Is Nationalism a Distinct Ideology?

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Whether or not nationalism is an ideology is a question that can be illuminated by a study of its conceptual structure. Core and adjacent concepts of nationalism are examined within the context of liberal, conservative and fascist ideologies, contexts that respectively encourage particular ideational paths within nationalist argument, while discouraging others. Employing a morphological analysis of ideological configurations, it is argued that various nationalisms may appear as distinct thin-centred ideologies, but are more readily understood as embellishments of, and sustainers of, the features of their host ideologies.

The categorization of nationalism as an ideology is a matter of some confusion in contemporary political analysis. Textbooks on political ideologies adopt widely different positions. Thus Adams regards nationalism as an ideology, however flawed, observing that 'among modern ideologies, nationalism is the simplest, the clearest and the least theoretically sophisticated, but it is also the most widespread and the one with the strongest grip on popular feeling'. On the other hand, Ball and Dagger note that 'nationalism and anarchism take so many forms and are so entwined with so many different ideologies that we think it better not to treat them as distinct ideologies'. Heywood straddles these poles, stating that 'strictly speaking, nationalism is not an ideology at all in that it does not contain a developed set of interrelated ideas and values’ but nevertheless has a chapter on nationalism in his book. Recent political theorists, by contrast, avoid the question whether nationalism is an ideology by focusing on different issues: investing nationalism with ethical concerns or attempting to construct a model of nationalism that would find favour with contemporary political philosophers, often substituting for it terms such as nationality or nationhood. Yet their readings of their subject-matter may themselves, from a very different methodological perspective, contain clearly ideological features.

For the student of ideologies this state of affairs is far from satisfactory. Given the current interest in nationalism and the rapid increase in scholarly writing on the topic, the question whether or not nationalism is a political ideology needs

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1 This article is a revised version of a paper originally delivered at the Paris–London Seminar in Political Philosophy at the London School of Economics in February 1996.
2 I. Adams, Political Ideology Today (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 82.
posing and requires the development of criteria to enable the formulation of a response. Not surprisingly, such a response turns out to be a complex one. However, one clarification is necessary at the outset: the understanding of an ideology employed here does not relate to the pejorative Marxist usage of ideology as distorted consciousness, reflecting exploitative and alienating power relationships that can be overcome in a socialist society. Rather, it relates to ideologies in the concrete, not as phenomena that ought not to exist, nor as occurring on a truth-falsehood dimension, nor as essentialist, but as those actual and composite thought-patterns of individuals and groups in a society which relate to the way they comprehend and shape their political worlds, and which supply us with crucial clues for understanding political conduct and practices. Those thought-patterns are contextualized on time and space continua.

Specifically, ideologies are configurations of political concepts – such as liberty, democracy, justice, and nationhood – in which particular interpretations of each constituent concept have been selected out of an indeterminate range of meanings they may signify. This indeterminism entails a fundamental pluralism of meaning which is partly captured by Gallie’s notion of essential contestability. Political concepts are contestable both because of the value judgments they express, concerning which no preferred position can be allocated indisputable and incontestable status, and because the intension of any political concept contains more components than any particular instance can hold at a given time.

However, ideologies perform the crucial role of decontesting those concepts by assigning specific meanings that are logically arbitrary, though of great cultural significance, to the indeterminate universe of meanings that political concepts hold. They thus enable meaningful political worlds to be constructed, as well as translating the multiplicity of potential conceptual meaning into the singularity of a political decision, without which politics-cum-power becomes an impossibility. Conventionally, ideologies have been seen as sets of political ideas, beliefs and attitudes that involve the adoption of practices which explain, support, justify or contest socio-political arrangements, and which provide plans of action for public political institutions. The morphological perspective adopted here accepts that functional interpretation but concentrates rather on examining the conceptual configurations that accord any specific instance of an ideology a particular set of identifying meanings.

For nationalism to be an established ideology within a loose framework of family resemblances it will have to manifest a shared set of conceptual features over time and space. On the basis of observed linguistic practices those features will be able to be organized into general core concepts – without which an ideology will lose its defining characteristics as well as its flexibility – and adjacent and peripheral concepts and ideas that colour the core in different ways. The latter include the conceptualization of perimeter practices, through which ideologies interact with, and shape, the concrete world. These structures of conceptual interdependence fix, or limit, the meanings conveyed by the

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6 On the polysemic of words see P. Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning (Fort Worth, Texas Christian University Press, 1976).

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ideological system in toto. This is accomplished by different arrangements of proximity and priority accorded to the constituting concepts of an ideological family.

But in addition, in order to be a distinct ideology, the core of nationalism, and the conceptual patterns it adopts, will have to be unique to itself alone; and in order to be a full ideology it will need to provide a reasonably broad, if not comprehensive, range of answers to the political questions that societies generate. After all, ideologies compete over the ‘correct’ meanings of political concepts, and they tend to abhor conceptual vacuums and to address all the political concepts to be found in a prevailing political language or discourse. They do so by offering recommended routes through the conceptual clusters they utilize; thus one version of liberalism may have on offer a route that conducts the consumer of ideologies from the core concept of liberty decontested as self-development, through the adjacent concept of rights, one of which will be the right to welfare decontested as the provision of the physical, mental or emotional means to such development, and towards related perimeter practices that involve general education, or social security, or the guarantee of minima of property and wages.

Nationalism as a Thin-centred Ideology

How does all this help us to make sense of nationalism? For nationalism to be an ideology, it would have to display one of two structures. It could exhibit a full morphology, containing particular interpretations and configurations of all the major political concepts attached to a general plan of public policy that a specific society requires. That fullness exists either by design, or by default as a reaction to the challenges of ideological rivals. Alternatively, it could exhibit a thin-centred morphology, with a restricted core attached to a narrower range of political concepts.

A thin-centred ideology is one that arbitrarily severs itself from wider ideational contexts, by the deliberate removal and replacement of concepts. The consequence is a structural inability to offer complex ranges of argument, because many chains of ideas one would normally expect to find stretching from the general and abstract to the concrete and practical, from the core to the periphery, as well as in the reverse direction, are simply absent. Thus if nationalism entertains neither practices nor conceptual fundamentals pertaining to welfare policies – a feature of all major ideological systems – a shrinking of the political is inevitable. A thin-centred ideology is hence limited in ideational ambitions and scope. That type of narrow nationalism often abandons mere persuasion in favour of a resort to force exercised over political language and over the practices involved with that language. The power struggle engaged in by narrow nationalism enforces the selection, prioritization and combination of certain political concepts and the elimination of others. The exclusionism which many scholars see in extreme nationalist practice directed against concrete individuals and groups is paralleled in its ideological morphology. Because this requires a form of legitimization, it necessitates some explanation for why circumstances can justify the exclusion, suppression or neglect of other concepts.

9 For the notion of thin-centred ideologies, two of which are feminism and green political thinking, see Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, chaps 13–14.

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and why its limited political programme is a sufficient one. That may be
presented simply as a question of urgency, or it may be one of elevating
nationalism to the apex of political expression.

If, on the other hand, nationalism is not an ideology, we would expect to find
its conceptual arrangements as a component in another, broader, ideological
family. In that case, it is not that nationalism needs to be ‘filled out by other
idea-systems’\(^{10}\) as that it helps to fill them out. We must certainly resist the
temptation proffered by the suffixes of the English language to assume that
every ‘ism’ is ipso facto an ideology.

My contention is that nationalism fails to meet the criteria of a com-
prehensive ideology. Its conceptual structure is incapable of providing on its
own a solution to questions of social justice, distribution of resources, and
conflict-management which mainstream ideologies address. At best, as Lord
Acton noted of theories of nationality, ‘they cannot serve as a basis for the
reconstruction of civil society, as medicine cannot serve for food; but they may
influence it with advantage’.\(^{11}\) Indeed, it has been asserted with some just-
ification that ‘nationalism is clearly an extremely poor ideology and no match
whatsoever for the great bodies of thought that constitute socialism or liberal-
ism’.\(^{12}\) Instead, nationalism oscillates between the second and third possibilities;
between being a distinct thin-centred ideology and being a component of other,
already existing, ideologies. The very different conceptual configurations of
nationalism allow its polysemic variants to develop in these diverse directions.
This is no simplistic dualist assertion. Rather, it is the conceptual parallel to
Smith’s observation that nationalism displays ‘a chameleon-like ability to
transmute itself according to the perceptions and needs of different commu-
nities’.\(^{13}\) The existing literature on nationalism is full of broadly dichotomous
distinctions between liberal and radically-illiberal, liberal and conservative,
moderate and aggressive, risorgimento and integrative, nationalisms. A
morphological approach shows these either to be generalizations from what
actually happens in nationalist discourse, or tangential to it. There are indeed
overarching family resemblances, but they do not capture the internal nuances
of a multi-dimensional set of arguments.

The Core Structure of Nationalism

What, then, is the core of nationalism, the components all users of nationalist
language actually employ, and without which that semantic field is unsustain-
able? First, the prioritization of a particular group – the nation – as a key
constituting and identifying framework for human beings and their practices.
The realized condition in which this occurs is called nationhood. Second, a
positive valorization is assigned to one’s own nation, granting it specific claims

\(^{11}\) Lord Acton, ‘Nationality’, in Essays on Freedom and Power (Cleveland, World Publishing,
\(^{12}\) P. Alter, Nationalism, 2nd ed. (London, Edward Arnold, 1994), p. 118. See also B. Anderson,
Imagined Communities (London, Verso, 1991), p. 5: ‘It would, I think, make things easier if one
treated [nationalism] as if it belonged with “kinship” and “religion”, rather than with “liberalism”
or “fascism”.’
\(^{13}\) Smith, Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era, p. 13.
over the conduct of its members. Third, the desire to give *politicoinstitutional expression* to the first two core concepts. Fourth, *space and time* are considered to be crucial determinants of social identity. Fifth, a sense of belonging and membership in which *sentiment and emotion* play an important role.

As with all sets of political beliefs and ideological families, we must not expect the core concepts of nationalism to be sufficient to account for the *complexity* of all forms and instances of nationalism, or to bear the *totality* of beliefs incorporated in any one variant of nationalism. Rather, they are necessary for identifying any given instance as *belonging* to the family of nationalisms. Its core concepts will be found at a level of abstraction which requires further *concretization* through multiple, often incompatible, and hence competing, adjacent and peripheral concepts and ideas. On their own, core concepts are too vacuous to contain the meanings necessary to provide interpretations of political reality and plans for political action. Hence each core concept of nationalism – as shall presently be demonstrated – logically contains a number of possible meanings. These meanings are established by adjacent and peripheral concepts that radiate out from the core, forming interpretative paths, each path constituting a different pattern of conceptual combinations in conjunction with the core concept. However, in order to endow an essentially contestable core concept with a decontested meaning, a choice among these paths has to be made. That choice will depend on cultural, social and historical preferences for surrounding the core with a given set of political concepts from among the competing configurations. The core concepts of nationalism may hence be attached to as many adjacent and peripheral concepts and ideas as there are interpretations of nationalism, though both nationalists and students of nationalism may prefer to bunch together the ensuing multiple nationalisms in clusters, whose constituents will each contain roughly similar configurations. The different adjacent and peripheral notions that comprise all these possible interpretative paths supply the varieties of nationalism with their richness, thicknesses and irreconcilable diversities. Nevertheless, the core concepts of nationalism cannot rival the possibilities available to the mainstream ideologies such as conservatism, liberalism or socialism – all of which have core conceptual structures which permit a far fuller range of responses to socio-political issues. Whether or not the nationalist core will then constitute a thin-centred ideology or be assimilated into existing ideological families will reflect the extraneous proximities forged by socio-cultural factors. Having a distinctive core does not as such rule out being a segmented component of a broader political ideology.

The first core concept already allows for different readings: the nation as a group may be homogeneous, it may be holistic, or it may be pluralistic. A homogeneous group refers to its perceived scope and singularity, and the nationalism concerned will relate to an ‘imagined community’ called the nation-state (or aspiring to be one), and will be reluctant to accept national diversity.

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14 Alter suggests that ‘disrespect for and animosity towards other peoples’ is a common structural component of nationalism, but there is no evidence that this is a necessary component (see Alter, *Nationalism*, p. 3). Rather, the emphasis is on what Breuilly has called the celebratory ‘quality of self-reference’ (J. Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, 2nd ed. (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1983), p. 64).

15 Some scholars also suggest that national identity or nationalism are activating principles, but that is merely a fundamental feature of an ideology in general – its shaping and identification of political practices. See respectively Miller, *On Nationality*, p. 24, and Alter, *Nationalism*, p. 4.
A holistic group refers to the intensity of the constituting tie between it and its members, and the nationalism concerned will contain certain assumptions about the nation’s independent attributes and will be reluctant to accept the detachment of individuals from national aims, though different degrees of holism may apply. If the group is both homogeneous and holistic, the chances are that we are facing an organic theory in which the individual is subservient to a monolithic set of values attached to national wills and purposes. If, however, the group is conceived as pluralistic, the nation is at least partially defined and interpreted through relationships among spatially proximate groups, ethnic, religious, or cultural (though one group may be dominant); and another political concept, usually the state, is called in to provide a political framework as a form of supra-national identity, or as a substitute for it. Thus the goal of full citizenship may, as with black aspirations in the USA, be the route to and expression of membership in a nation.16

The second core concept also allows for different readings. One familiar distinction occurs when the positive valorization is also a privileged one, bringing into play adjacent concepts of loyalty demands directed at members, and superiority claims directed at other nations. This interpretation will, of course, gain support from a holistic decontestation of the first core concept. The ensuing externalization of nationalism – its frequent engagement in the international arena – is mainly a function of the high salience its core concepts acquire in a world of nations as the dominant actors. Nationalism operates at its best in the international sphere because its conceptual structure fits in well with a simplified political world in which nation-states are the main actors and acquire a prominence and power they rarely do in national fora. For the same reason its domestic agenda is weak, as it has to contend with a multiplicity of complex social structures, principles and priorities that dissipate the salience of its core. The nation as ideological construct has a sharper definition in competition with other nations. When it appears as a thin-centred distinct ideology it will struggle against other instances of the same ideological family – other nationalisms, as witnessed in the Northern Ireland situation. When it is an adjunct to other ideological families, such as liberalism, socialism, or fascism, it will compete against other ideologies not as nationalism, but as part of a broader ideological structure, and it will then relate to the broader concerns of the ideologies it attacks. Yet another path from the core is possible when, as Hall has suggested, ‘nations can develop together in a positive sum game’.17 Patriots may extol their nation without denigrating others.18

The third core concept relates to the close association between a sense of nationhood and the desire to create a political forum through which it can be represented. The most obvious form is the state for, as MacCormick has contended, this may well be a function of ‘a context in which the dominant politico-legal culture asserts the unity of state and nation’.19 That contextualism is the precise reason for proffering the nation-state combination as one conceptual

18 On the relationship between patriotism and nationalism, see below.

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proximity among many. Other quasi-autonomous or federalist solutions have been mooted, and national aspirations can also attach themselves to varieties of imperialism. When the first two core concepts of nationalism have attained a high degree of salience within a political culture, the result is often an understanding of the political, and its institutional forms, as tantamount to the implementation of nationalist ends. However, all types of nationalism seek institutional recognition.

The fourth core concept involves the privatization of, and often exclusive control over, stated space and time parameters. It constitutes a type of particularism that can be justified in terms of competing notions of national space – geographical, linguistic, cultural, biological. These are generally reinforced by an association of space with time: the continual occupation of land, the inherited ties of family in possessions and blood, the evolving cultural domain of language. Time is usually constructed as an invented continuity designed to cover fragmentary historical evidence. It is occasionally attached to a founding myth and an ultimate destiny, that is, to fixed points in past and future, or it may be evolutionary and open-ended. Moreover, even within one nation diverse constructions and myths about time and space may compete over exclusive legitimacy.

The fifth core concept refers to sentiment and emotion as the bases for socio-political ties. Philosophers often aspire to be free of the non-reflective emotionalism seen to characterize ideological thinking. All ideologies, however, carry emotional attachments to particular conceptual configurations, both because fundamental human values excite emotional as well as rational support, and because ideologies constitute mobilizing ideational systems to change or defend political practices. Emotive argument is a crucial short-cut to attain rational ends, and then to support them without having to re-open the debate. In nationalism, however, the role of emotion becomes an overriding consciously desired value – which is why it contains such useful sets of ideas when recruitment to the flag and sacrifice are predominant political ends. Nationalism is a rare instance of enlightenment-generated rational political thought that acknowledges the political importance of emotion when pointed in certain directions. Nationalism institutionalizes and legitimates emotion as a motive force of political, not just private, life.

Multiple Nationalisms

The core concepts of nationalism are too indeterminate to make sense on their own. They require further proximate concepts to enable us to appreciate how these geographical, linguistic, cultural or biological spaces, and memories, sequences, and events, are transformed into supportive structures for nationalism. Adjacent concepts such as democracy, power, political obligation, ethnicity, liberty, community, state are now brought to bear on the core in a wide range of combinations. The choice among, and configuration of, these concepts also

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21 The two concepts overlap sufficiently to consider them as one for the purposes of this argument.
22 For a helpful assessment of the role of sentiment in nationalism – and the message this comports to political philosophers – see Miller, *On Nationality*, pp. 15, 56, 64.
affect the political arrangements sought, which vary from statehood, to a federal status, to forms of regional or cultural autonomy. Once we understand the micro-structure of ideological morphology, the semantic field of nationalism begins to unfold.

As noted above, conceptual indeterminacy permits the construction of alternative interpretative routes through logically possible configurations of the core, adjacent and peripheral concepts pertaining to nationalism. We may, for example, surround the concept of the nation (decontest as one of many identity-constituting groups) with the adjacent concepts of democracy (decontest as the equal participation of all in the running of a community), liberty (decontest as the pluralistic choice over the expression of one’s group identity, or liberation from external oppression), power (decontest as control over one’s national policies), and citizenship (decontest as the recognition of individual membership as a complex of duties and rights), and with perimeter practices concerning the ability to opt in and out of national membership without loss of standing, and the accessibility and development of shared cultural artefacts. But a cultural choice to pursue other logical paths may create a very different semantic field within the family of nationalisms. We could decontest the nation as inherently superior to its members, and surround it with the adjacent concepts of hierarchical authority (decontest as the sole location of national will), community (decontest as a homogeneous ascriptive group whose membership features are involuntary and natural), liberty (decontest as the release of the nation from constraints in attaining whatever ends its leaders, representing the national will, set it), and power (decontest as necessary to assert the superior national interest against a host of potential internal and external detractors). We could then add perimeter practices concerning the restriction of immigration, the enforcing of language on all members of the nation, the positive valuation of compulsory military service, and the development of rituals in which emotional ties to the nation are given priority over other bonds. Of course, there are countless other conceptual variations. Crucially, political concepts acquire meaning not only through accumulative traditions of discourse, and not only through diverse cultural contexts, but also by means of their particular structural position within a configuration of other political concepts.

Let us examine this more closely. The concepts of liberty and democracy can account for different nationalist variants. Historically, the liberty dimension of nationalism preceded its democratic dimension. Many theorists of nationalism attach a positive understanding of national identity to the desire to encourage the growth of liberty, whether through the wish to throw off the shackles of tyrannical regimes and to enable a population to rule itself – an aspiration voiced by J. S. Mill and Mazzini – or as a valuable form of patriotism as the love of one’s people. But in many such cases the promotion of nationhood is merely a means to the enhancement of liberty and a range of humanist enlightenment values. Nationalism is a subservient and partial component of broader ideologies.

To understand the separate growth of nationalism, as a narrow doctrine, another conceptual path must be taken which highlights a specific ideational overlap between liberty and democracy. One of the components of liberty is the

removal of restraints over the making of choices concerning one’s life plans. One of the components of democracy is the removal of restraints over the choice-making of a group. The common component is often called self-determination. In neither case is this a total characterization of either liberty or democracy. But once the self-determination component of liberty is emphasized (rather than the opportunity, or growth, components), and once the self-determination component of democracy is emphasized (rather than the equality, or the more republican participation, components), both liberty and democracy risk being taken over entirely in the cause of the self-determination argument. A particular kind of nationalism may flourish by underplaying the equality and participation elements of democracy and over-emphasizing the self-determination ones, with their egoistic and atomistic connotations, reflecting as they do a social individualism in the inter-social sphere. Various nationalisms can extract these particular usages of liberty and of democracy in ways that support the core concepts of nationalism. In so doing they employ a plethora of conceptual arrangements, ranging from promoting the self-determination of all nations (retaining an egalitarian component) to promoting the self-determination of the nation over that of its members (jettisoning the egalitarian and participatory components altogether). As we move among different nationalist morphologies, the object from which liberation occurs alters as well. It shifts from the oppressor, the colonizer, the tyrannical government, to the foreigner, the stranger, the alien. In extreme illiberal forms, nationhood is defined by means of artificially imposing outsider status on any unwanted group, thus excluding them from social and citizenship benefits. An arbitrary criterion – race, religion, occupation, culture – is invented, or grossly distorted, which by definition removes the preferred values and practices of the ‘outsiders’ from the imposed ideological morphology, from nationally monopolized social space and time, and from dominant political languages. Liberty becomes extrication from contamination; democracy becomes the expression of the innermost ‘soul’ of the nation.

**Nationalism and Community**

The link between democracy and various conceptions of community may either assist or impede nationalist arguments. Democracy and nationhood become proximate not only via the route of self-determination but via the alternative route of group interests and consciousness. The appeal of democracy contains among others the element of membership in an egalitarian whole. This can be swung in the direction of aggregative views of individualistic human relations (as in utilitarian theories) or of various theories of interdependence. At this point many notions of community may emerge which in turn feed into different variants of national identity. However, ‘community’ should not be treated as a constant, undifferentiated concept, but one which evokes many levels of intensity and embeddedness. Thus, conceptions of the common good may be merely co-operative, or they may invoke organicist theories. Socialists

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24 See Canovan, Nationhood and Political Theory, p. 87.
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such as Otto Bauer may claim that ‘only socialism will give the whole people a share in the national culture’, via control over the means of production.\textsuperscript{27} Indeed, we may note the victory of the term ‘nationalization’ over the term ‘socialization’ in socialist language to denote the retrieval by the community of its own property. The nation signifies the repository of social goods and values. But the semantic field of nationalization is closely controlled by being held adjacent to the core socialist concepts of equality and community. Contrast these conceptions of community with Treitschke’s observation: ‘Every nation over-estimates itself. Without this feeling of itself it would also lack the consciousness of being a community; as Fichte truly said, “a nation cannot dispense with arrogance”’.\textsuperscript{28} Here the meaning of community-cum-nation was secured through its adjacency to an exclusionary superiority.

Canovan has persuasively argued that liberalism builds upon the tacit assumption that nations are given, that emotional solidarity, power relationships, and cultural identity constitute the unconscious presuppositions of contemporary political theory.\textsuperscript{29} Tamir has shown that nationalism can provide liberals with the ‘national virtue of embeddedness’ that liberalism otherwise is believed to lack.\textsuperscript{30} The complexity of ideological morphology must, however, also cause us to heed that the presence of community in an ideology does not necessarily indicate that it has been introduced via nationalism alone.\textsuperscript{31} There are trends in Western political theories and ideologies that attempt to isolate the concept of community from time and space. Some of these are outside the family of liberalisms: thus Marxist species being, not national being, is an essentialist category of human nature.\textsuperscript{32} Some appear within current political philosophy, claiming that human beings are embedded in a community, but again this is couched in terms of a supra-historical, universalist and generic statement of philosophical anthropology.\textsuperscript{33} Others emphasize the voluntarist nature of a national community, constituted by analogy as a liberal political community.\textsuperscript{34} Yet others point to the strength of sentiment in forging a common national identity, while allowing outsiders willing to accept that identity the choice of membership.\textsuperscript{35}

We need to note that organicist theories, models of political cohesion, and conceptions of affective ties may be gleaned from non-nationalist as well as nationalist conceptual configurations. The notion of a group, and of group-interests, may be endorsed on a variety of grounds without transporting the argument into the domain of nationalism. Conversely, liberalism may even consciously adopt a communal focus that is nationalist. In the German political tradition, liberalism typically developed a national orientation, as the German

\textsuperscript{27} O. Bauer, in O. Dahbour and M. R. Ishay (eds), \textit{The Nationalism Reader} (Atlantic Highlands NJ: Humanities, 1995), p. 185.


\textsuperscript{31} See also the strictures in M. Billig, \textit{Banal Nationalism} (London, Sage, 1995), pp. 167–8, who criticizes the assumption in Richard Rorty’s writings that the community entails the nation.


\textsuperscript{34} Tamir, \textit{Liberal Nationalism}, pp. 19, 87, 117.

\textsuperscript{35} Miller, \textit{On Nationality}, pp. 64, 130.
Rechtsstaat epitomized a concern for the rational safeguarding of the liberties of its members, yet the emancipated Volk afforded a more concrete interpretation of the general interest – the state containing the irrationality of the Volk and the Volk containing the impersonality of the state.36

The Eclipse of Thin-centred Nationalism

When nationalism stands on its own as a dominant set of political ideas, it exhibits a distinctive kind of thin-centredness. Unlike mainstream ideologies, whether liberalism, conservatism, socialism, and unlike other thin-centred ideologies such as feminism and green political thinking, thin-centred nationalism discards the general validity of its assertions as a universal organizing principle of political ideas. It does not aspire to compete successfully with, and permeate, other political languages and semantic fields in the international arena but, frequently, to ignore them. Moreover, unlike feminist and green ideologies, it does not have recourse to the self-contained morphologies of other ideologies in order to fill its ideational vacuums.37 The competition it conducts over the correct meanings of political terms takes place mainly within the one, unique, nation and, if internationalized, only in order to establish the superiority of the particular. Thus Treitschke’s nation state was decontested as the will to power through which the ‘highest welfare of the human race’ could be attained.38 War was the perimeter practice which best embodied the superiority of the state in comparison to its members; ‘The grandeur of history lies in the perpetual conflict of nations’.39 Treitschke’s exclusionist Völkisch nationalism was underpinned by the strong emotion of pride: ‘The real German is absolutely not to be confounded with any other people’.40 And Maurras prioritized Patrie over mankind as an absolute value, a deified goddess.41 In that sense nationalism finds a special affinity with fascism, whose particularism and inward-looking nature distinguish it from the universalist tendencies of other ideological families.

However, we have so far focused our attention on the core concepts of nationalism, the independent variables, and examined how a plethora of key political concepts are organized around them. That is standard procedure for the analysis of the main ideologies, which have developed a concrete and stable profile over time. The problem with nationalism is that to proceed in this fashion is partly deceptive. A number of concepts adjacent within the morphology of nationalism, concepts such as liberty, community, or democracy, form the cores of other, mainstream ideologies. The proximity of these concepts to the nationalist principles of group, sentiment, or spatial identity may well reflect the adjacency, rather than centrality, of nationalist principles to the mainstream ideological structures. It is really a question of what is adjacent to what? Are, for instance, democracy and community glosses on nationhood, or are nationhood,

37 Freeden, Ideologies and Political Theory, p. 486.
38 Treitschke, Politics, p. 588.
39 Treitschke, Politics, pp. 21, 66.
40 Treitschke, Politics, p. 280.
and nationalism more generally, a gloss on ideologies in which democracy and community play a crucial part? If a notion of nationhood is indeed a ubiquitous phenomenon, as Canovan contends, this does not rule out its being located in many ideologies somewhere on the margins of significance, rather than as a deliberate or central constituting principle. Because concepts are crucially defined by their idea-environments and their meaning cannot be accessed on its own, those various features will display different meanings when placed in alternative ideological morphologies. If we adopt this perspective, nationalism as a distinct, if thin, ideology begins to collapse, even though many of its features remain in a more peripheral role within, say, liberalism or conservatism. In that case it may well be that ‘when nation and state are coextensive . . . all the parties are “nationalist” in the sense that the nation they represent already has a state of its own; “nationalism” is taken for granted’. More precisely, as Benner has demonstrated with respect to Marxism, nationalism ‘cannot be analysed . . . as a phenomenon *sui generis*. Instead, it serves more fundamental goals.

There are however instances when nationality may become “a paramount claim” even for liberals, but only in the contingent and ephemeral circumstances of liberation from national oppression, or competition over a particular space. In that curious sense, a thin-centred nationalism may arise within a broader liberal context, as well as from non-liberal contexts, but it will be time-specific, emerging only in crises when liberationist or secessionist problems occur (nation-building, conquest, external threat, disputed territory, or internal dominance of a cultural or ethnic group perceived as hostile) and the political system becomes predominantly devoted to such issues. However, once the goals of nationalism are attained it has, like a realized utopia, nowhere to go. It becomes obsolete, or – if enduring – absorbed in ritualistic assertions of achievement, once again attached to broader universalistic ideologies. This thin-centred nationalism displays a sporadic diachrony in its separate ideological guise, and it attains longer life only when contained in larger vessels. It is, arguably, the only instance when nationalism may be identified as a separate ideology, and its tenuousness and ephemerality speaks for itself.

**Nationalism and its Host-vessels**

**Liberalism**

When nationalist ideas are found in host ideologies, they reflect the features of the host. It is therefore more accurate to talk not of a liberal nationalism but of the areas of nationalist discourse within liberal ideologies. Mill’s discussion of nationality illustrates that it cannot be removed from a constraining context of ‘equal justice’, ‘equal consideration’, ‘freedom’ and ‘concord’ that takes precedence over nationality. Acton – an older-type liberal, property-respecting and anti-interventionist – related it to true republicanism, ‘the principle of self-government in the whole and in all the parts’, thus simply extending the intension of this liberal concept of self-government to include federal as well as

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44 Acton, ‘Nationality’, p. 155.
45 Alter, *Nationalism*, p. 34.

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unified nation states. Tamir’s recent project aims to ‘place[ ] national thinking within the boundaries of liberalism’. Of course, the complex relationship between core and periphery in all ideologies ensures that a temporary emphasis on nationalist ideas may itself elevate them to an adjacent position from whence they may exercise influence on core liberal understandings of liberty, progress and tolerance. But this occurs within a semantic field delineated by those core features.

Nationalist concepts within liberal ideologies also reflect the universalism of liberalism. For liberals, nationalism has always included the bestowing of an equal right to national expression on a wide range of similar nations. However, liberals more frequently locate the concept of the nation in a morphological position adjacent to another liberal core concept: thus popular sovereignty is decontested as national self-determination, itself an offshoot of the core concept of liberty. Nevertheless, liberalism is equipped with a variety of conceptual arrangements through which to ensure the legitimacy of the state, only one of which operates through attaching that institution to the concept of a nation. Nationalist arguments certainly do not provide sufficient conditions for such legitimation within liberalism, and often fail even to provide necessary ones.

But tensions still abound. For one, liberalism itself now reflects the universalism/particularism divide. Merely to state, as some scholars have done, that a synthesis between universalism and particularism takes place is unedifying. Detailed conceptual analysis is required to establish the different kinds of synthetic mixture available. Initially, constraints on liberal universalism applied – as in the case of Acton – in the form of a desire to encourage different kinds of national expression in diverse societies. Here a pluralist liberalism as the host-ideology is dominant, and is put in the service not of freedom as self-development, but of freedom from the unnecessary intervention of government. This principle was extended by liberals from individuals to groups, as in Hobhouse’s reiteration of Mazzini’s position that ‘every nation had its own peculiar function to fulfil in the life of humanity’. But he also observed that national rights had to be found a place within the unity of the state in order to make room for diversity. Writing on Irish Home Rule, Hobhouse adopted a majoritarian view, arguing for the legitimacy of a lesser ‘Belfast’ nationalism, but only when operating within a wider ‘Dublin’ one.

These liberal themes have been extended to embrace the new awareness of multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity. Nationhood is incorporated into the new pluralism of the liberal host-ideology, accepting groups and communities as formative social units, but it must often compete on equal terms with the claims of other non-national groups. Nevertheless, liberals may have to deny – as

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48 Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, pp. 4, 12.
50 See Guibernau, *Nationalisms*, p. 53.
52 Acton, ‘Nationality’, pp. 159–60.
54 ‘Under conditions of security, I will acquire a more complex identity than the idea of tribalism suggests … I will be an American, a Jew, an Easterner, an intellectual, a professor … When identities are multiplied, passions are divided’ (M. Walzer, ‘The New Tribalism’, quoted in Dahbour and Ishay, *The Nationalist Reader*, p. 332).
Hobhouse did – what Miller terms ‘radical multiculturalism’ and opt instead for arrangements by which minorities share in the common and larger culture and sense of identity, while simultaneously preserving formative elements of their separate identities.\textsuperscript{55} Another perspective on the universalistic-particularistic dimension asserts the constitutive inevitability of both elements. As MacCormick has argued, since all individuals are contextualized liberalism must include respect for a sense of national identity and belonging as part of the self-understandings of individuals.\textsuperscript{56} These positions are interestingly compatible with Kristeva’s understanding of the nation both as a series of differences and as a general interest. According to that view, particular rights need to be highlighted as well as integrated, though not absorbed, into a Montesqueuian \textit{esprit générale} offering identifying space. That space is typified by defining (and hence dominant) cultural and political features, in this case the principles of the French enlightenment.\textsuperscript{57}

However, another tension within liberalism, relating to political obligation, reduces the possibility of a rupturing competition between nationalism and other group allegiances. Nationalism obviates consent/promising as the preferred liberal method of settling the issues of legitimacy and obedience and offers instead non-reflective and non-voluntarist grounds – memories, proximity, kinship, and the emotionalism of passion and loyalty – as the basis for eliciting support for state or group activity. The advent of the nation-state has established an additional level of supra-political obligation, not accounted for in contract theory, which strikes an uncomfortable note for liberals. Political obligation is no longer directed solely at governments and civil societies, or even at states \textit{simpliciter} – that is, at politically responsible institutions and rational processes – and it can therefore no longer be tested in the breach. For how can civil disobedience be directed not at a government or state, but at the nation itself as the ultimate focus for, and underpinning of, allegiance? Civil and political disobedience have been couched in terms of disregard for a law or authoritative rule, not for a cultural practice, a blood tie, or a sentimental attachment. No wonder that nationalist discourse is still assigned marginal status in liberal morphologies. In that case it may yet withstand the fragmenting tendencies of post-modernist analysis.\textsuperscript{58} In contrast, Treitschke’s narrow nationalism proceeds much further on this logical route. Distinguishing between civil society – an arena of \textit{internal} conflict endorsed by liberalism – and the state, with its ‘moral sanctity’, Treitschke removed the realm of political obligation as contract entirely from his morphology: ‘In all my life I have never once thought of my moral obligations towards [civil] society, but I think constantly of my countrymen, whom I seek to honour as much as I can’.\textsuperscript{59}

\textit{Conservatism}

The relationship between nationalism and conservatism is slightly more complex than that between nationalism and liberalism, though there is still a

\textsuperscript{55} Miller, \textit{On Nationality}, pp. 130–40.

\textsuperscript{56} MacCormick, ‘Liberalism, nationalism and the post-sovereign state’, p. 565.


\textsuperscript{59} Treitschke, \textit{Politics}, pp. 45–9.

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case to be made for subsuming nationalism within conservative core concepts. The two main core notions of conservatism concern an insistence on controlled organic and natural change, and a belief in the extra-human origins and underpinning of the social order. Both notions align easily with certain interpretations of the nationalist core concepts. The organicist conception of community, discussed above, has an important bearing on this issue, for another distinction which can now be added to that conception is the distinction between spatial and temporal organicism. The one refers to synchronic interrelationships, a generic condition of human interdependence at any given point in time, in real or imagined space, such as Durkheim’s organic solidarity or Marx and Engels’s slogan ‘working men of all countries, unite!’ Both socialisms and left-liberalisms have adopted it irrespective of nationalist discourse, though not ruling the latter out. Conservative discourse has occasionally had recourse to spatial organicism, but often of a hierarchical nature, as in the Victorian idea of ‘my station and its duties’.

Temporal organicism is however more typical of well-known instances of conservatism. It refers to diachronic historical continuity, intimating the Burkean conception of natural growth, and employing a view of historical time as accumulative. This perception of time can be buttressed by a reading of nationalism as incorporating ‘the possession in common of a rich heritage of memories’, though as Renan rightly observed, those memories will include a great deal of forgetting as well. Expressed differently, the less liberal the nationalism, the more insistent it will be on the construction and legitimation of a selective and singular national or folk memory that takes no account of broader historical frameworks. This particularization of time is in marked contrast to its universalization by other historically-inspired political theories such as Hegelianism or Marxism. The group known as the nation can be constructed to reinforce the conservative conceptual configuration and support the crucial growth metaphor. Even Herder, often seen as a founder of a liberal nationalism linked to freedom as a differential, pluralistic self-realization among nations, reflected this conservative motif, by regarding spiritual and cultural unity as the basis of a natural political community, a Volk, over time, and drawing upon both spatial and temporal organicism.

The retroactive appeal to the naturalness of nations offers important support for conservative forms of social control. The general reference to the extra-human sanctification of the social order shields a system of government, and the social order it maintains, from unwanted criticism. If not only time evolves on a

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60 For an elaboration of this argument see Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, pp. 317–47.

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growth model, but the nation too is seen as natural, nationalist core ideas can powerfully uphold conservative ideologies. Maistre, for example, decreed that ‘no nation has ever succeeded in developing by written constitutional laws rights other than those present in its natural constitution’.66

**Fascism**

Within fascism, too, a variant of nationalism emerges which is crucially supportive of a host ideology, but only as a part of a larger whole, whose core concepts include not only the nation, but also leadership, totalitarian organicism, myth (determinist and/or anti-modernist), regenerative revolution, and violence.67 Fascism decontest the concept of the nation in a specific way precisely because of its proximity to these other core notions. However, alone among the major ideological families, fascism recognizes the nation as a core concept, although in doing so it is prone to considerable conceptual crudity. The particular attraction between fascism and nationalism lies in the fact that both locate the concept of the nation in their respective cores, though beyond that the core similarities diminish. As for the naturalness of social features, to which both conservatives and fascists appeal, this may invoke very different conceptual patterns. When race is employed by fascists as the constituent of community, naturalness relates to virtually impermeable physical, therefore spatial, boundaries not conducive to the moderate vista of change offered by conservative growth, let alone the quasi-voluntarism evident in liberal comunitarianism.

Consequently, the thought-patterns of fascism, as well as its political practices, may seem to fluctuate between appearing solely as a thin-centred nationalism and assimilating nationalist argument to broader ends. But the thinness of an independently-standing nationalism suggests that the latter is the more plausible approach; indeed, the precise decontestation of the nationalist component of fascism is, as Griffin has argued, a populist ultra-nationalist (that is, illiberal) variety.68 In the terms employed here, fascism attaches the concept of the nation to an extreme valorization of one’s own nation. That valorization is constrained by markedly irrational myths that help to constitute a conception of the national group, as well as its aggressive location in space and time. Its expression necessitates the concept, as well as the practice, of violence as a manifestation of political will and power. But the fascist core cannot be contained in that form and will also include concepts of leadership, regenerative revolution, and totalitarianism absent from thin-centred nationalism, all of which appear in different fascist configurations.


Nationalism and Emotion

The core concept of sentiment and emotion – a peculiarity of nationalist argument – has differential impact on various ideological configurations. Though human emotion is often recognized by political philosophers, it has been contained – as with Hegel – in the realms of the private, the family, its immediacy considered to be inferior to mediated and reflective thought.69 As second wave feminists have frequently pointed out in a different context, Western modern political thought lacks the vocabulary to conceptualize emotion in the public sphere.70 In liberal host ideologies nationalism is the only form of acceptable emotion, carefully surrounded by other constraining concepts. Mill referred to the ‘sentiment of nationality’, consisting of ‘collective pride and humiliation, pleasure and regret, connected with the same incidents in the past’.71 Acton talked of the ‘national sentiment’ and ‘a community of affections and instincts’ – though the latter have to be tamed through a framework of laws and obligations. ‘Self preservation’, he contended, ‘is both an instinct and a duty’.72 Mazzini reflected the liberal mixture between the ‘sentiment of love, the sense of fellowship’ and a rational approach to a ‘community of work and purpose’. Within liberalism, national feeling is often referred to as patriotism, a positively evaluated term. Though conceptually and historically distinct from nationalism, this is not necessarily true of its actual usage. Patriotism accords nationalist ideas moderation and respectability and is located adjacent to core, universal liberal concepts such as liberty, limited government, and participatory self-government.73 ‘I adore my Country’, wrote Mazzini, ‘because I adore a Country in the abstract; I adore our Liberty, because I believe in abstract Liberty; our rights, because I believe in abstract Right’.74 This epitomizes the way in which ideologies harness reason and emotion.

Only in extreme twentieth century ideologies of the right is emotion exploited as a prime means of mobilizing mass support, moving beyond the arational ‘holy passion’ of Maurras75 to irrational practices such as the Nuremberg mass rally, commensurate with Hitler’s portrayal of nationalism as ‘a driving force . . . of fanatical, even hysterical passion’.76 Significantly, this emotionalism singles out national will, not national reason. It is then let loose to dominate the conceptual morphology, attached only to an unconstrained version of power located in pseudo-heroic elites, and the political practice it endorses is violence. Conservatives, on the other hand, recognize the centrality of emotion in human conduct, but seek to contain it as a source of evil as well as good and appeal to moral instincts, to a quasi-mystical national consciousness,77 and – as with

70 See e.g. C. Gilligan, In a Different Voice (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1993).
71 Mill, Considerations on Representative Government, p. 360.
72 Acton, ‘Nationality’, pp. 152, 163.
76 Quoted from Mein Kampf in Koselleck, ‘Nationalismus’, Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe, p. 402.
Oakeshott – to the comfort of long-standing temporal proximity. Renan insisted that community of interests alone does not make for nationality; it must be supplemented by soul, by ‘a heritage of glory and grief to be shared’. The various uses of emotion are methods of locking conceptual relationships into place, preventing or permitting internal morphological flexibility and legitimating certain types of argument.

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Many current explorations of nationalist thought are based on a functionalist view of what nationalism does to, and for, the groups it pervades, or on the styles of politics it involves, or on the ethical propriety of its contentions, or on its ideational genesis. When they do relate directly to ideological families, rough and sweeping dualistic categorizations are frequently in evidence. It has been argued here that a morphological analysis of nationalism is a more appropriate aid to understanding both the diversity and commonality of nationalism. Its focus is on the thought-product itself, on the idea-artefacts produced and consumed by a given society, through which we can best appreciate the features of an ideology. Such an analysis allows us to assess whether nationalism is an independent ideology, and to examine the nature of its complex relationships with the comprehensive ideologies with which it intersects. When understood as an ideational phenomenon that displays variegated conceptual configurations, nationalism appears as a plastic structure, reflecting the even greater complexities of its broader host containers. Only when it occasionally attempts to stand on its own does its ideational paucity come to light. To reduce nationalism to its thin-centred form may well be an effective and forceful political tool in the hands of political actors, but as a general characterization of nationalism it employs abstractions and truncations which serious students of politics should eschew.

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79 Renan, ‘What is a Nation?’, pp. 201–2.