

*mevzu*

*sosyal bilimler dergisi | journal of social sciences*

e-ISSN 2667-8772

*mevzu*, Haziran/June 2026, s. 16: 33-67

**Ideological Anatomy of Nationalism: Between Theory and Practise**  
Milliyetçiliğin İdeolojik Anatomisi: Kuram ile Pratik Arasında

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**ROR ID:** <https://ror.org/033sm2k57>

**DOI:** 10.56720/msbd.2026.s16.407

**Makale Bilgisi | Article Information**

**Makale Türü / Article Type:** Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

**Geliş Tarihi / Date Received:** 9 Kasım / November 2025

**Kabul Tarihi / Date Accepted:** 26 Mart / March 2026

**Yayın Tarihi / Date Published:** 15 Haziran / June 2026

**Yayın Sezonu / Pub Date Season:** Haziran / June

**Atıf / Citation:** Yorgancıoğlu, Cemal. "Ideological Anatomy of Nationalism: Between Theory and Practise". *Mevzu: Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 16 (Haziran 2026): 33-67.  
<https://doi.org/10.47424/10.56720/msbd.2026.s16.407>

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**Abstract**

The aim of this study is to approach nationalism not only as a sense of belonging or cultural practise, but instead to re-evaluate it as a comprehensive ideological formation. On a theoretical level, it examines how collective identity, historical narrative, sovereignty, cultural homogeneity and the institutional practises that support them interact to shape nationalism into an ideological structure. The article analyses the interactions between nationalism and liberalism, socialism, conservatism and fascism and shows how these relationships shape the variable yet defining character of nationalism. The methodology employed is an interdisciplinary framework that draws on political science, ideological theory and historical sociology and emphasises conceptual analysis, critical literature analysis and theoretical synthesis. The results emphasise the functions of nationalism in the construction of sovereignty and the production of legitimacy and show how these are reproduced through institutions, media and education. The study proposes conceptual tools for future empirical research and at the same time points to the importance of strategies based on cultural pluralism for policy makers. Furthermore, the article demonstrates the conceptual flexibility of nationalism by discussing its temporal and spatial variability and offering a new perspective to the literature.

**Keywords:** Nationalism, Ideology, Collective Identity, Political Theory, Historical Narrative

**Öz**

Bu çalışmanın amacı, milliyetçiliği sadece aidiyet duygusu veya kültürel bir uygulama olarak ele almak değil, onu kapsamlı bir ideolojik oluşum olarak yeniden değerlendirmektir. Teorik düzeyde, kolektif kimlik, tarihsel anlatı, egemenlik, kültürel homojenlik ve bunları destekleyen kurumsal uygulamaların nasıl etkileşime girerek milliyetçiliği ideolojik bir yapıya dönüştürdüğünü incelemektedir. Makale, milliyetçilik ile liberalizm, sosyalizm, muhafazakarlık ve faşizm arasındaki etkileşimleri analiz etmekte ve bu ilişkilerin milliyetçiliğin değişken ancak belirleyici karakterini nasıl şekillendirdiğini göstermektedir. Kullanılan metodoloji, siyaset bilimi, ideolojik teori ve tarihsel sosyolojiden yararlanan ve kavramsal analiz, eleştirel edebi analiz ve teorik sentezi vurgulayan disiplinlerarası bir çerçevedir. Sonuçlar, egemenliğin inşa-

sında ve meşruiyetin üretiminde milliyetçiliğin işlevlerini vurgulamakta ve bunların kurumlar, medya ve eğitim yoluyla nasıl yeniden üretildiğini göstermektedir. Çalışma, gelecekteki ampirik araştırmalar için kavramsal araçlar önermekte ve aynı zamanda politika yapıcılar için kültürel çoğulculuğa dayalı stratejilerin önemine işaret etmektedir. Ayrıca makale, milliyetçiliğin zamansal ve mekansal değişkenliğini tartışarak ve literatüre yeni bir bakış açısı sunarak milliyetçiliğin kavramsal esnekliğini göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Milliyetçilik, İdeoloji, Kolektif Kimlik, Siyaset Teorisi, Tarihsel Anlatı

### 1. Introduction

Nationalism is one of the most powerful political ideas that characterise the modern world (Anderson, 2006; Gellner, 2006; Smith, 2010). From the emergence of nation states to today's identity-based politics, traces of nationalism can be found in many social changes (Brubaker, 1996; Hobsbawm, 1992). Despite its widespread influence, there is still no consensus on what nationalism actually is. Some see it as a "feeling/emotion" or "a form of belonging" (Billig, 1995; Calhoun, 2007), while others define it as "a political movement" or "a social practise" (Breuilly, 1993; Özkırımlı, 2017).

This study aims to approach nationalism not as an "emotion," "movement," or simply a historical phenomenon, but as an ideological form organised around specific conceptual cores. The main question asked by this article will be, "Can nationalism be considered an ideology that produces a consistent conceptual structure within itself and makes sense of the political world?"

Answering this question involves not only a theoretical debate but also an important normative and political enquiry. If nationalism is an ideology, what values is it based on, what kind of worldview does it offer, and who does it include and exclude? From a normative point of view, these questions open up a discussion about the ethical limits of nationalism. From an analytical point of view, considering nationalism as an ideology enables an understanding of its structural features, its constituent elements and its historical transformation. On a political level, the ideological dimension of nationalism makes it easier to see how it is positioned in today's world and how it is instrumentalised by various actors. Michael Freeden (1998) defines ideologies as

conceptual frameworks that give meaning to and legitimise the political world. From this perspective, nationalism also represents a particular worldview, draws political boundaries and distinguishes between “us” and “them” (Anderson, 2006; Wimmer, 2018). At the same time, the different types of nationalism (ethnic, civic, postcolonial) have different ideological tendencies (Smith, 2010; Yack, 2012). For example, ethnic nationalism emphasises common ancestry and cultural heritage (Hutchinson, 2017), while civic nationalism is characterised by political participation and constitutional citizenship (Habermas, 1996).

The central argument of this article is as follows: Nationalism creates an ideological morphology that functions through interconnected conceptual elements, including identity construction, the production of historical narratives, the relationship between land and sovereignty, and the pursuit of cultural homogeneity. Although this morphology may take different forms depending on historical context and its relationships with other ideologies, it maintains continuity around certain core concepts.

Within this framework, the study makes three contributions: systematically mapping the fundamental conceptual elements that constitute the ideological structure of nationalism; demonstrating how these elements are recorded through interaction with ideologies such as liberalism, socialism, conservatism, and fascism; and analysing the historical transformation of nationalism through this ideological core, thus repositioning it as a dynamic ideological structure rather than merely a historical phenomenon.

This study approaches nationalism not merely as a typological category but as a conceptual structure that is both ideologically produced and contextually flexible. As a result, nationalism is no longer merely viewed as a historical issue or a subject for a normative argument, but rather it demonstrates how nationalism is structurally and ideologically produced as an active system of ideology.

Using a conceptual analysis method and an conceptual synthesis method, the research gathers works written by designated authors within the literature about nationalism who are recognized as authorities on the subject to identify the concepts around which the ideological basis for nationalism is constructed

and how those same concepts are reconfigured in different contexts. This approach is dependent upon morphological analysis rather than empirical hypothesis testing of conceptual frameworks.

Disciplines such as political science (Mann, 2005), historical sociology (Armstrong, 1982) and ideological theory (Freeden, 2003) make important contributions to understanding how nationalism emerges, how it functions and how it gains legitimacy. For example, Billig's (1995) concept of "banal nationalism" shows how nationalist discourse permeates everyday life. The modernist approach of Gellner (2006), on the other hand, explains nationalism as a structural necessity inherent to industrialised society.

By combining analytical reasoning with conceptual interpretation, the article demonstrates that while nationalism may be used as a tool and can also be viewed as a historical necessity; nationalism is also an ideological framework that is structured along particular conceptual premises. As a consequence, the use of the phrase 'ideological anatomy' in this article was a deliberate choice. The aim of this phrase was not to establish a rigid definition of nationalism; rather the intention was to provide an analytical understanding of the conceptual components that comprise nationalism; how nationalism operates; and how historical circumstances have altered the form of nationalism. The emphasis in this statement on "theory vs. practice" indicates that nationalism occurs not only through intellectual development and theorising, but also through political arenas, social movements and government prescribed national policy.

## **2. Ideological Characteristics of Nationalism**

The ideological nature of nationalism can be assessed by examining its underlying conceptual elements and how these elements interpret the political world. What makes a system of thought an ideology is not only its ability to explain the world, but also its claim to change or reshape it. Ideologies create a normative vision of order by centralising certain concepts and establishing political boundaries that align with this vision. In this context, nationalism is not just a sense of belonging or a form of cultural identity, but a specific social concept, a historical understanding and a proposal for a political order. Therefore, nationalism should be approached as an ideological structure that reor-

ganises concepts such as identity, history, land, and sovereignty within a specific framework. This section will first analyse the fundamental conceptual elements that transform nationalism into an ideology, then discuss how nationalism is articulated and recoded through the relationships these elements establish with other ideological traditions. Thus, it will be shown that nationalism is not merely a discourse of identity, but a functioning and self-reproducing ideological morphology.

## **2.1. Fundamental Characteristics that Make Nationalism an Ideology**

Nationalism cannot be reduced to a mere sense of belonging based on identity. What makes it an ideology is the fact that it provides people with a conceptual framework that helps them understand the world and determine what kind of political order they want. This framework defines the boundaries of the political community by centralising the concept of the nation, determines the source of legitimacy, and sets the normative direction for collective action. According to Michael Freeden's (1998) theory of ideology, every ideology is built around a set of concepts. These concepts serve to explain the world, to give it a normative direction and to give meaning to political action. However, what distinguishes ideologies is not only which concepts they contain, but also how they organise these concepts and position them within a hierarchy. In this sense, nationalism is a holistic ideological form built around the concept of nation, encompassing elements such as history, identity, sovereignty and cultural integrity (Miller, 2020; Özkırımlı, 2017; Smith, 2009). In this structure, the nation is not merely a reference point but serves as the central node connecting other concepts.

The four basic elements discussed below – collective identity, historical narrative, the relationship between territory and sovereignty, and the pursuit of cultural homogeneity – are the basic components that concretise the ideological character of nationalism. These elements are not independent of each other; they form a whole that mutually reinforces each other and defines both the normative boundaries and political objectives of the national community.

Nationalism is based on how we perceive ourselves as a group; the value placed on our history gives that identity context and consistency, and the relationship between our land and the sovereignty derived from it links this

group identity to the political space we occupy. Seeking cultural sameness through the pursuit of uniformity establishes a normative ideal. This cycle creates the ideological morphology of nationalism, with each component reciprocally connected. These elements also form the cornerstones of nationalist ideologies in historical and political practice (Anderson, 1983; Conversi, 2021; Gellner, 2006; Ichijo & Poutianen, 2020; Yack, 2012). Therefore, nationalism should not be considered a random set of concepts, but a structured ideological form that enables the conception of a specific normative order.

## **2.2. Collective Identity Construction**

Nationalism is an identity system that enables individuals to identify themselves as members of a nation. This identity not only conveys a sense of belonging but also serves to draw boundaries as to who belongs to that nation and who does not (Brubaker, 1992). Benedict Anderson's (1983) concept of the 'imagined community' explains how this collective identity is constructed through modern means of communication and shared symbols. The nation enables individuals to feel emotionally and politically connected to a community that most of them do not recognise. Nationalist identity is institutionalised through specific cultural and political codes – citizenship, language, religion or history. French republicanism defines the nation as a common political project, while German nationalism has long defined the nation through blood ties. This contrast shows that nationalism not only constructs identities but also classifies them and lends this classification an ideological legitimacy (Greenfeld, 1992; Wimmer, 2013).

While nation-states' efforts to homogenise continue, concepts such as multiculturalism and diasporic identities challenge the rigid boundaries of nationalist identity (Hall, 2021; Vertovec, 2007). Digital platforms in particular facilitate the emergence of new identity narratives and the formation of transnational communities, while at the same time preparing the ground for the spread of ultranationalist discourses and polarisation (Castells, 2010; Maly, 2019). At the same time, collective identity is not only created out of a nationalist ideology but also forms a basis for the development of nationalist ideology. In defining "who we are," we also define our historical story, the basis of our right to sovereignty, and the normative basis for pursuing a common cul-

ture. Therefore, collective identity is an essential feature in the ideological morphology of nationalism, together with other constituent concepts, creates a holistic political order.

### **2.3. Myth-Making and Historical Narratives**

Every nationalist ideology selectively constructs the past. This construction is not only about the memory of events, but rather about transforming certain events and figures into symbols that lend meaning to national identity (Smith, 2009). Eric Hobsbawm's (1983) concept of the 'invention of tradition' shows how such historical narratives emerge through social construction processes and serve political purposes. The historical narratives of nations are often characterised by selective memory; they are marked by both victories and defeats that are imbued with meaning (Renan, 1882/2002). In the context of Turkey, the nationalism of the republican era turned the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the War of Independence into foundational myths; victories such as Mohács and dramatic sieges such as Plevna were also incorporated into this memory (Keyder, 1988). These narratives position national existence in a constant state of 'danger' and create a rhetoric of threat that feeds the ideological continuity of nationalism. History thus becomes less an archive of memory and more a source of political orientation (Assmann, 2011).

History is no longer a reflection of the past, but one of the sharpest political weapons of the present. The manipulation possibilities of the digital age are being skilfully exploited, especially by populists and far-right actors. Revisionist narratives and founding myths spread via social media serve to normalise authoritarian tendencies by shaping the public's memory (Mols & Van Kessel, 2024). This is not only a distortion of history, but an outright exploitation of collective memory. Moreover, this is not limited to the national level. As Rothberg (2009) has shown, historical narratives also clash on the international stage and attempt to suppress or redefine each other. History is less about truth than about power.

Here, history has a broader definition than the nationalist one. It is a historical ideology that legitimises collective identity over time, providing historical justification for the exercise of sovereignty and making the quest for a unified culture a normative necessity. An ideological anatomy of nationalism,

created through selective memory, mythical narratives, and elements of identity and state, constructs the trans-temporal foundation of the nation. As such, history provides a component of the historical and symbolic unity of nationalist ideology.

#### **2.4. The Relationship between Land and Sovereignty**

Nationalism defines the nation not only as an abstract community, but also identifies it with a specific geography. National territories are not only physical spaces, but also have a symbolic meaning as carriers of a collective identity and objects of political affiliation (Gellner, 2006). This idea forms the basis of the modern understanding of political sovereignty and is still associated with Jean Bodin's theories of sovereignty (Hinsley, 1986). This understanding functions both as a condition for the existence of the state and as a source of legitimacy for nationalism. Therefore, Palestinian or Israeli nationalism is characterised not only by the fate of a people, but also by historical claims to land (Kimmerling & Migdal, 1993). Similarly, ethnic nationalism in the Balkans has paved the way for geopolitical conflicts based on the idea of the 'historical homeland', in which land serves both as a spatial representation of identity and a guarantee of political sovereignty (Ramet, 2006).

In the age of the climate crisis, which is changing the planet, altering migration routes and increasing insecurity, nationalism is also being reshaped. Land is no longer just a territory demarcated by borders, it is an identity, a sense of security, even a promise. While populist discourses keep the image of the "homeland to be protected" alive, these discourses are even disseminated, defended and reconstructed in digital media (Ash, Kitchin, & Leszczynski, 2018). As Graham et al. (2020) note, claims to a national territory are no longer only formulated on maps, but also on screens. In this new landscape, notions of sovereignty are caught between the myths of the past and the crises of the present, but the strong connection of nationalist ideology to the land still takes centre stage (Sassen, 2022).

This relationship between land and sovereignty forms the spatial dimension of nationalist ideology. While collective identity preserves its temporal continuity through historical narrative, land grounds this identity in a concrete political space and transforms the claim to sovereignty into a normative

claim to rights. Thus, the concept of “homeland” becomes a central axis in the ideological morphology of nationalism, uniting identity, history, and cultural integrity within a spatial framework.

### **2.5. The Search for Cultural Homogeneity**

Nationalism is generally based on the idea that a ‘shared’ culture should form the basis for defining a nation. This shared culture consists of elements such as language, religion, traditions and lifestyle and is standardised over time through state action (Smith, 2009). According to Ernest Gellner (2006), modern nation states have attempted to create cultural homogeneity through the ideology of nationalism, which was necessitated by industrialisation. This striving for homogeneity often leads to the suppression or assimilation of differences. The ban on regional languages in France, the restrictions on Catalan and Basque during the Franco era in Spain and China’s policy towards the Uyghurs are concrete examples of this ideological function (Keating, 2013). Nationalism is not inclusive here, but an instrument that presents the majority culture as the “only correct” one and makes it the national norm. In this way, the goal of cultural homogeneity opens the door to direct mechanisms of exclusion. Recent studies show that nationalism is increasingly shifting to the axis of cultural identity. Right-wing extremist and populist movements operating with the rhetoric of a “culture war” present globalisation, migration and liberal values as a threat to “national culture” (Kriesi, 2014; Wodak, 2021). This approach legitimises the exclusion of social groups that are seen as incompatible with national norms.

Nationalism not only suppresses cultural differences, but also functions as a means of political mobilisation (Martinelli, 2016). These developments show that nationalism continues to pursue its basic principle of homogeneity while adapting to a changing world. In this context, nationalism emerges as a comprehensive ideology that operates with institutional and political dimensions far beyond an emotional or cultural phenomenon. This ideological structure, which shapes the nation within a certain subject pattern, also determines who is accepted into the national community and who is not, and on which values this affiliation is based.

Within nationalist ideological frameworks, the pursuit of cultural homogeneity is an essential mechanism that gives nationalistic ideology its normative boundaries. 'Us' as a collective identity defines who we are but it is through historical narrative that our identity has continuity to the past through our present. This means that the relationship of our land and sovereignty provides us with an anchor to our spatial identity. Thus in order for us to maintain our cultural homogeneity and to define what it is politically necessary to maintain the unity of 'us'. Cultural homogeneity is therefore an important part of the ideological morphology of nationalism and equally creates exclusionary and inclusive processes.

### **3. The Interaction of Nationalism with Other Ideologies**

Throughout history, nationalism has never existed as an isolated ideology. It has often intermingled with other ideologies and given rise to new political forms in different historical and social contexts. In this sense, nationalism is both a permeable and a changing ideological formation. Michael Freedman (1998) states that ideologies consist of "core" and "peripheral" concepts and emphasises that nationalism has become a "peripheral but influential" component for many ideological structures. Nationalism, combining with different ideologies, can sometimes be liberal, sometimes repressive; in some cases, it can be progressive, in others authoritarian.

#### **3.1. Nationalism and Liberalism**

When nationalism is combined with liberal values, it bases the nation on the rights of the individual, the rule of law and the principle of citizenship. In this approach, national identity is not characterised by ethnic or religious ties, but by shared political values. Civic nationalism is the result of modern political socialisation and defines the nation through a common legal framework and a common bond of citizenship (Keating, 2013). National identity is constructed in an instrumental way within the framework of civic understanding. Accordingly, the theorists of civic nationalism regard the state as the starting point for the formation of national identity. In this perspective, the state provides the institutional framework within which national identity is articulated and sustained through shared citizenship and common legal norms. Moreover, territorial and national unity under a single political will is considered a

prerequisite for national unity. Yael Tamir (1993) argues that the model allows for differences and can create a common identity. However, theory and practice need not always coincide. The example of France is one of the clearest proofs of this. Although the concept of citizenship is based on universal rights, the understanding of national identity rooted in secularism and the French language may not provide an inclusive proposal for society as a whole (Kymlicka, 1995). Similarly, Anthony Smith emphasises “the centrality of a national territory or homeland, a common system of laws and institutions, the legal equality of citizens in a political community, and the importance of a mass civic culture binding citizens together” (Smith, 1999, p. 232). This shows that civic nationalism, despite its seemingly integrative character, sometimes has homogenising tendencies.

### **3.2. Nationalism and Socialism**

The alliance between nationalism and socialism formed an important ideological basis in the 20th century, especially in the anti-colonial struggles. In this form of nationalism, the nation is defined as a subject that resists imperialism and strives for independence. In examples such as Vietnam, Cuba and Algeria, socialist principles were combined with the goal of national freedom and economic equality and political sovereignty were jointly defended (Müller, 2016). In this context, nationalism does not replace a class-based revolutionary ideology; rather, it situates it within a specific historical and political context. In anti-imperialist struggles, the “nation” is seen as both the bearer of political sovereignty and the agent of social transformation. Therefore, socialist nationalism emerges as an ideological synthesis of national independence and social equality. In this approach, the triangle of anti-imperialism and class solidarity on the one hand and popular sovereignty on the other has led to a gap between theory and practice, with the dominant character of nationalism manifesting itself in practice (Anderson, 1983). As Anderson points out, although many revolutionary movements initially adopted an internationalist discourse, political mobilisation has often been organised around national identity. This has created a persistent tension between the universal claim of class solidarity and the concrete political framework of national sovereignty. In the Soviet Union and China in particular, socialist nationalism led to the suppression of different national identities and the restriction of cultural di-

versity through centralised policies (Suny, 1993). During Stalin's era, the "national question" was redefined not as a struggle against national oppression, as initially discussed in Marxist literature, but as a political issue threatening the integrity of the socialist state. This transformation clearly revealed the contradiction between recognising national differences and strengthening central state authority. This situation demonstrates how nationalism was instrumentalised under state control, contrary to the socialist theory of international proletarian solidarity (Avineri, 1991; Hobsbawm, 1992).

The interaction between socialism and nationalism is such that nationalism is not merely an influence on socialist ideology but exists within socialism's conceptual sphere, shaping socialism according to the specific historical conditions of the time. Gellner's and Anderson's theoretical frameworks demonstrate how socialism and nationalism intersect. For example, through Freden's ideological morphology, the two core concepts of socialism – social equality and social class – are reorganised alongside the two core concepts of nationalism – nation or national sovereignty and collective identity – to form a new type of political organisation when combined with nationalism. As a result of this interaction, the nation becomes more than a cultural community; it also becomes the principal subject of political mobilisation and social change.

This interaction also creates a convergence between Gellner's modernisation theory and Anderson's conceptualisation of "imagined communities". Gellner regards nationalism as a structural necessity for modern society, while Anderson sees the nation as a symbolic and imagined community. Examples of socialist nationalism illustrate both theoretical approaches and provide evidence that the nation is both a vehicle for political mobilisation in the modern era and an ideologically constructed entity.

### **3.3. Nationalism and Conservatism**

When nationalism goes hand in hand with conservative ideas, it relies on historical and cultural references to ensure the continuity of the social structure and thus leads to an understanding of identity that is strongly tied to traditional values (Gellner, 2006; Smith, 1998). This form represents an understanding of nationalism that emphasises traditional values, historical continuity and religious/cultural references. This type of ideological synthesis creates a

kind of 'cultural defence' against the processes of modernisation and globalisation. In the example of conservative nationalism in Turkey, the reference to the Ottoman heritage, the refunctionalisation of religious symbols within the national identity and the normative protectionism towards the family structure are remarkable (Mardin, 1989). The slogan 'reclamation', which was frequently heard during the Brexit process, revived the idea of protecting the country's borders, traditions and values in people's minds (Wodak, 2021). This perspective became an expression of a more selective and cautious attitude towards rapid social change.

Recent research shows that the strong alliance between conservative nationalism and populist movements is having a significant impact on the direction of politics. Issues such as border control, anti-immigrant sentiment and the defence of national culture against the 'invasion' of 'liberal' values make this ideology directly conducive to populism (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018; Galston, 2018). Here, the nation is constructed not only as a cultural entity, but also as a moral community. This creates a hard and comprehensive ideological response to the value conflicts created by modernisation. This approach transforms into an active political struggle to redefine the values of society rather than passively preserving them.

In the context of the ideological morphology of Freedman's model, conservative nationalism reconstructs the nation by incorporating elements from a conservative belief system: traditions, cultural continuity, and moral community. Nationalism is not only an ideology concerned with political sovereignty (the nation-state), but also serves as a normative reference for preserving social order.

### **3.4. Nationalism and Fascism**

When nationalism is combined with fascist ideologies, it takes on its most extreme, totalitarian and aggressive forms. In this context, the nation is constructed as a collective subject with a pure and superior historical destiny. The myth of 'national rebirth' (palingenesis), as conceptualised by Roger Griffin (1993), forms the core of this ideological structure and feeds both a repressive policy against internal enemies and a mobilisation reflex against external threats. As in the examples of Nazi Germany and Mussolini's Italy, fascist nation-

nationalism is not limited to ethnic discrimination, but also pursues goals such as the suppression of internal opposition and the transformation of society into a unitary structure (Paxton, 2004).

Racism, militaristic rhetoric, rejection of intellectual pluralism and the cult of the leader are the basic elements of this understanding (Griffin, 1995). Fascist nationalism rejects individual freedoms and rational debate, relying instead on emotion and the idea that the nation is an 'organic' whole. This creates a totalitarian worldview that sees the nation as a single body and the leader as its unshakeable head (Eatwell, 2019). Thus, nationalism ceases to be merely a sense of identity and becomes a political programme that controls all aspects of social life. Through the lens of Freeden's ideational morphological approach to pluralist ideologies, fascist ideology does not regard nationalism as simply one of many ideologies, but as the fundamental premise around which all other components of the ideology – such as the state, leader, cultural purity, and collective destiny – revolve. The national concept becomes the organising axis of the entire ideological system within fascism.

In conclusion, Smith states: "Nationalism is not a unitary, fixed set of tenets and ideals. As doctrine, movement and symbolism, it has proved chameleon-like, capable of almost infinite adaptation and reformulation, while preserving its underlying purposes" (1999, p. 201). The coexistence of different ideologies has led to different practises, but it is noticeable that nationalism has always held the upper hand. The various forms it has taken sometimes show that it can assume dangerous proportions. This shows once again that nationalism is a structure that is difficult to understand but politically effective.

#### **4. The Historical Ideological Transformation of Nationalism**

Throughout history, nationalism has never fitted into a uniform mould, but has emerged in different forms at different times (Breuilly, 1993). On its path from the Enlightenment to the present day, it has sometimes been the bearer of a libertarian discourse and sometimes the legitimiser of authoritarian projects (Kohn, 2017). This section analyses how nationalism took shape at four historical points in time: the 18th century, which began with the idea of the rational citizen; the 19th century, which witnessed the consolidation of

borders and identities; the 20th century, which witnessed the height of ideological oppression; and finally, the 21st century, which is characterised by identity crises, digitalisation and populist movements (Hobsbawm, 1992). Nationalism thus goes beyond the discourse of identity and becomes a decisive touchstone in the interplay of political power struggles, cultural antagonisms and social technologies (Conversi, 2021; Wimmer, 2013). This historical transformation shows that the ideological structure of nationalism should be understood as a conceptual morphology reconfigured in different historical contexts, rather than as a fixed doctrine.

#### **4.1. Origins in the 18th Century and the Enlightenment**

Although the Age of Enlightenment radically changed the concept of government, reason and popular sovereignty, which replaced religious authority, made nationalism not only a symbol of freedom but also the ideological basis for a new form of power. The nation was no longer the product of divine providence, but of the social contract and collective reason. The detachment of political legitimacy from divine origins and its reliance on the will of the people characterised the founding principles of nationalism (Breuilly, 1993; Greenfeld, 1992). Ideas such as Rousseau's concept of the 'general will' or Montesquieu's emphasis on political freedom centred on the right of the people to determine their own destiny and formed the theoretical basis of modern nationalism.

During this period, nationalism developed into a progressive ideology that defended the people's right to self-determination against monarchies. The French Revolution is the most emblematic example of this change: the term "nation" became a category that defined a community of equal citizens and not subjects of the king (Hobsbawm, 1992). Nationalism thus initially developed as an ideology of emancipation based on the right of the people to determine their own political order. However, even at this stage, nationalism was interwoven not only with universal values, but also with a collective sense of belonging and a restrictive construction of identity. This dual character formed the basis for the ideological transformations of nationalism in the following centuries. In this context, the Enlightenment period can be seen as the time when the first conceptual framework emerged, centred on concepts such

as “popular sovereignty”, “citizenship”, and “collective will” within the ideological morphology of nationalism.

#### **4.2. Nation State Building in the 19th Century**

Throughout the 19th century, nationalism functioned not only as a system of thought, but also as a practical process of political construction (Hobsbawm, 1992). The idea of popular sovereignty, which spread after the French Revolution, strengthened the understanding of legitimacy based on the nation and not on monarchical structures. The political union of Germany and Italy has vividly demonstrated the state-building power of nationalism (Breuilly, 1993). The nation state model pioneered the institutionalisation of a collective identity through instruments such as a common language, history, flag and education (Breuilly, 1993; Hobsbawm, 1992). National education policy, centralised military systems and a growing bureaucratic apparatus proved that nationalism functioned not only as an idea, but also as a founding force. As a ‘state-building ideology’, nationalism not only created a common culture, but also provided a normative framework to determine who was considered a citizen, within which borders sovereignty was exercised and to whom loyalty was owed (Gellner, 2006). Because of this powerful ideological role, combined with liberal constitutional models, it defined the political architecture of the 19th century. This process also marks a stage in which the ideological morphology of nationalism was reorganised at the institutional level. The idea of the nation became a permanent political framework, sustaining collective identity by being embodied in modern state institutions such as education, bureaucracy, and military organisation.

#### **4.3. Uses in 20th-Century Totalitarian Regimes**

In the 20th century, nationalism was not only used to strengthen national identity, but also to consolidate the power of authoritarian regimes. As the examples of fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union show, nationalist ideology played a fundamental role in the establishment of central authority, the perception of threats and social mobilisation (Hobsbawm, 1992; Paxton, 2004). In this context, the myth of ‘national rebirth’ connected people with a sense of common destiny and at the same time served as a justification for divisive and marginalising policies (Griffin, 1991). Elements such as ethni-

city, ancestry, language and culture became criteria for defining the boundaries of the 'true' nation. Nationalism was no longer just identity politics but also the vehicle for social engineering projects and authoritarian regimes. The ideological forms of nationalism in this period were interwoven with structures that suppressed the rights of the individual, coded difference as a threat and exaggerated the state. In this way, nationalism lost its earlier emancipatory character and was able to transform itself into a totalitarian apparatus (Arendt, 1951). This development shows that the ideological morphology of nationalism was reconfigured in a narrower and more hierarchical way during this period. The concept of nation merged with ideas such as state, leadership, and cultural purity, becoming central to the ideological framework and the main axis of political legitimacy.

#### **4.4. Nationalism in the Age of Globalization, Populism, and the New Right**

In the 21st century, nationalism is not just a relic of the past, but a dynamic ideological form characterised by new political waves. In an era of accelerated globalisation, in which borders are becoming increasingly permeable on an economic and cultural level, nationalism has regained strength as a reflex to protect national sovereignty (Calhoun, 2007; Wimmer, 2018). The rise of right-wing populism today is fuelled by a deep dissatisfaction with migration, economic inequality and the cultural diversity brought about by globalisation. At the centre of these movements is a populist understanding of nationalism. This understanding constructs the political discourse around sharp distinctions between the people and the elites, between natives and foreigners. This ideological framework forms the basis of the new right. Assumptions about the erosion of national culture reproduce and legitimise an exclusionary identity politics (Mudde, 2007). In this process, digital media become not only a tool, but also a space for the production and circulation of ideology (Maly, 2018). As a result, nationalism, in conjunction with contemporary right-wing populism, becomes a hegemonic discourse that destabilises liberal democratic consensus, which are in a crisis of representation.

The ideological path of nationalism indicates a multi-layered process of transformation determined by historical conditions rather than a static iden-

tity politics. Early forms of nationalism, derived from the ideas of the Enlightenment, redefined the relationship between the individual and society on the basis of principles such as rationality, progress and popular sovereignty (Kohn, 2017). In the 19th century, these principles guided the legal and political institutionalisation of the nation state (Breuilly, 1993; Hobsbawm, 1992). In the 20th century, however, these same structures became repressive ideological apparatuses in the hands of totalitarian regimes that operated on the basis of demands for internal homogeneity and the perception of external threats (Griffin, 1991; Paxton, 2004). Today, the erosion of identity caused by global capitalism and the crisis of political representation have placed nationalism at the centre of populist discourse, redefining it and mobilising it as a force (De Vreese et al., 2018). In the context of this historical continuity, nationalism should not only be understood as a narrative of the “we”, but also as a flexible ideology that restores legitimacy to the political order. This transformation also demonstrates how the ideological morphology of nationalism continues to reorganise in new political contexts, incorporating concepts such as sovereignty, identity, and cultural protection into contemporary populist discourse.

## **5. Ideological Codes of Different Types of Nationalism**

Although nationalism is based on a certain theoretical core, it has manifested itself in various forms across different historical, social and political contexts. These forms point not only to differences in application, but also to the ideological codes they carry. For example, some types of nationalism are based on inclusive frameworks such as citizenship, law and political values, while others draw exclusionary boundaries based on the basis of ethnicity, cultural identity or religious affiliation. In this section, the four main types of nationalism – ethnic, civic, anti-colonial and hybrid nationalism – are analysed in terms of their contextual characteristics and ideological content (Azada-Palacios, 2022). Rather than representing entirely separate ideologies, these types can be understood as different configurations of the ideological morphology of nationalism, reflecting how its conceptual core is reorganised in various historical and political contexts.

### **5.1. Ethnic nationalism: Based on Lineage, blood, religion, language**

Ethnic nationalism tends to base the identity of a nation on innate characteristics such as blood ties, common language, religion and cultural heritage. According to Walker Connor (1994), a nation is a community formed by people who believe that they are descended from a common ancestor. In his view, ethnic ties are stronger and more binding than national ties. In this context, the sociology of nationalism is conceptualised through certain elements and instruments of ethnic identity which form the basis of political mobilisation. Anthony Smith's ethnosymbolic approach draws attention to the fact that the nation is a cultural community that has become a collective public consciousness through its 'myths, symbols and historical memories' (Mentzel, 2025). The link between ethnic identity and nationalism also implies a claim to sovereignty over geography. For this reason, the organic geography in which ethnic identities are rooted is also accepted as the habitat or endemic region of ethnic identities (Schertzer & Woods, 2022). In this context, ethnic nationalism is a configuration in which the concepts of lineage, cultural continuity, and historical belonging hold a central place in the ideological morphology of nationalism. While the restriction of cultural diversity can lead to tensions in society, this form of nationalism can create strong emotional bonds by giving people a sense of belonging to a community and allowing them to cope with past traumas. However, the lack of inclusivity can also make it dangerous.

## **5.2. Civic nationalism: Based on Citizenship, Law, and Political Values**

Civic nationalism defines national identity on the basis of common citizenship, legal equality and shared political values and not on the basis of ethnic origin or cultural characteristics. According to this understanding, the 'nation' is a political community formed by individuals with constitutional rights, regardless of blood ties (Habermas, 1992, 1996; Kohn, 1944). Civic nationalism therefore makes it possible to create a nation that encompasses and unites different segments of society. The paradigm of civic nationalism not only defines citizenship within the framework of positive law, but also constructs it as the ethical and political cornerstone of collective national identity. Habermas' (1996) theories of the "public sphere" and "communicative action" provide a normative framework for this understanding. It has been presented as a liberal form of citizenship based on the tradition of the social contract made famous by the French Revolution, which valorises the idea of the nation

within a framework of common political values and based on universal principles. Although this image has a framework, there have always been debates about who is a citizen and who is not. The framework of shared values provided by civic nationalism can sometimes suppress social differences, leading to problems such as polarisation and exclusion (Brubaker, 1992; Calhoun, 1997). From this perspective, civic nationalism represents a configuration within the ideological morphology of nationalism in which citizenship, legal equality, and shared political values occupy a central position.

### **5.3. Anti-Colonial Nationalism: As an Ideology of Freedom and Independence**

Anti-colonial nationalism contributed to the ideology of the non-European independence movements in the middle of the 20th century (Chatterjee, 1986). This nationalism was not limited to the construction of identity, but also became a symbol of resistance against colonial rule (Fanon, 1963). The fundamental ideological elements of this nationalism, which pursued many goals on the road to independence, included the restoration of suppressed indigenous identities, the restoration of destroyed justice and the recovery of political sovereignty (Young, 2016). Another peculiarity of this nationalism was that it was often intertwined with socialist or populist ideologies and could combine demands for “freedom and equality” with the rhetoric of “national independence” (Anderson, 1983). On the other hand, the goal of restoring identity and gaining political independence often became the dominance of a single cultural narrative; local differences were suppressed and power was reproduced by new national elites (Mamdani, 1996). The new leaders that emerged between the blocs and were defined as the Third World (a term attributed to it from the outside), symbolised by the Non-Aligned Movement, saw themselves as the bearers of a new identity and a new social order in many post-colonial regions (Prashad, 2007). Thus, anti-colonial nationalism became one of the most important axes of reckoning with colonial violence and the founding logic of the post-colonial order. In this sense, anti-colonial nationalism developed into an ideological structure that was just as open to critical analysis as it was to its liberating potential (Chatterjee, 1993). From this perspective, anti-colonial nationalism is a configuration within the ideological

morphology of nationalism, in which the concepts of freedom, sovereignty, and collective liberation occupy a central position.

#### **5.4. Islamist, Socialist and Postcolonial Nationalisms: Hybrid Ideologies**

Nationalism has not always emerged as a singular and pure ideological form. On the contrary, it has adopted hybrid structures and mixed with various ideologies depending on historical conditions and political needs (Anderson, 2006). Over time, nationalism has mixed with other ideologies and taken on hybrid forms. Islamic nationalism redefines national identity on a religious basis, in contrast to the secular and ethnocentric definitions of the West (Bayat, 2007; Voll, 1994). In this understanding, identity stems from faith, holiness and the historical solidarity of the people. In Iran, the revolution was the strongest expression of this resistance: Shiism was no longer just a sect, but the backbone of the nation (Abrahamian, 1982). In Turkey, after 1980, the state systematically built a 'Turkish-Islamic synthesis', which represented both a means against the internal opposition and an ideological position against the West (Findley, 2010; Mango, 1999).

In the meantime, socialist nationalism became the frontline of the oppressed against colonialism and capitalist rule. Vietnam, under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, both repelled imperialism and realised a revolutionary vision of equality (Duiker, 2000). Cuba defended its freedom despite US intervention and combined socialism with national independence (Gott, 2005). Post-colonial nationalism, however, is not just an idea, but a way of surviving. This movement, which Fanon (1963) champions, is the voice of indigenous truths against the narratives of the West.

To the extent that colonial historiography is called into question, resistance becomes not a theory but a question of existence (Chakrabarty, 2000). This nationalism is not only the reconstruction of the past, but also of the present. Nehru's secular state ideology in India or Nkrumah's pan-African vision in Ghana are practical expressions of this kind of nationalism (Getachew, 2019; Nkrumah, 1965). According to this understanding, national identity is not only based on origin, but also on the memory of resistance. Ultimately, these three hybrid forms show how flexible nationalism can be in different ideologi-

cal contexts. Whether on a religious, class-based or cultural level, such nationalisms not only offer alternatives to existing power relations, but also fundamentally question and reconfigure the definition of the nation (Chatterjee, 1993).

As a result, the ideological forms of nationalism differ not only in terms of content, but also in terms of the normative orientations and political functions they fulfil. Ethnic, civic, anti-colonial and hybrid nationalisms, as Freedman (1998) puts it, form around different conceptual clusters and offer ways of understanding specific political worlds. Because of its ability to adapt to different historical and social contexts, nationalism can be seen as a constantly evolving “ideological morphology” rather than a fixed and unchanging ideology. Nationalism is therefore not an essential content, but a system of meanings that changes its form according to the zeitgeist and political needs (Mamdani, 2012; Smith, 2010).

## **6. Criticism and Defence of the Ideology of Nationalism**

Nationalism is a multi-layered ideological phenomenon that has played a crucial role in shaping the modern world. In this context, both oppositional and cautious critiques and intellectual defences of the ideology are assessed. Different approaches, ranging from critical theory to postcolonial thinking, from liberal perspectives to radical critiques, contribute to an understanding of the multi-layered nature of nationalism (Calhoun, 1997). These criticisms and defences show why the ideological morphology of nationalism remains consistently controversial and is reinterpreted through various conceptual frameworks.

### **6.1. The Approaches of Critical Theorists: Nationalism and Ideological Production**

In the Marxist tradition of thought, which takes a counter-position to nationalism, and in the critical theory that follows it, nationalism is treated as an ideological illusion that prevents class reality. For Marx, national identity obscures class interests, weakens the universal struggle of the working class and enables the acquisition of a “false consciousness” through regional identities (Marx & Engels, 1968/2001). Although this idea of the nation makes capitalist contradictions invisible, it also functions as an ideological cloak.

Gramsci's theory of hegemony shows that nationalism is not only a discourse of identity, but also an order of consent in which domination is internalised through language, culture and institutions (Gramsci, 1971). According to Althusser, nationalism works through ideological apparatuses - especially the education system, the media and the family - that turn people into subjects who conform to the existing order (Althusser, 1971). In this sense, nationalism is not just an emotional affiliation, but an institutional guarantee that plays a central role in the reproduction of the system.

Habermas recognises the historical role of the nation-state in the construction of the public sphere, but argues that the idea of 'constitutional patriotism' must be put forward for this structure to be comprehensive (Habermas, 1992). This understanding defends a bond of citizenship based on legal and political values rather than ethnic or cultural values. However, Habermas' approach has been criticised by cultural Marxist thinkers such as Terry Eagleton on the grounds that it neglects the emotional dimension of national identity (Eagleton, 1990).

Hobsbawm assesses nationalism in terms of 'invented traditions' and argues that certain versions of the past are recreated for political purposes (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1992). This fiction creates an illusion of continuity and presents national identity as natural and ancient. Nationalism is seen here as a process of political construction rather than historical truth.

In this critical theoretical framework, nationalism is understood not only as a set of ideas but also as a central means of ideological reproduction of the social order. In Balibar's words, the nation is both a "naturalised ideology" and a practise of demarcation: it is a constitutive form of exclusion that determines who is included and who is excluded (Balibar, 1991). These critiques show that nationalism is not merely a discourse of identity but also constitutes an ideological morphology that operates through the arrangement of different concepts in specific ways. Therefore, nationalism should be understood not only as a discourse of belonging but also as a central ideological mechanism in the processes of legitimising and reproducing the social order.

## **6.2. Postmodern and Postcolonial Critiques: The Crisis of Representation and Hybrid Identities**

Postmodern thinking questions the link between nationalism and grand narratives. Jean-François Lyotard's assertion of the 'end of grand narratives' is aimed directly at holistic identity discourses such as nationalism (Lyotard, 1984). The nation is no longer a fixed subject, but a composition of fragmented, plural, hybrid and temporary identities. Nationalism contradicts this plurality by asserting a normative singularity that suppresses it.

In postcolonial theory, nationalism is both a means of liberation and a means of new forms of domination. Partha Chatterjee opposes a kind of nationalism that copies Western concepts of colonial modernity (nation, state, people) (Chatterjee, 1993). A non-colonial political imagination is only possible in cultural spheres outside of 'national modernity'. According to him, even anti-colonial movements have often reproduced a Western model in the name of nationalism. Nationalism here becomes both the language of resistance and of new domination.

In these critiques, nationalism is seen not only as exclusionary, but also as an ideology that suppresses difference by claiming to represent a single 'essence'. Edward Said's concept of 'Orientalism' is also functional at this point: national identities are defined by discursive superiority built on the Other (Said, 1978). This shows that identity is not an inner truth, but a representation constructed through opposites. In this context, postmodern and postcolonial critiques show that nationalism is neither a fixed nor a natural form of identity, but an ideological structure shaped by specific historical and discursive conditions.

## **6.3. Defences: Liberal Nationalism, Cultural Solidarity and Political Legitimacy**

The idea that nationalism is only a repressive or totalitarian ideology is refuted by modernist and liberal theorists. Ernest Gellner explains nationalism as a structural necessity of modern society (Gellner, 2006). The transition to an industrialised society requires the development of a common high culture. In this process, the overlapping of state and culture makes the nation inevitable. According to Gellner, nationalism is a product of industrial society.

Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities' treats nationalism not as something divisive, but as a social idea (Anderson, 2006). The nation is a community that individuals will never fully understand, but to which they nevertheless feel they belong. This idea is institutionalised through print media, education and official rituals.

Tamir's approach of liberal nationalism proposes a compromise between national identity and individual rights (Tamir, 1993). According to Tamir, people not only need abstract rights, but also concrete forms of belonging. National affiliations create a sense of belonging for the individual, which is necessary for citizenship and democracy. Liberal nationalism is based on a sense of community based on shared political values and not on ethnic or cultural uniqueness.

Greenfeld, on the other hand, sees nationalism as the engine of modernity (Greenfeld, 1992). According to him, nationalism legitimises political participation by making the individual the subject of history. In this case, nationalism is not only an identity, but also the basis for collective action. Ernest Renan, in his text 'What is a nation?', emphasises the desire to live together rather than blood ties or language to define the nation (Renan, 2002). According to him, the nation is based on the common will to make shared memories one's own and to forget certain pasts together. This perspective links nationalism not only with separatism, but also with its power to create community.

One of the conclusions of this paper is that nationalism, as a "charged but unavoidable ideological form", is seen by its opponents as a cover, while its proponents recognise it as the basis of collective identity and political legitimacy. Critical approaches point to its exclusionary nature, historical constructs and ideological domination, while defensive approaches emphasise its ability to create citizenship, the common good and meaningful political belonging. Although nationalism often harbours contradictions, it allows it to respond to changing needs over time. Nationalism, regardless of how often it might be condemned is a crucial element of political life as it provides individuals with a common bond of solidarity. These theories and examples collectively demonstrate to us that nationalism serves not only as a theoretical construct but also as a practical vehicle through which collective identity can

be formed, political legitimacy established and social cohesion maintained in the modern world.

### **Conclusion: The Significance of Considering Nationalism as an Ideology**

Theoretical and political implications of seeing nationalism as an ideology have been presented in this article. This study shows that nationalism is much more than simply an identity-based way to feel belonging; organised in an elaborate structure of beliefs, nationalism has the ability to influence how individuals act to create the political order, produce legitimacy through the exercise of that political order, and define social boundaries between groups. This analysis shows that nationalism is not a fixed content, but can take liberal or authoritarian, inclusive or exclusive forms by combining with different ideological foundations.

The article contributes by analysing nationalism not only as a historical phenomenon or sociological sentiment, but also as an ideological system of thought with the power to generate concepts, assign meaning and establish political rules. Within this framework, the study argues that nationalism constitutes an ideological morphology that operates through the arrangement of different concepts in specific ways. In this respect, nationalism has been remodelled across a broad spectrum, from liberalism to socialism, from fascism to post-colonial resistance. However, this flexibility makes it difficult to analyse. Therefore, nationalism should not be understood as an ideology defined by fixed and immutable codes, but rather as a conceptual structure reconfigured in various historical contexts.

The article does not definitively determine whether nationalism is a normatively justified ideology in this context. This is because nationalism is a contradictory ideological form that can be both redemptive and destructive. This contradictory character makes it necessary both to criticise it and, in some contexts, to understand it.

In today's world, characterised by increasing authoritarianism, cultural insecurity and identity crises, nationalism has once again become a central element in the creation of political meaning. For this reason, nationalism should be seen not only as an ideology of the past but also as an intellectual fra-

nework that remains influential in contemporary political struggles. This article shows that the conceptualisation of nationalism in this framework offers both explanatory and transformative possibilities. This study shows that analysing nationalism within this framework provides significant opportunities to explain and critically evaluate the modern political order.

The analysis presented here shows that nationalism can be examined from several theoretical perspectives. For example, Gellner's modernist approach sees nationalism as a consequence of an industrialised and structured labour force, while Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities' provides a cultural and discursive context for the emergence of nations. Michael Freeden's ideology theory argues that nationalism is an ideological morphology, organising identity, sovereignty, history, and cultural integrity into a distinct conceptual category. These three approaches to analysing nationalism indicate that nationalism is not solely a product of modernity; it also depends on the historical context in which its collective identity narrative develops. Furthermore, nationalism should be understood as an ideologically organised structure, in relation to both modernity theory and the theory of ideological morphology. As such, this analysis gives rise to a framework within which to explain how modern political systems are formed and how to interpret current issues related to identity and legitimacy.

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