

# Recurrent nationalism

Borders of Europe: Old and New Europe  
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# Overview

The 'complex nature' of the beast: nationalism

The East-West (European) distinction

Populist Nationalism and Anti-Europeanism

Beyond Reason: the ethnonational bond

A dynamic and processual understanding  
(multidisciplinary approach)

Risks and opportunities: nationalism and the European  
project

# Tools

*Nationalism*: a political programme that holds that groups defined as 'nations' have the right to, and therefore ought to, form territorial states of the kind that have become standard since the French Revolution (Hobsbawm, 1991)

*Patriotism*: love for the political institutions of one's country (Connor, 1993)

*Ethnicity*: *not* a political programme...is a readily definable way of expressing a *real* sense of group identity which links the members of 'we' because it emphasizes their differences from 'them' (Hobsbawm, 1991)

'Nation': an ideological construct that has been essential to assigning subject positions in the modern state (Verdery, 1991)

Today, few if any scholars would argue that ethnic groups, ..or nations... are fixed or given: they are historically emergent and in some respects mutable. In this sense we are all constructivists now (Brubaker, 2009)

# Not the same...but related



# Dimensions of nationalism

- Homogenising and exclusionary phenomenon (politics of belonging – e.g. Language politics)
- Invocation of popular self-rule, collective autonomy
- Integrative force
- Portrayal of the nation as an organic unity between people, history and territory
- Tool for national advancement and increasing competitiveness (in regard with other nations, e.g. ‘Made in Germany’)
- Justifying logic for the allocation of valued resources, collective and symbolic goods (including deserving ‘us and excluding undeserving ‘others’)

# The East-West distinction

## Western Europe

### ***'Civic' Nationalism***

- Benign & emancipatory (gradual inclusion of the masses in government, individual (human) rights)
- Citizenship: *Ius solis*
- Inclusive
- Equality of all citizens
- (liberal) democratic
- Replacing city-states and empires → modern
- Opposed minority rule in feudalism

## Eastern Europe

### ***'Ethnic' Nationalism***

- Malign & resentful, aggressive
- Citizenship: *Ius sanguinis*
- Exclusive (ethnic) national identity, inequality between 'majority' and 'minority' ethnies
- Self-determination for an ethno-culturally, prepolitically defined group
- 19th cent. Romantic nationalist movements, remnants of collapsed (multi-national) empires

# Theoretical homogenous but oversimplified

- Historically speaking the distinction between Eastern and Western nationalism is at best valid up to some length. Becomes problematic if extended over time and obstructs a proper analysis of contemporary nationalism
- A clear-cut historical geographical distinction between Western and Eastern European nationalism is contestable (e.g. The imperialist wave of the end of the 19th century had a strong sense of superiority of the Western 'race' and held strongly exclusionary definitions of the nation)
- Nationalism in the East is more than 'tribal nationalism' and also civic nationalism can not do without some 'thick' emotive form of political and social cohesion

# Populist nationalism

- Resurgence of populism and nationalism in Eastern Europe after the collapse of the communist regimes is result of 'valley of tears' of the post-communist transformation (from a centrally planned system to a democratic, market society)

Two lines of argumentation:

## ***The modernizationists***

('social costs' of the transition too high, large number of 'modernization losers' susceptible to mobilization of by populist movements)

## ***The historical-determinist one***

(tribal nationalism, atavistic ethnocentrism as essences of the Eastern societies)

## **Solution?**

The adoption of the 'right' institutional structures, procedurally based political institutions of Western European states = moving towards a 'civic' form of nationalism



# Populism and Democracy

Political reality: last 2 decades: populism in Eastern and Western Europe.

“Populism is not just a reaction against power structures but an appeal to a recognized authority. Populists claim legitimacy on the grounds that they speak for the people: that is to say, they claim to represent the democratic sovereign, not a sectional interest such as an economic class”

Clashing interpretations of democracy (Janus head)

**Pragmatic** (order & rule of law)  $\leftrightarrow$  **Redemptive** (total and direct power of the people (the sovereign))

# Nationalists use an emancipatory discourse

Rather than a reconciliation of redemptive and pragmatic politics, a constant balancing and thus conflict over democracy is a constitutive feature of modern politics → populism is not a pathology in the modern setting, to be transcended by liberal institutions, but a structural element of modernity.

*“If populism is a shadow of democracy, it will follow always as a possibility – and probably as something more than a possibility, since no one can choose whether or not to have a shadow” (Arditi, 2004)*

# Populism and the nation

If exclusivists features of nationalism are underlined →  
conflictive force (e.g. Separatism in Czechoslovakia, ethnic  
strife in former Yugoslavia, conflicts with national  
minorities in Romania, in the Baltic States, Belgium)

If emancipatory features of nationalism can be stressed →  
Call for (national) self-determination or the enhancement  
of particular group rights (maybe even the regional  
autonomy) of an ethno-cultural group

Fits a political style that builds upon a rigid dichotomy of  
'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite'

# Anti-Europeanism

- Call for protection of national culture (rather called ‘cultural’ nationalism than ‘ethnic’ nationalism)

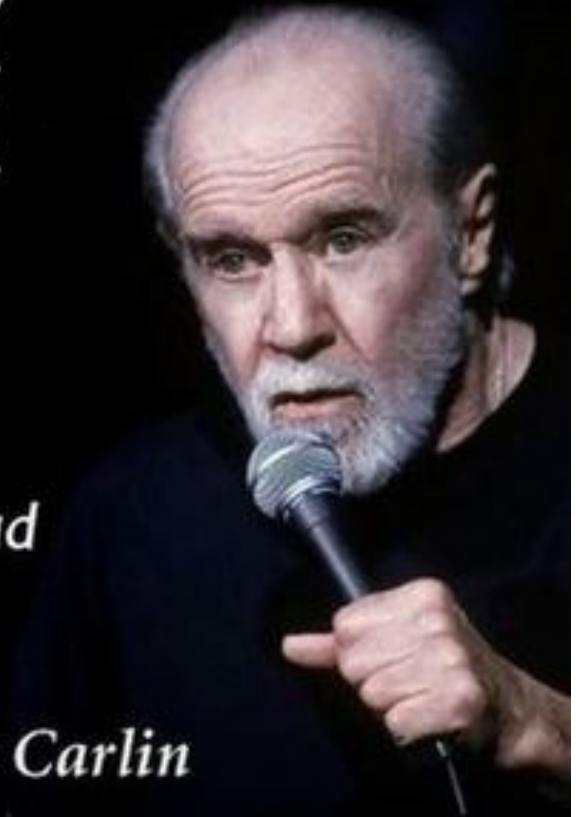
Goes hand in hand with *an understanding of Europe* different from the ‘official’ version, namely, a ‘Europe of the Nations’ or a ‘Europe of the Regions’. Europe is often understood as the cooperation between sovereign peoples, rather than an incremental form of supra nationalism designed to gradually overcome national differences.

Here popular sovereignty is directly linked with the survival of the nation with its particular culture and history. This has a much wider appeal than merely the ‘lunatic fringe’ (the extreme right)

# Discussion item: proud to be?

*I could never understand ethnic or national pride. Because to me pride should be reserved for something you achieve or attain on your own, not something that happens by accident of birth. Being Irish isn't a skill, it's a fuckin' genetic accident. You wouldn't say 'I'm proud to be 5'11". I'm proud to have a predisposition for colon cancer.' So why the fuck would you be proud to be Irish, or proud to be Italian, or American or anything?*

*- George Carlin*





# George Carlin (clip)

God Bless America

# Beyond reason: the ethnonational bond

- Necessity of ‘enchantment’ of any social order
- The importance of (national) poetry, religion, music / songs, anthems, folkways, museums, history (books), sports (teams and competition)
- Anthropological universal: ‘To belong’ (to have a safe haven in a heartless world)
- Profoundly self-sacrificing love inspired by nations and nationalism (not less real or powerful for being ‘imagined’)
- Fear of Freedom / Escape from Freedom (Erich Fromm)

Contrast with:

- Multiple identities
- Layered identities (e.g. European, Dutch and...)

# Dynamic and processual understanding

- Shift from attempts to specify what an ethnic group or nation *is* to how ethnicity and nation *works*
- → from a 'language of nouns' to a 'language of verbs'
- Groupness is a variable not a constant
- Multidisciplinary approaches
- Paradigm shifts
- a) **The Situationalist Turn** (F. Barth)
- b) **The Cognitive Turn** (ethnicity and nationalism are not things *in* the world, but perspectives *on* the world)

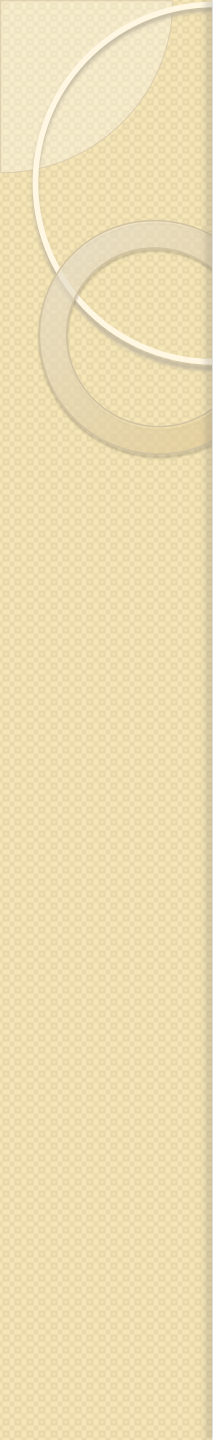


# Risks and opportunities for the European project

- Understanding where the fear, pain and critique of populist and nationalist movements lays
- The political project of the European polity 'from above' – even if promoting to be 'unity in diversity' does not convincingly rejoin the widely shared concerns in terms of popular sovereignty, local autonomy and cultural diversity
- Western Europe: civic solidarity as the cement of national societies is the result of a longtime process (shared background in language and cultures more latent); Eastern Europe belated nation-building, experience of communism, shifting borders, loss of collective identity etc, leads to more problematic 'national question'. Not to be mistaken for structurally different forms of nationalism

# The European project (continued)

- Many (Western) European societies suffer from social disorientation, of the fraying, and sometimes snapping of the threads that used to be the network that bound people together → fall prey to xenophobia (the fear of the unknown) and pushes those who can no longer rely on belonging anywhere else but to that imagined community to which one can belong: 'the nation', or the ethnic group.
- Only if civic nationalism (as projected at the European level) is to be understood as a convincing substitute for rather than in conflict with national identities and 'thicker' forms of the social bond, the populist critique might be pre-empted (otherwise it might prove to be more persistent)



**(short) BREAK**