literature reflected the traumatic effects of Nazism and fascism, texts written in the age of decolonization celebrated the idea of national liberation, works written in the mid-twentieth century during the heyday of globalism favored postnationalism, and contemporary writings respond to the reemergence of a wide spectrum of national phenomena. It thus seems that scholars of nationalism tend to describe what has happened rather than schooling us in what should happen. The role of advocacy is left to national activists who very rarely, if ever, use theoretical arguments to make their point.

Hence, in the case of nationalism, activists and theoreticians play in different fields. While the theoretical forefathers of liberalism, democratic theory, socialism, and Marxism were missionaries preaching the theory they developed, many of the scholars of nationalism—for example, Elie Kedourie, Hans Kohn, and Hugh Seton-Watson—were very critical of nationalism and were not (except for Kohn in his adolescence) active nationalists. As a result, most of the writings on nationalism are grounded in an external point of view, attempting to evaluate the phenomenon rather than to promote it. The study of nationalism takes a bottom-up approach; it describes different national cases, places them within a comparative framework, and tries to reach some theoretical conclusions. A brief survey of the list of books reviewed and articles published in *Nations and*

*Nationalism*, one of the leading journals in the field, shows that about 90% examine a particular case study or compare different cases. Few attempts are made to flesh out theoretical principles. The literature on nationalism is far more descriptive than prescriptive.

One of nationalism's most common characteristics across nations is the celebration of uniqueness. By fleshing out the importance of their particular narrative, nationalists contribute their fair share to the detheorization of nationalism. Unlike liberals, socialists, or democrats, who go out of their way to link their values and policies to a universal theory, nationalists tend to avoid relying on a general model that might fit others too. Although a wide array of general claims cut across national arguments, such similarities are often ignored. This preference for case-specific justifications and the endorsement of a particularistic approach to politics and morality affirm the nationalist claim that values and standards are intrinsic to one's history and tradition. Nations and their cultures, values, and habits are therefore presented not only as unique but also as incommensurable, an approach that reinforces the claim that each nation must live according to its own norms, fostering its own customs and experiences. If members of a nation deserve rights or benefits, it is not because they are similar to but rather because they are different from members of other nations.

The unwillingness to trace national claims back to some universal principles supports their depiction as erratic outbursts of emotions. The assumption that nationalism is a radical antithesis to theory is epitomized in Kedourie's (1993) choice of Yeats's poem "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" as the epigraph of his influential book on nationalism:

> We pieced our thoughts into philosophy
> And planned to bring the world under a rule,
> Who are but weasels fighting in a hole.

For Kedourie, nationalism is a hindrance that obstructs the philosophical attempt to subject the world to the orderly authority of universal laws; it is an expression of an irrational, primordial force that subverts all rules of rational thinking.

It is therefore not surprising that the first associations evoked by nationalism are those of blood and belonging, fiery exhortations to rally around the flag, demands for total devotion and self-sacrifice—a cluster of feelings that sweep away all structured considerations. Nationalism, Gellner (1965, p. 149) argues, is "a cry of passion, a tug of war against reason." And in what may be the most widely known criticism of nationalism, Popper (1962, p. 49) claims that nationalism has a strong affinity with the revolt against the open society, as it "appeals to our tribal instincts, to passion and to prejudice, and to our nostalgic desire to be relieved from the strain of individual responsibility which it attempts to replace by a collective or group responsibility."

In this skeptical spirit, Benn (1967, p. 445) asserts that despite the importance of nationalism for historians and sociologists, it would be absurd to treat it as inviting serious rational criticism. Nationalism, he states, eludes conceptualization; scholars may examine national cases one by one, evaluating their independent social and political impact, but it makes no sense to formulate them into one coherent theory. The inability to form a theory of nationalism is attributed also to the ambiguity of the term itself. As Woodrow Wilson, one of the champions of nationalism as a guiding political principle, notes, nationalism needs no definition: "What it is is part of the imaginative conception of every one whose mind has traveled at all in the realms of history and social experience" (quoted by Waldron 1985, p. 418). Wilson saw nationalism as an active motivating force whose influence is independent of its theoretical foundations; the idea of nationalism he admits "was used to guide thought, and even action, before being fully understood" (quoted by Waldron 1985, p. 418).

Ever since the French philosopher Ernest Renan first posed the question in 1882, answers to the question "What is a nation?" have been ambiguous and confusing. Global Policy Forum (**https://www.globalpolicy.org/nations-a-states/what-is-a-nation.html**) defines a nation thus:

> A nation is a large group of people with strong bonds of identity—an "imagined community," a tribe on a grand scale. The nation may have a claim to statehood or self-rule, but it does not necessarily enjoy a state of its own. National identity is typically based on shared culture, religion, history, language or ethnicity, though disputes arise as to who is truly a member of the national community or even whether the "nation" exists at all (do you have to speak French to be Québécois? are Wales and Tibet nations?) Nations seem so compelling, so "real," and so much a part of the political and cultural landscape, that people think they have lasted forever. In reality, they come into being and dissolve with changing historical circumstances—sometimes over a relatively short period of time, like Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.

In short, though nations of different sorts exist and play an extremely important social and political role, their intrinsic nature (if they even have one) is unclear. One source of this ambiguity is that the concept of a nation is defined by a list of criteria, none of which are either necessary or sufficient. A "nation" emerges as a result of the interplay between many variables including culture, religion, language, law, geographical conditions, bureaucratic decisions, and international policies. Yet, its paramount common denominator is cognitive rather than factual: The existence of a national consciousness fosters feelings of belonging and national fraternity. It is this common denominator, rather than any of the specific conditions that led to its emergence, that lies at the heart of the definition of a nation.

From Greenfeld's (1992, pp. 5–12) detailed analysis of the development of the usage of "nation" from the early sixteenth century to the present day, it is clear that the term has maintained a core meaning, namely, an exclusive and limited community whose members share some unique, defining characteristics and are connected by feelings of fraternity. However, this definition leaves both the boundaries of nations and their structure rather blurry. It thus seems that there is little or no correlation between the clarity of a concept and its power to motivate action. In fact, the opposite may be true; the vagueness of a concept allows individuals to pour their feelings and thoughts into it, giving it the ability to appeal to different people in very different ways. Much of the effort invested in reaching theoretical clarity may be wasted or, worse still, lead us in a misguided direction.

It is nonetheless important to remember that many of the rudimentary concepts of political theory—such as autonomy, freedom, justice, and equality—are equally ridden with ambiguity, yet this has never prevented theorists from making them the cornerstones of their work. Why, then, should nationalism be any different? One possible explanation is that national ambiguity reflects more than a definitional challenge; it is rooted in the difficulty of bridging the gap between the rational and the emotional. National feelings are seen as primordial, that is, the kind of feelings one develops in the very early stages of development. Unlike liberal or democratic beliefs, which must be nurtured in more advanced developmental stages, national feelings are taken to be natural.

Describing liberal principles as psychologically more advanced than national attachments could easily be interpreted as a means of diminishing nationalism; no wonder liberals have been keen to ground such descriptions in scientific evidence. The works of the celebrated social psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg have been recruited for this job, inspiring the writings of the two champions of twentieth-century liberalism: American philosopher John Rawls and German philosopher Jürgen Habermas. Following Kohlberg (1971), Rawls and Habermas present love for one's nation (and love in general) as an expression of primal feelings, in contrast to a preference for freedom, autonomy, and justice, which they offer as products of personal maturity that lead individuals to

rise above the immediacy of their actual life experiences and into the realm of moral law. Particular attachments, they assert, are crucial for the development of moral faculties, but in that process they must be transcended and substituted with a desire to follow abstract principles.

According to Rawls (1972), a sense of justice is developed in three stages. At the preconventional level, children are responsive to cultural rules and to the labels of good and bad, right and wrong, that are articulated by those who make the rules. Next, at the conventional level, individuals are motivated by a need to satisfy the expectations of their family, group, or nation. This is not merely an expression of conformity with communal expectations and social norms but a manifestation of loyalty to the existing social order, actively maintaining, supporting, and justifying it. The last, postconventional level constitutes a clear effort to detach oneself from all contingencies in order to define and follow universal values and principles. Particular attachments are seen as a childhood disease that must be experienced in order to acquire the right kind of moral immunity. Nationalism is thus condemned to a moral and theoretical inferiority. What kind of respectable theory would advocate being blocked at an early stage of moral development?

Liberals would like affectionate morality to be restricted to the private sphere of family and community life, leaving the public and political spheres free to follow a universal set of principles. This allows liberals to distance the murky sphere of emotions from the orderly sphere of principles. Hence, the private sphere and the state are preserved as separate moral entities: The former is the space where particular identities and attachments live side by side, each expressing itself in its own way; the latter remains neutral, adjudicating between the demands and desires of the different groups. Communitarianism, multiculturalism, diversity, and pluralism extended the private sphere into an intermediate zone where particular identities can be expressed without undermining the rational, normative purity of the realm of the state. Theoretically, this was a neat solution; in real life, these distinctions collapse into a mishmash of rational principles and emotional considerations, which is now challenging the internal coherence of both liberalism and nationalism.

Very few political philosophers have learned how to live with normative inconsistencies. It is interesting to note that the most prominent of them—Isaiah Berlin, Charles Taylor, and Martha Nussbaum—all acknowledged the importance of nationalism. Indeed, Berlin was one of the very few contemporary thinkers to have a prescient understanding of the importance of nationalism as a political and cultural phenomenon; in the 1960s he was a solitary voice. His essay "Nationalism: Past Neglect and Present Power" ends with the following prophetic words: "It would not, I think, be an exaggeration to say that no political movement today, at any rate outside the Western world, seems likely to succeed unless it allies itself to national sentiment" (Berlin 1980, p. 335). In an age when most Anglo-American philosophers were anticipating the emergence of a postnational world order, Berlin (1980, p. 335) described nationalism as "the strongest force in the world today." In her enlightening analysis of political emotions, Nussbaum (2013, p. 17) concurs with Berlin and presents the nation as a primary unit of analysis, "the largest unit we know until now that is decently accountable to people's voices and capable of expressing their desire to give themselves laws of their own choosing."

Nowadays, when there is a growing interest in nationalism, the lack of a sound theoretical basis for discussion, the ambiguity of national concepts, and the classification of national demands as morally and politically inferior to liberal ones make it harder to find a way to fit nationalism into the theoretical and political discourse. In order to become more palatable and be accepted as a respectable participant in the moral and political debate, nationalism needs to be exonerated and redefined in ways that connect the lower moral stages grounded in attachments with the higher ones associated with principles, thus creating a normative combination that is both rational and primordial. It is tempting to do this by suggesting a distinction between two kinds of nationalism:

the good kind, which allows national emotions to correspond with abstract moral principles, and the bad kind, which leaves no room for rational discourse, representing an irrational relic or retrogressive return to a barbarous past. The former is commonly associated with civic nationalism, the latter with nationalism's more ethnic forms.

## CIVIC AND ETHNIC NATIONALISM

The origins of the distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism are to be found in the works of Hans Kohn, one of the first modern writers on nationalism. Writing at the end of World War II, Kohn (1944) distinguished between civic nationalism, a rational and liberal way of thinking founded on respect for human rights and personal freedoms, and ethnic nationalism, a mystical, religious, and ethnocentric mindset predicated on tribal feelings. Civic nationalism, Kohn argued, is characteristic of liberal-minded Western states and is a modern political phenomenon closely related to the pursuit of personal liberty; ethnic nationalism is typical of Eastern states, focused on folk culture, language, and ethnicity, and therefore primitive, emotional, and motivated by blood and belonging.

For Kohn (1944), the five Western nation-states he examined—the Netherlands, Switzerland, Great Britain, France, and the United States—represented the desired kind of affiliation between nation and state. In all five cases, the state preceded the nation; nation building was therefore guided by and coincided with the interests of the state. In the East, however, the emergence of nations preceded the building of the state. Consequently, national borders did not overlap with those of the state, and relationships within states remained ridden with conflict. Eastern nationalism was therefore politically divisive.

In what follows, I argue that the distinction between the sophisticated and developed nationalism of the West and the crude and primordial nationalism of the East is more normative than descriptive and was meant to establish the moral supremacy of the West. Hence, it is not surprising that the two kinds of nationalism are assumed to be associated with different stages of political development. Ethnic nationalism is depicted as characteristic of the early developmental stages, while the aspiration to act in accordance with state law characteristic of civic nationalism is presented as an expression of the more advanced stage of moral and political development. These differences of character are taken to reflect the stage of moral and political development of the respective societies. Western nationalism is assumed to prosper where there is a strong and confident bourgeoisie that is able to build a citizen-nation with a civic spirit. Eastern nationalism occurs in states lacking a solid middle class, which are often ruled by imperial autocrats and semifeudal landowners whose repressive rule fosters authoritarian and submissive behavior.

Kohn's (1944) distinction between a high and a low form of nationalism was adopted by other scholars, who have argued that civic nationalism is characteristic of culturally developed nations that can, from a position of self-confidence, approach each other on an equal footing, seeking cooperation on the basis of mutual respect. In contrast, ethnic nationalism is characteristic of primitive nations, motivated by feelings of inferiority and inspiring belligerent policies. Gellner (1983, pp. 99–100) sharpens the national–cultural division by arguing that Western civic nations are united on the basis of high culture, while their Eastern ethnic counterparts are joined on the basis of local, popular, and conventional culture. Ignatieff (1993, p. 6) follows the same line of argument, claiming that civic nationalism is constituted by "a community of equal, rights-bearing individuals who are united in patriotic attachment to a shared set of political practices and values." Ethnic nationalism is motivated by deep attachments that are inherited, not chosen, because "it is the national community that defines the individual; not the individual who defies the national

community" (Ignatieff 1993, pp. 7–8). Western nationalism, Ignatieff argues, is the nationalism of the well-cultured, emancipated bourgeoisie; Eastern nationalism is the nationalism of the subjugated, uneducated masses.

Scholars of Eastern Europe offer a different point of view. They attribute the ethnic nature of Eastern nationalism to Western influence rather than to the inherently primitive and emotional character of its bearers. Krastev (2017) claims that the problem with Eastern nationalism is that it is driven not by an irrational attraction of blood and belonging but by an aspiration to mimic a Western state of mind in order to legitimize national and political aspirations. After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire with its multiethnic and multilingual nature, the idea of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic uniformity crept in from the West, and Eastern nationalism signed up to the philosophy that states should be founded on the basis of national and cultural homogeneity. In other words, cultural homogeneity was promoted in the East as a way of securing self-rule and gaining the support of those adhering to the principle of national self-determination rather than as an expression of ethnic supremacy or xenophobia.

Milanovic (2017) concurs:

> All those [East European] countries fought, more or less continuously, to free themselves from the Imperial pressure, whether it was exerted through cultural assimilation (as in the case of Czech and Slovenians), imperial conquest and partition (Poland), imperial conquest *tout court* (the Baltics and the Balkans), temporary inclusion as a second-tier ruling nation (Hungary) or any other way.

Aspiring to gain political autonomy by becoming fully fledged members of the community of nations, East European nations espoused a national strategy characteristic of the postwar period in the West. Entering a democratic age, they saw political independence as inherently and intimately associated with national homogeneity. For the emancipated countries, liberation meant a return to a culture and language suppressed by the Soviet Empire. They aspired to secure this new state of affairs by adopting three strategies (mainly targeting the millions of Russians who had been forced to move to these territories in the process of Russification): assimilating those who were ready to accommodate to the new reality (by, in particular, becoming fluent in the local language) and driving others away or preventing them from participating in the political process. Ethnic nationalism was harnessed to the chariots of democracy, while the West kept silent, watching with satisfaction the decay of the Russian Bear.

Kupchan (1995) reinforces this point of view and attributes the emergence of ethnic nationalism to the ideological and political vacuum left behind by the collapse of the Soviet Union. The post–Cold War era was marked by a growing legitimization of national and ethnic demands. First and foremost was the unification of Germany, "which could be justified only on ethnic grounds" (Kupchan 1995, p. 181). In the German case, political authority was reconfigured along national lines, ensuring that ethnic groups saw "statehood as the logical endpoint of claims to nationhood" (Kupchan 1995, p. 181). This national state of mind also led to a growing international support for the breakdown of the few remaining multinational states, such as Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, along national-ethnic lines.

Eastern Europe ethnic mobilization, Kupchan posits, was primarily the result of a search for a modern democratic political identity; yet, in the absence of the political institutions and political sophistication "needed to balance ethnicity's allure and ensure that it become only one of the several anchors of identity in the midst of change" (Kupchan 1995, p. 181), ethnicity became a major player. The view from the East, therefore, is that the ethnic aspects of nationalism, rather than the civic ones, are children of the West, brought about by the fall of the empires and the spread of processes of democratization.

The one-sided interpretation of the complex political events that marked the beginning of the 1990s—the creation of the European Community on the one hand and the flourishing of national liberation movements on the other—caused an ongoing misunderstanding of the nature of both Western and Eastern nationalism. From the Western point of view, 1992 marked the beginning of the abolition of national frontiers and the fortification of common European institutions meant to establish joint monitory, fiscal, defense, and foreign policies. It was thus argued that "just as Europe took the lead in inventing (and propagating) nationhood and nationalism, so now it would take the lead in transcending them…. [A]n incipiently postnational Europe was seen as showing the rest of the world 'the image of its own future'" (Brubaker 1996, pp. 1–2). Nonetheless, 1991–1992 also saw the revival and rebirth of the nation-state and national ideals. A series of events from the unification of Germany, "predicated on a conception of state-transcending nationhood" (Brubaker 1996, p. 2), to the "spectacular reconfiguration of political space along national lines in Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia…suggested that far from moving *beyond* the nation-state, history—European history at least—was moving *back* to the nation-state" (Brubaker 1996, pp. 2–3, emphasis original).

The political blindness of the liberal West is striking given the fact that in 1991 alone, 11 states won political independence due to international recognition of their right to national self-determination: Estonia (August 20), Ukraine (August 24), Moldova (August 27), Kyrgyzstan (August 31), Uzbekistan (September 1), Macedonia (September 8), Tajikistan (September 9), Armenia (September 21), Croatia (October 8), Azerbaijan (October 18), and Kazakhstan (December 16). This national revival was widely ignored in the liberal world. Captivated by the idea of "the end of history" (Fukuyama 1989), liberals attributed these political events to a liberal victory over all other ideologies including nationalism. The East was seen to be finally maturing, catching up with the West by placing civic/democratic values ahead of ethnic ones. The establishment of the European Community and the open aspiration of many of the newly established nation-states to join it encouraged the view that Europe was approaching a postnational and civic age. This suited the spirit of the age symbolized by Fukuyama's (1989, p. 3) claim: "What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government."

It is now clear that it was wrong to take the liberation movements of the 1990s as a sign that the East was about to leave behind its ethnic past, just as it was a mistake to assume that Western states had altogether transcended their national and ethnic elements and would, from now on, be solely grounded in "freely chosen principles [that] have replaced cultural heritage as the basis of political solidarity" (Yack 2012, p. 23). It was especially dangerous to ignore Brubaker's (1996) prescient statement that the "short twentieth century" (1914–1991) was ending much as it had begun, "with Europe entering not a postnational but a postmultinational era through the wholesale nationalization of previously multinational political space" (Brubaker 1996, p. 3).

Locked within their paradigm, liberals in the West underestimated the resilience of nation-states (old and new) and their dependence on processes of homogenization. This misapprehension led to a misunderstanding of the true nature of nationalism and the nation-state and encouraged the spread of a dangerous political illusion that the developed world (East and West) was moving toward a more advanced moral and political age in which civic ideals would trump ethnic ones.

## HOW NATIONALISM TURNS BANAL

A rejection of the civic/ethnic dichotomy and of the ensuing interpretation that the moral and political development of states is one-directional leads to the realization that states oscillate between

the two forms of nationalism, thus pulling the rug from under the feet of Western paternalism. Suppose ethnic and civic nationalism are no longer seen as representing successive stages of moral and political development and are instead regarded as different states of affairs that are grounded not in national character or a nation's culture or mythology, nor in its moral and political development, but in social, economic, and political states of affairs. What motivates each state of affairs, what makes it stable, and what motivates change? One can answer these questions by examining a series of five acts.

## Act 1: The Birth of a Nation

Unlike empires or monarchies, modern democracies cannot be kept together by merely the power of the ruler or political agreements imposed by inheritance, marriage, or economic exchange. The emergence of democratic states is therefore dependent on the ability of individuals to get together to join a community, and then on processes that turn the community into a political entity that wishes to govern and express itself in the public sphere.

In their formative years, democratic states are obliged to actively foster the formation of a unifying consciousness grounded in a historical narrative, a common language, norms, culture, and symbols. In this early stage, homogenizing powers shape the public sphere in an attempt to form a shared identity that provides individuals with the personal and social tools necessary for becoming active social, economic, and political agents. These tools, as Alexis de Tocqueville noted in *Democracy in America* as early as 1835, must reflect "the habits of the heart" of the people and not of the ruler.

Homogeneity allows for the development of a participatory public sphere and an open market, which is essential for the formation of a large-scale, industrial economy. It is therefore not surprising to find a strong correlation between moments of political consolidation and an accelerated process of national homogenization, social solidification, and economic growth. The birth of the modern democratic state and that of the nation are therefore inherently interrelated; one cannot do without the other.

## Act 2: Banal Nationalism

Once the national identity is consolidated and political autonomy secured, a national-cultural status quo is reached. At the stage of "banal nationalism" (Billing 1995), nation-building efforts are relaxed, and the national-cultural background turns transparent. Nevertheless, the national foundations of the state offer considerable political, cultural, and economic benefits to members of the nation, allowing them to function in a public sphere that is both familiar and easy to command and inviting them to adopt leadership positions to represent the nation and act on its behalf. Individuals do not necessarily appreciate these benefits that are taken for granted.

## Act 3: Multiculturalism

As democracy settles down and the process of nation building is relaxed, minorities gain social and political power and demand a voice and a political presence. From their secured position (which now seems everlasting), members of the majority—especially privileged members of the majority—agree to transform existing social structures and make them more open and inclusive. The majority becomes less interested in the nature of the public sphere, which allows minority groups to become active and imprint the shared space with previously excluded identities.

## Act 4: Diversity

The impact of these changes is slow, yet, in due time, homogeneity is eroded and diversity settles in. This is a new state of affairs that piggybacks on the homogeneity previously created and on the sense of security cemented during the period of banal nationalism. The formative stages are now forgotten and their importance undermined. Room is given to a wider range of social, cultural, ethnic, racial, and linguistic representations. The nation-state starts to take pride in its ability to accommodate diversity and internal differences. It is now assumed that national infancy has been transcended; the state is maturing from its ethnic period and entering a civic stage.

## Act 5: Post-Diversity

At a certain point, changes in the public sphere turn from invigorating to threatening. When this threshold is crossed, the balance of power tilts back from diversity toward homogenization. The majority (especially its most vulnerable members) wakes up and starts worrying about the erosion of the familiar public sphere and the influence of these changes on their ability to cash in their national capital. Fearing the loss of status and opportunities and exposure to greater internal and external competition, vulnerable members of the majority become more critical of the growing diversity and try to reclaim some of the traditional structures of the nation-state. This process is intensified in times of austerity when social resources are scarce. The ideological wind thus changes and a more nationalistic voice sets in, reflecting an antidiversity and anti-immigration mood alongside a desire to revive some of the strategies that were used in the first stage of nation-building.

## Discussion of the Five Stages

This analysis explains why modern states tilt back and forth between periods of more or less national and cultural homogeneity. In moments of national birth as well as in moments of crisis, individuals voice prohomogenization views more openly than in quiet, mundane times. When feeling stressed and under attack, they call upon nationalism for help; while in peaceful and prosperous times, they tend to trust themselves, overlooking their dependence on nationalism and ignoring its dormant powers. This, of course, does not mean that in good times nationalism stops playing a social role but only that its dominance trivializes its existence.

History tells us that even civic nations that place universal political principles at their core carry a cultural inheritance born in the period of nation building. The United Kingdom, the United States, and France [three of Kohn's (1944) examples of civic nations], as well as Italy and Spain, were all created during a homogenizing social, political, and linguistic process that brutally erased local identities and merged them into one entity. As Yack (2000) argues:

> [T]he supposedly "civic" Canadian identity is no less inherited than the supposedly "ethnic" Québécois identity. Being Canadian comes with all kinds of hand-me-down cultural baggage: the connection to Great Britain and British political culture, the history of tension and co-operation between Francophones and Anglophones, the ambivalent relationship to Canada's overwhelmingly powerful neighbor to the south, and so on. The same is true for the United States and France.

Linguistic homogenization is one of the first steps of nation building; France, Germany, England, and Italy were all born from this process. A less intuitive example is the United States. When it was founded, only 40% of the people living within its boundaries spoke English as their first language in comparison to 87% today (Lake 2002). This is no coincidence; it is the result of a series of

processes that took place in the formative years of nation building and entailed the rejection of other European languages including German and French, the eradication of indigenous languages, and the subordination and marginalization of black dialects. These struggles are now forgotten, yet, according to Lake (2002), what has happened since 1776 is a matter of contest, conflict, and even persecution:

> In the antebellum South slaveowners and traders sometimes cut out the tongues of slaves unable or unwilling to speak English…. General Benjamin Butler had Francophones executed…to discourage the use of French…. Blackfoot Indians…were forbidden to speak their native language, and were beaten if they did so. During World War I, certain state and local governments proscribed speaking German in public…and throughout U.S. history, other less dramatic factors have contributed to English's emergence as our dominant tongue.

This process allowed the United States to move into the stage of "banal nationalism" in which the newly created lingual unity was taken for granted. In that stage, far from seeing English as a matter of conflict, many Anglophone Americans were unaware that they spoke a particular language; English was like the air they breathed, a natural right (Lake 2002). This is obviously not the case for immigrants and members of minority groups, for whom a lack of fluency in English has significant social and economic repercussions.

In the United States, second languages are always pressurized into declining. According to a new Pew report on the future of Spanish in the United States (Lopez & Gonzalez-Barrera 2017), the number of Hispanics who speak Spanish is projected to fall and the number of those who speak only English at home is expected to rise from 25% in 2010 to an estimated 34% by 2020. The report was nonetheless reticent as to whether Spanish will follow the same pattern as other non-English languages in the United States, such as Italian, German, and Polish. The United States is not alone; ethnic, cultural, and linguistic biases are to be found even in the most civic nations that are presently relatively open and inclusive societies. None has started that way.

Many assume that diversity breeds tolerance, diversity therefore opens the door to greater diversity, and this development is one-directional; consequently, societies move from closed to open, from homogenizing processes to diversification. Research challenges this assumption. In a comparison of 44 countries over a 20-year period, Larsen (2017) convincingly demonstrates that countries vacillate between civic and ethnic poles in response to social and political events. His findings force us to reconsider some of the most common assumptions regarding the relationship between social diversity and civic identity. Larsen clearly shows that, more often than not, growing diversity induces social instability and intolerance.

The explanation for this phenomenon lies beyond the scope of this article. I can only hint at two major reasons. The first is grounded in the relationship between national and personal capital. The main resistance to diversity is motivated by a social and cultural (and sometimes economic) anxiety that the erosion of national capital would harm one's life chances. Such concerns are more common among those with limited means who are troubled about their ability to secure for themselves and their offspring those goods that became available to them due to their national status. The second reason is that the costs of diversity are not evenly spread among the members of the different groups, so those who may lose out fear diversity, while those who feel protected are indifferent or supportive (see Tamir 2019 for a more detailed analysis of this issue). Recent events have sharpened this point; tolerance of diversity is in decline all over the Western world in civic and ethnic nations alike. It seems that having crossed a certain threshold, diversity is no longer seen as a source of enrichment but instead of destabilization. The wind then blows in an antidiversity direction, and demands for greater homogenization prosper.

In examining these oscillations, we find a repetitive pattern suggesting that homogenization and stabilization allow for diversity, not because they foster a willingness to surrender cultural and linguistic dominance (encouraging a true preference for a neutral state of affairs), but because the present state of affairs is considered unshakable. Once the fluidity of the situation is exposed, resentful forces are awakened. When does a society move from one stage to the next? How much diversity can a society absorb? The answers vary from one place to another and are highly influenced by social and economic parameters. One thing is sure: No position along the ethnic and civic continuum is a permanent one. This claim challenges the assumption that the position in which a state finds itself reflects some basic set of national traits or a certain stage of moral development.

These days, it is clearer than ever that the East-ethnic/West-civic dichotomy is theoretically and historically falling apart. Germany, which was one of Kohn's examples for the ethnic pole, has moved in the post–World War II period to the civic pole, defining itself as a pure constitutional democracy. Today, as it copes with growing social diversity and inequality, making an ethnic move, it seems to be rediscovering its dormant nationalist past. It is no wonder that Chancellor Angela Merkel, long-term promoter of proimmigration policies, has been forced to moderate her stance and has committed to deporting immigrants who have no right to protection while capping the number of migrants admitted each year (Chase 2018). Even these capitulatory statements were met with criticism from the right. Germany is certainly seeking a new balance, one that will be less civic and more attuned to ethnic national voices.

The real option modern states confront is not between civic and ethnic nationalism but between a more or less liberal nationalism. All forms of nationalism rely on a certain degree of continuity necessary for the formation of social cohesion, and on a preference for our particular way of life. As I have argued in *Liberal Nationalism* (Tamir 1993), the difference between different forms of nationalism is one of degree: More liberal forms of nationalism will balance liberal democratic values against national ones while illiberal forms of nationalism will ignore the need to take other moral points of view into consideration. Yet even the most liberal forms of nationalism go beyond civic friendship. They rely on a collective identity that cherishes some cultural, linguistic, and symbolic features that mark the border between insiders and outsiders, us and them. If, as I argue, the civic/ethnic distinction has fallen apart, then why should we pay attention to it? The reason to keep the debate going is the recent fascination with civic nationalism, which is now presented as a panacea to the destabilization of the democratic world.

## THE CIVIC PANACEA

The longing for a nationalism that is free of all malignant aspects and allows for an overlap between membership and identity is understandable, but is this kind of nationalism viable? This is not merely a theoretical question. Idealistic visions and imprudent theoretical assumptions can easily be translated into misguided expectations and harmful policies.

Two mistaken assumptions encouraged by the civic/ethnic distinction influence present-day politics. First, the distinction assumes that ethnic conflicts are endemic to the East, encouraging us to ignore the spread of racial and ethnic tensions within presumed civic Western democracies, which include ethnic racial conflicts, the marginalization of indigenous peoples (often entirely excluded from the civic/ethnic discussion), and phenomena such as anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and xenophobia. By waving the civic flag, Western democracies pretend to be more peaceful and inclusive than they really are, fostering a self-image that allows them to exonerate themselves, leaving them unprepared to deal with internal conflicts.

Second, the civic/ethnic distinction encourages the view that in civic nations the roles of culture, language, religion, ethnicity, and race are minimal and can therefore be ignored. This

presupposition forces us to revisit the interplay between politics and identity. In the first round of this debate, members of minority groups forced the majority to acknowledge that identity determines not only who we are but also what we get. In order to remedy this bias, minorities (as well as women) struggled for the right to present their identity in the public sphere, thus changing it in substantial ways. The success of identity politics meant that identity issues could no longer be ignored, and thus we have entered the age of multiculturalism.

Nowadays, questions of identity are being raised once again, this time by the less well-off members of the majority, who resent the diversification of the public sphere. Answers to their claims are often phrased in civic terms, ignoring the significance of cultural differences. Curiously, in this round of the debate, the circles of injured individuals have widened to include not only those excluded or marginalized from the common culture, tradition, or ethnic identity (which remain important social and economic factors in all political frameworks) but also those who are threatened by changes in the common sphere and feel they lack the necessary tools to cope with it.

This phenomenon is often obscured by the civic language that pushes identity to the margins of the political sphere, allowing politicians and theorists to paint an ideal picture that seeks to make conflict go away. On the eve of his election, President Emmanuel Macron delivered a speech in Marseille, one of France's most diverse cities, with a mixed population of French-born residents and immigrants from all over the world. "When I look at Marseille," Macron said, "I see the people of France. Look at them. They are here. They are proud. Proud of being French. Take a good look at them. Ladies and Gentlemen of the *Front National*: this is what it means to be proud to be French" (translation cited in Mounk 2018, pp. 209–10). The reality, however, is quite different. Marseille is "the world capital of apartheid," says Samia Ghali, the mayor of Marseille's fifteenth and sixteenth arrondissements and a national senator with the *Parti Socialiste*. Despite Macron's inclusive words, Ghali tells Hoad (2017) that she feels "alone in a world people didn't want to see."

Needless to say, feelings of estrangement are common also among many of those who feel that Marseille is no longer the France they know and who find the high level of diversity difficult to cope with. No wonder Marseille is the hotbed of the Front National. On the ground, the civic ideal seems much less applicable. When an ideal is presented as a reflection of reality it loses its reformative power. It creates an impression that the desired change has already happened (or is happening) and nothing needs to be done; it thus promotes avoidance rather than action.

At the end of the last century, for a very brief moment, we have been deluded into believing that modern societies can move from the desire to rely on particular cultural or national ties to a sphere of political maturity and reliance on abstract principles. We now find that the seemingly childish desire for stability and continuity is coming back to haunt us. For those who understand personal and social psychology, this should come as no surprise. When Albert Einstein asked Sigmund Freud to explain "why war persists," Freud (1963) seized the opportunity to express his skepticism about the liberal vision. The ideal condition of things would be, he claimed, "a community of men who had subordinated their instinctual life to the dictatorship of reason. Nothing else could unite men so completely and so tenaciously, even if there were no emotional ties between them. But in all probability this is a Utopian expectation" (Freud 1963, p. 145). Compelling individuals to continually act in accordance with axioms that contradict their instinctual inclinations is asking them to live—psychologically speaking—beyond their means (Freud 1963). As the purely civic vision of nationalism is based on this type of quest, its repeated failures should be anticipated. Following the German epic trail from the Enlightenment to romanticism, nationalism, fascism, Nazism, and finally to a constitutional democracy and the current reemergence of nationalism teaches us an important lesson about the oscillation of nations from ethnic to civic realities and back.

Mounk (2018, p. 208), one of the few political theorists to acknowledge the power of nationalism, argues that we should domesticate it, make it inclusive, build "on the tradition of multi-ethnic democracy to show that the ties that bind us go well beyond ethnicity and religion." Is there a tradition of multiethnic democracy? Multiethnic empires, monarchies, and a commonwealth existed and flourished, but multicultural, multiethnic democracies have a very poor track record. Even the United States, which Mounk rightly deems an exceptional case, finds diversity a difficult challenge, as demonstrated by the spread of nativist sentiments and harsh laws on immigration that coincided with the rapid growth of diversity at the beginning of the twentieth century (Mounk 2018, p. 167).

It is natural to aspire to enjoy the best of all possible worlds. Yet nationalism, like other forms of human relationships, carries a price tag that is commensurate with its benefits. It is possible to soften the particularistic aspects of human relationships by balancing out their effects. It is, however, impossible to repress them. To believe otherwise is a dangerous illusion, not only because it offers an unworkable political solution but also because it obscures our ability to reflect on the true nature of personal and political relationships.

The civic version of nationalism offers a model that is too abstract and legalistic. While constitutionalism, universal rights, and equal membership are valuable guidelines for political action, they cover a limited scope of a person's life. More important, they offer far too thin a basis for social and political cooperation. This is why nationalism keeps coming back, pushing civic ideals aside, and making its way to center stage. Those who know how to meet the needs it presents will be the winners of the coming decades.

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