



**Title:** The Endurance of Nationalism: Ancient Roots and Modern Dilemmas

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**N**ationalism pervades the modern world, yet its origins, nature and prospects remain clouded by confusion and controversy. Identified as a quintessentially modern phenomenon by many scholars, it is seen as rooted in pre-modern traditions by a dissenting minority. Embraced as a vital framework for democratic self-determination by some, it is decried as the mortal enemy of tolerance and liberalism by others.

This book suggests that the very contradictions and dilemmas that inhere in nationalism play a central role in the developments of national identities and the historical evolution of nationalist ideologies and institutions. According to Aviel Roshwald, it is precisely nationalism's position at the intersection of conflicting principles and sentiments – and the abiding appeal of its unrealisable promise to reconcile these clashing elements – that lends nationalism much of its endurance. In his view, “nationalists and the nation-state hold forth hope for a resolution of the tensions between the inescapable reality of historical change and the persistent thirst for continuity of tradition, between the clashing interests of complex societies and the aspiration to a solidarity transcending all classes and parties, between the sense of the nation's uniqueness in the world and the belief that it has a mission to humanity.”

In the inception of his analysis the author develops the claim that nationalism existed in the ancient world. This may strike some readers as an odd way to begin a book focused on the dilemmas of nationalism in the modern world. But the author contends that many of the critical paradoxes of modern nationalism have pre-modern antecedents. He thinks that the elements that distinguish modern nationalism from its pre-modern forms cannot be discussed in an informed manner unless one places the phenomenon of nationalism in a deep diachronic context, rather than assuming that its contemporary incarnation bears no relation to anything that happened prior to the dawn of the modern age. The modern era has indeed brought about many significant changes and innovations in the dynamics and character of nationalist policies. The printing press, the spread of literacy, the development of mass-conscription armies, universal enrolment school systems and standardized mechanisms for the institution of universal suffrage, along with other modern instruments of communication and

integration, have facilitated the dissemination of nationalist ideals and sentiments on a territorial and demographic scale and with a speed and intensity unimaginable in earlier historical epochs. They have contributed to the conceptualization of nationhood as a generally applicable principle of political-cultural organization, one whose global attraction has been enhanced by its close association with the modern power and prestige of the Euro-Atlantic countries. These and other factors including the English, American and French Revolutions, European overseas imperialism, the collapse of multinational empires at the end of the First World War, post-1945 decolonization, and the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and Soviet Union during 1989-91, have catalyzed the worldwide diffusion of the idea of 'popular sovereignty' as the legitimizing basis of state authority. Nationalism was an option in the pre-modern world; in the modern era it has become a quasi-universal, globally dominant framework for the exercise of political sovereignty.

This book is organized thematically around a selection of seemingly opposing forces and ideas whose intimate interaction has played a vital role in the shaping of national identities and ideologies. Each chapter focuses on a particular dilemma faced by many – if not most – nationalists employing an assortment of examples and case studies to explore in concrete, historical terms some of the various ways in which the issue has played out.

As to key definitions used by the author in his work, "nation" refers to any community larger than one of mutual acquaintance that claims some form of collective, bounded, territorial sovereignty *in the name of its distinctive identity*, or any population in its capacity as a society on whose behalf such claims are asserted. "Nationalism" refers to any ideology or set of attitudes, emotions, and mentalities based on the assertion of such claims. Nationalism is distinguished from patriotism – devotion to an already existing, independent state. "Nation-state" signifies a sovereign polity that claims to embody or represent the identity and will of one particular nation. "Ethnic group" and "nationality" are used interchangeably to refer to a population larger than an actual kinship group that considers itself to be bound together by common ancestry and historical experience, as manifested in shared cultural characteristics that mark it apart from the rest of humanity.

The author appreciates that the contradictions and dilemmas that lie at the heart of nationalism make it difficult to analyze. He is convinced, however, that in order to understand it well reference has to be made to the ancient world. Nationalism as understood by the author helps fulfil primordial human needs for a sense of connection and belonging in the context of impersonal structures of territorial authority and law. But, in the author's view, nationalism has never been the only means of fulfilling such needs. Indeed, theocratic ideals, universalistic conceptions of religious community, and patriarchal images and ideals are among the sources of cohesion and authority that have held together a variety of states through the ages. During the Middle Ages no framework for the crystallization of national identities existed as at that time the state was non-existent or extremely weak. On the other hand, when the state began to consolidate itself and made itself present in the life of its citizens, the latter started to conceive their territorially bounded polity as an extension of themselves, first amongst the elite and then amongst the masses. As time went by, the idea and practice of popular sovereignty gained currency amongst the populace until political legitimacy ended up being associated with national identity.

The author asks: what is the source of the unity among the people which is necessary to jointly exercise the indivisible power of sovereignty? He finds this source in universalistic religious beliefs or class solidarity. Nevertheless, the latter are viewed as conceptions of identity that are not readily confined territorially as is the case with statehood. To the extent that the territorially bounded nature of statehood is accepted as a given, the assertion of popular sovereignty is almost unavoidably accompanied by claims that national identity is the source of the sovereign's people's unity and solidarity.

In the modern world nationalism has risen to dominance especially through its association with the power of nation-states such as France, Britain and Germany which emerged more powerfully following the development of modern industrial, technological and military power. Nationalism provided a cover for the adoption of foreign ways and the jettisoning of cumbersome traditions as when the Turk leader Kemal Atatürk secularised

politics and law in the name of a distinctive Turkish identity and imposed radical linguistic and dress-code reforms.

In the post-modern world, there are a variety of organizations, alliances, interests, ideologies, loyalties, and identities that diminish the power of nationalism and the nation-state. But this should not be interpreted to mean that in the post-modern globalized world nationalism is becoming irrelevant. Roshwald opines that people's identities have never been exclusively defined by nationalism even if the concept of national identity does continue to be the standard basis for the legitimization of independent statehood in the contemporary world.

Supranational institutions and international law contribute to restrain nationalism's abusive potential. The European Union, for instance, is perceived by some as threatening to supplant the nation-state especially when it will manage in the future to constitute itself as a more unified federation with a common foreign and defense policy. That said, the author thinks that in such a scenario the sub-national identities of each state will be supplanted by a European national identity. Otherwise it would be difficult to imagine how a federal Europe would be in a position to succeed in gaining acceptance and commanding loyalty among EU citizens.

Aviel Roshwald asserts that it is not correct to conclude that nationalism has succeeded in establishing itself as the unchallenged source of personal and collective identity and political legitimacy in the modern world. On the contrary, nationalism succeeds only to the extent that it manages to link itself to, co-opt or coexist with, other loyalties and affiliations, ranging from the religious to the familial. Often it fails to achieve such syntheses; many countries in the contemporary world are afflicted, not so much by the power of nationalism as by its weakness.