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The persistence of the civic–ethnic binary: competing visions of the nation and civilization in western, Central and Eastern Europe

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ABSTRACT

The normative binary of ‘good-progressive’ and ‘bad-retrograde’ nationalism, traceable to the civic and ethnic dichotomy, is alive and well in studies of nationalism and populism today. This article underlines the insufficiency of this approach, firstly by examining three stances on the civic nation in the West, each of which rejects ethnic nationalism and reflect different fundamental concerns. Moving east, in Central Europe the binary is inverted and turned against ‘liberal cosmopolitans’; in Russia, the Kremlin’s ‘state-civilization’ project can be viewed as a distinct trend in nation-building for non-Western contemporary great powers.

KEYWORDS

The civic and ethnic nation; nation-building; populism; ideal types; majority nationalism; multiculturalism

Introduction

Anyone grappling to understand nationalism is almost immediately confronted with a challenging question: are there distinct types of nationalisms? Nationalism intuitively appears to be a sporadic but universal phenomenon across the globe. When, however, we look at particular cases and their specific contextual features, universal definitions and typologies often do not hold. This is particularly true with regard the categories of ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’: the enduring tendency to see a nationalist movement or nation-building programme in terms of a binary: progressive or regressive; liberal or illiberal; good or bad.

We should not be surprised that such binary thinking persists; the increased political polarisation of the current day is very much an issue of the crude application of binaries to understand the social world. Binaries map on to fundamental empathy biases, which in turn connect to political and social identities. Binaries also make it easier to form positions on issues in a complex and changing social world. Take two prominent contemporary examples of empathy bias and binary thinking. One is the liberal-left concern for protecting minority groups from the majority ethnic group, promoting values such as tolerance, diversity and respect, with preventative measures such as hate speech laws and sensitivity training deployed to control tendencies towards exclusivism. Another, on display in

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Central Europe's shift to cultural nationalism, is concerned with the 'abandoned' majority who are 'forced' to accept globalisation and mass immigration by elites promoting 'cultural suicide'. Here, rage burns against the 'establishment' and 'mass media' who ignore the 'people'. In both cases, binaries (us/them, good/evil, victims/perpetrators) help express strong empathy with one's allies, while pushing extremely negative emotions upon one's opponents. This way of thinking is comfortable for the human mind in terms of moral psychology but should be resisted in academic work.

In the first part of the article, I consider civic and ethnic in relation to Weberian ideal types, highlighting some of the key problems in applying civic and ethnic as a binary that sidesteps the complex interactions between ethnicity, culture and political consciousness. In part two, I examine three conceptual camps in defining the 'civic' nation within academic literature on nationalism in the West. In part three, I examine developments in Central Europe where a variant of cultural nationalism has won power that rejects the normative pressure of Western models. The civic–ethnic binary is inverted against 'liberal enemies' of the nation to reject cultural, social and economic liberalism. Finally, in part four, I consider the case of Russia, which has taken a more anti-Western and illiberal course than the Central European countries in its 'state-civilization' turn, which I argue is a solution to two decades of debates on nation-building in Russia. The state-civilization turn supports Russia's battle for great power status and coheres with anti-Western sentiment in the country.

Materials and methods

The article as a whole offers a review of the contemporary literature on populism and nationalism, which can serve as the basis for future research and theory. The review conducted is a 'scoping study' which aims to 'map key concepts circulating in a research area' in order to uncover recurring trends in existing research, as well as identifying the gaps and problems in the field (Simons, 2020, pp. 22–23). The article is based on argumentation analysis (which arguments are used) and a qualitative analysis of the ideas found. After reviewing three approaches to defining the civic nation, I consider the key distinctions between Western, Central and Eastern Europe. Thus, in the confines of a single article, this approach not only highlights polarisation and division in Western elite opinion on what constitutes a healthy and sustainable civic nation, it also highlights how Western models of nation-building have simultaneously lost their appeal to Central and Eastern Europe. By shifting the lens to a more detailed study of state policies and discourse in contemporary Russia, the final section studies the great-power 'civilization-state', which may prove a key trend in twenty-first century nation-building.

Part one: the civic–ethnic dichotomy and the question of Weberian ideal types

Hans Kohn's classic dichotomy between 'ethnic' and civic' (Kohn, 1944; Meincke, 1970) gained new attention after the breakup of the USSR and Yugoslavia (Brubaker, 1996; Ignatieff, 1993; Smith, 1991). In the 1990s, ethnic nationalism, alongside Islamism, replaced communism as the main threat to the new global liberal order. Successfully guiding the world's nations away from toxic ethnic nationalism was the prerogative of

the West, whose civic nation model, based on ‘individual assent rather than ascriptive identity’ and ‘common values and institutions’ (Keating, 1996, pp. 5–6), was put forward as the model for the rest of the world.

Here is not the place to reproduce in detail the numerous critiques of the civic–ethnic binary (Brubaker, 2004; Huntington, 2004; Kuzio, 2002; Shulman, 2002; Yack, 1996, 2012). Instead, I limit myself to two sets of problems. The first concerns using civic and ethnic as Weberian ‘ideal types’. It should be noted that ideal types do not actually exist; they are imperfect representations developed by social scientists to act as a starting point from which to explore the essence of empirical reality.¹ There is a gulf between ideal types, as formulated by the thinker, and the actual observable reality (Swedberg, 2018, p. 184).

Much observation and reflection are needed when applying ideal types to particular cases. If we were applying ethnic and civic as ideal types, we would need to observe the behaviour of specific actors and institutions to see what our provisional ideal types (if anything) *mean* from their point of view. Factoring in agents’ understanding of specific situations should help revise and refine the original ideal types for a specific context (Aronovitch, 2011, p. 361). With such an approach, we would end up with a number of versions of the civic nation in competition; this reflects the way specific actors have operationalised a concept for a set of circumstances in ways that defy the researcher’s original expectations. An actors’ centred approach allows access to the kind of compromises and ad hoc arrangements that are involved in the actual deployment of ideal types in the real world. Whether the context is democratic or authoritarian, Western or Eastern, there is no universal meaning of civic and ethnic; their meanings are highly contingent on specific cultural and linguistic spaces (Reeskens & Hoogie, 2010, p. 595)

A second set of problems with civic and ethnic is how these ideal types are constructed. By what process do we end up with these two types of nation, civic and ethnic? Rogers Brubaker (2004) highlighted the instability of ethnic and civic as opposable categories. Assuming we define ‘ethnic’ in the narrow terms of blood and ancestry, then all non-racial references to culture would be understood as ‘civic’. If, on the other hand, we broaden our definition of ‘ethnic’ to include culture then we would have to see almost all currently existing nationalism as ‘ethnic’ (Brubaker, 2004, pp. 60–61). Stephen Shulman (2002, p. 559) summarised the challenging issues in untangling categories of civic, cultural and ethnic in the table below (Table 1).

The key divisions in this table can be applied to contemporary Western societies where three clearly identifiable positions on what the ‘correct’ civic nation is: (1) ‘post-nationalist’; (2) ‘liberal nationalist’; (3) ‘cultural nationalist’.² These three versions of the civic state above, which will be unpacked below, each contain different stances on what it means to

Table 1. Civic, cultural and ethnic identity (Shulman, 2002, p. 559).

Content of national identity	Key indicators
Civic	(i) Live on the territory; (ii) Have legal citizenship status; (iii) Express will to join political community; (iv) Adhere to basic state-promoted values
Cultural	(i) Believe in dominant religion; (ii) Speak national language; (iii) Share national traditions
Ethnic	(i) Ancestry, descent;(ii) Belong to the dominant ethnic/racial group

belong to a nation and what mode of integration is best. The persistence of the binary ('ethnic/illiberal/bad' nation versus the 'civic/liberal/good') is returned to below in the context of the current debate on populism in the West.

Part two: three trends defining the civic nation in the west

(i) The post-nationalist position

The post-nationalist position on the civic nation is to make it as open and inclusive as possible, based on shared territory, citizenship, and certain values (tolerance, diversity and inclusion) without relying on an overarching set of values connected to the traditions and culture of the ethnocultural core (Levey, 2014, p. 177). Immigrants coming into the country need not face illiberal assimilation; minority cultures are protected in an age of 'differentiated citizenship' and the 'global citizen' (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 174). Central to this version of the civic nation is multiculturalism, a mode of integration that protects minority cultures while regulating the majority culture to ensure it accepts diversity and tolerance.

The above vision is often presented as the natural evolution of liberalism into the twenty-first century. Yet, rather than liberalism, postmodernist epistemology is the key foundation of the post-nationalist stance. Post-modernism in the social sciences and humanities can be broadly understood as a critique of modernist visions of 'progress' that adopts a position of 'incredulity towards metanarratives' (Lyotard, cited in Gare, 2001, p. 78). The aim in much of this is to expose the often unspoken, hegemonic assumptions that allow some to dominate others. To do this, notions such as 'truth', 'identity', 'rationality' and 'normality' should be deconstructed. In the case of nationalism studies, this has manifested itself in hostility to overarching hegemonic narratives of national identity. This views nationalism as a practice of subjugation that ranks people into categories of better/worse, advanced/backward. This, in turn, justifies dominance, violence and aggression of one group onto another, leading to the marginalisation and exclusion of the latter.³

Critical constructivism has targeted 'liberal' and/or 'cultural' nationalism as an oppressive construction to be dismantled (See: Ashcroft & Bevir, 2018; Brook, 2002). In deconstructing nationalism, labels such as 'extreme right', 'authoritarian', 'xenophobic' and 'racist' are often dispensed without much differentiation. Disparate phenomena such as populism, ethnonationalism, authoritarianism and fascism are easily lumped into one regressive and harmful category. Ironically, those using postmodernist critical constructivism end up creating their own subjective categories of 'good' (progressive, cosmopolitan, open-borders, pro-diversity and tolerance) and 'bad' (intolerant, xenophobic, nationalist, fascist, authoritarian).

In examining Switzerland's referendum to limit further construction of minarets, for example, Betz argues Islamophobia is at the heart of the campaign that portrayed mosques as 'beacons of Jihad', 'symbols of a political and aggressive Islam', and landmarks of an 'intolerant culture'. (Betz, 2013, p. 73). In citing polling data in Germany, Betz reveals what he considers to be 'Islamophobia': When 90 per cent of Germans in a 2006 survey say Islam is hostile, when 71 per cent thought Islam is intolerant, and when 71 per cent of an

Austrian survey in 2010 say Islam is fundamentally incompatible with Western ideas of democracy, freedom and tolerance. For Betz, the obvious explanation for these views is racist xenophobia (Betz, 2013, p. 82). Whether or not there may be any 'real' social issues emerging from large-scale Muslim immigration into European countries would not be considered here; instead, the problem is conscious or unconscious prejudice or bias: the charge of 'cultural racism'.

The hunt to expose examples of 'cultural racism' is a common theme; the claim that 'ethnic nationalism' is still alive in 'cultural racism'; culture is 'acting as a homologue for race'; cultural 'others' are facing exclusion (Richardson, 2013, p. 117). Here I would agree with Yuval Harari's point (2018, p. 1148) that we should distinguish between 'racism' and 'culturalism'. The former has is about race (a concept not accepted by all scientists) and superiority/inferiority (lesser races must be segregated; superior races are entitled to better). The latter is about culture (a concept more universally accepted to exist in science) and how differences in culture should be regulated along with the desirability of assimilation. Thus, a culturalist holds the position that 'if only the "others" will adopt our culture, we will accept them as our equals' (2018). In contrast, the racist consigns the 'racial other' to the ghetto and would not think of their integration into one common society. Merging 'culturalist/integrationist' with 'racist/chauvinist' into one category of 'evil' is an error and a key element of binary thinking in left-liberal analysis.

Indeed, much research focuses on exposing 'cultural racism' and alerting readers to the danger and threat of the 'radical right'. In Halikiopoulou et al. (2013), populist right-wing manifestos and posters are 'exposed' in such a way. In Fozdar and Low (2015), for example, data from focus groups involving ordinary people is used to justify a pre-existing hypothesis that Western society, despite apparent progress in combating racism, is still rife with subconscious racism among the white population.⁴

I would contrast the above research with those attempting to study social reality through the eyes of actors involved. In studying *Pegida* in Germany, Jorg Dostal pointed to the 'general disenchantment of the political centre ground in Germany with the political system' (Dostal, 2015, p. 523) and concluded *Pegida* was made up not of extremists but people identifying as centrists who feel 'overwhelmed by socio-economic and cultural change' and 'fear that large-scale migration might further decrease their prospects and social status'. Salmela and Von Scheve (2017, p. 583) examined the emotional language in populist movements and concluded that supporting populist movements is a way of 'providing gratification and relief from negative emotions' for many people (Salmela and Von Scheve 2017, p. 583). Emotional language includes feelings of pride and joy to be expressed in 'ritualistic encounters of the like-minded', which helps foster 'social identities and group solidarity'. Cas Mudde (2016) has argued that, in this sense, populism is not undemocratic; it brings people back into politics, something in stark contrast to apathy and non-involvement of the so-called TINA (there is no alternative) politics that preceded it.⁵

(ii) The Liberal Nationalists

The second group, who can be termed 'liberal nationalists', are influenced by a rather different set of ideas and fundamental concerns; that nationalism, democracy and

liberalism are all interconnected and form the basis of the modern world in a positive sense. James Kennedy (2013, p. 30) pointed to John Stuart Mill as one original source of this sentiment.⁶ In more recent times, David Miller developed this stance further, defending a shared and common national identity as central to social trust, cohesion, social belonging and, thus, the functioning of democratic states (Miller, 1995).⁷ In other words, national culture gives meaning to the individual's choices in life; national identity can be a positive force encouraging civic participation, trust in shared institutions and solidarity based on shared equal rights (Miller, 1995, pp. 192–195). Such an approach clashes with multiculturalism, which moves minority group identities to centre stage and demands the majority culture is reshaped in a manner acceptable to all minority cultures.

Liberal nationalists have also been concerned with the so-called 'progressive dilemma' (Goodhart, 2013; Leddy-Owen, 2014; Miller, 1995, p. 128): increasing diversity and inclusion (desirable to the progressive) appear to go hand in hand with the reduction of social trust and the erosion of a solidaristic community of values and sense of 'we' (undesirable to the health of liberal democracy). Robert Putnam (2007, p. 137) developed this argument with empirical data on social trust, arguing 'immigration and ethnic diversity tend to reduce social solidarity and social capital' and pointing out the 'conflict theory'/'contact theory' binary was not accurate.⁸ Instead, he argued both in-group and out-group bonding decrease with the increase in diversity. In other words, the response to increased diversity is not only about xenophobia but an observable drop of generalised trust across all groups.⁹ David Goodhart has summed this problem up as communities, 'different from one another in lifestyle, values, ethnic and national origins', that, as a result, are 'less willing to sacrifice, trust and share' (Goodhart, 2013, p. 261).

Thus, these authors worry that highly diverse communities will not automatically experience 'shared liberal values' and a 'sense of transnational belonging'; instead, these may communities may experience 'tension, insecurity and threat' (Leddy-Owen, 2014, p. 343). Thus, in liberal nationalism the national identity of a liberal democracy cannot be reduced to culturally neutral 'civic' features such as participation in political institutions and the public sphere. A cultural component – language, history, ways of thinking and living – produces solidarity that, in turn, is the linchpin of a functioning liberal democracy: willingness to trust each other, vote and pay taxes. Thus, the liberal nationalist group can be visualised as sitting between the 'post-nationalists' and the third group, which I term the 'cultural nationalists'.

(iii) The Cultural Nationalists

'Cultural nationalists' appear to be basically unconcerned by the progressive dilemma: they want measures to preserve the majority culture group and for the whole population, regardless of ethnicity, to adhere to a set of national values and traditions. A variety of mostly conservative writers defend this position. Roger Scruton (1999) argued protecting the cultural heritage of language, religion and collective memory would mean limiting inclusion: 'The nation is not ... conceived as an accidental and defeasible contract between strangers; it is a hereditary entitlement, a burden of duty, a call to sacrifice' (Scruton, 1999, p. 289). Samuel Huntington (2004, p. 339) echoed this concern pointing out: 'A nation may, as America does, have a creed, but its soul is defined by the

common history, traditions, culture, heroes and villains, victories and defeats, enshrined in its “mystic chords of memory”.

Thus, merely having a passport and obeying the law is not enough: to become American, for example, ‘one must migrate to America, participate in American life, learn America’s language, history and customs, absorb America’s Anglo-Protestant culture, and identify primarily with America rather than with the country of their birth’ (Huntington, 2004, p. 340). Huntington warned that if a unifying ethno-cultural core of values was not promoted then ‘multicultural America will, in time, become a multicreedal America, with groups with different cultures espousing distinctive political values and principles rooted in their particular cultures’ (Huntington, 2004, p. 355). In the current period, it would appear most of the so-called ‘right-wing populist’ or ‘nationalist-populists’ are in alignment with the concerns of cultural nationalism. As the following section will demonstrate, liberal and cultural nationalism takes different forms in the cases of Western, Central and Eastern Europe. Broadly speaking, Western Europe populists look to unite ‘liberal’ and ‘cultural’ nationalists while rejecting the ‘ethnic nationalist’ label and promising to defend ‘Western’ or ‘liberal’ values, manage existing diversity and rebuild national cohesion. Central Europe’s populists are more socially conservative and move more clearly against economic liberalism, while placing the ‘West’ and ‘globalist’ forces as ‘others’ attempting to subvert national sovereignty. In Russia, an even more intense level of anti-Western and illiberal sentiment supports the imaginary of Russia as a state-civilization battling for its existence in the face of Western hostility.

Part three: Western and Central Europe compared

(i) Western Europe

Brubaker (2017) has offered a compelling interpretation of Western Europe’s new ‘nationalist-populists’ as ‘civilizational’ actors: they transcend parochial and ethnic nationalism and advocate a certain vision of European civilization, one that contrasts sharply with post-national recipes. This ‘civilizationalism’ contains three common themes that can be found across Western Europe’s populist parties: (i) defending Christianity as a civilizational inheritance (not as religion); (ii) advocating secularism in response to Islam’s increasing presence; (iii) preserving ‘liberalism’: freedom of speech, women’s rights, gay rights (Brubaker, 2017, p. 1202). Western European ‘nationalist-populists’ present their opponents (‘the globalists’) as ‘against’ the people in two main ways: on a vertical dimension (‘the elite versus the people’ in economic terms) and a horizontal dimension (culturally ‘alien’ elements opposing those ‘belonging’ to the nation) (Brubaker, 2017, p. 1192).

Brubaker concludes these movements cannot be easily labelled ‘radical’, ‘far’ nor ‘extreme’ right in the sense that they are anti-system (Brubaker, 2017, p. 1210); nor can they be called ‘ethnic nationalists’ (Brubaker, 2017, p. 1202). Nonetheless, these groups are paradoxical: they promote ‘an intolerant, illiberal and exclusionary celebration of one’s own tolerance, liberalism and inclusiveness’ (Brubaker, 2017, p. 1203). In a sense, Western populists in countries such as Holland and Sweden are battling to overturn the hegemonic dominance of the post-national civic nation. They reject the accusation their movements are full of ‘cultural racism’ and publicly break with older anti-Semitic

discourses to underline their 'support of 'liberal' social policies (gay marriage, secularism). As Brubaker points out, this 'unsettles conventional analytical rubrics such as "radical right" and "extreme right"' and makes it hard to characterise Western 'nationalist-populists' (Brubaker, 2017, p. 1202).

(ii) Central Europe

The ethnic–civic dichotomy experienced a fresh lease of life among researchers studying the transitional pathways of post-communist states in the 1990s (Brubaker, 1996; Cummings, 1998; Linz & Stepan, 1996; Schopflin, 1995; Wilson, 1997). The transition paradigm was partly based on the assumption that countries emerging from discredited communism and had to be guided away from the darkness of dangerous 'ethnic' nationalism and toward the light of the 'civic' nation. Policies of ethnic and cultural homogenization, no longer in vogue in the multicultural democracies of the West, would hinder the emergence of civil society and functioning democracy (Linz & Stepan, 1996). In time, the idea of containing or managing 'ethnic nationalism' was absorbed into the documents of international institutions such as the OSCE and the United Nations.

In Central Europe, the two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall have been dubbed the 'Age of Imitation' (Krastev & Holmes, 2018, p. 118), during which ex-communist countries imported a range of Western liberal-democratic forms, practices and values, as well as entering NATO and the EU. Yet, in 2010 in Hungary and 2015 in Poland, parties came to power that did not conceal their disillusionment with Western tutelage and showed strong cultural nationalist trends. The end of this 'Age of Imitation' did not come overnight but together with the falling prestige of Western models, such as democracy promotion in the Iraq War of 2003, 'casino economics' in the financial crisis (2008–2009), as well as the actual experience of post-communist governance and transition (Krastev & Holmes, 2018, p. 119).

In the case of Hungary and Poland, three key elements stand out in the rise of Fidesz and the Law and Justice Party (PiS), which represent a cultural nationalism of a particular type. The first is opposition to certain neo-liberal reforms and criticism of 'liberal' elites. Fidesz rose to prominence in its resistance to neo-liberal economic reforms, engineering a referendum to defeat privatisation moves in healthcare and education (Rydliński 2018: 97). Fidesz presented itself as the party of the silent majority struggling against 'foreign' forces, with the period of 1989–2010 presented as one of decay and corruption (Palonen, 2018, p. 316). In Poland, PiS promised to work for the 'common good' of 'all Poles' against a privileged liberal elite (*układ*), restoring true democracy and social cohesion, contrasting their 'solidaristic Poland' to the 'social Darwinism' of 'liberal Poland' (PiS, 2011). In both Hungary and Poland, the language of social democracy (protecting pensioners, healthcare system, national industries) is used to connect to 'us' (hardworking, decent patriots) and push back against 'them' ('liberals', 'cosmopolitans', 'elites').

Secondly, both parties used their parliamentary majorities to enact legal and constitutional reform, building an 'illiberal state'. After victory in 2010, Orbán used his super majority to bring about constitutional reform cementing the rule of the ruling party (Bánkuti et al., 2012, 139–141). In re-election in 2014, Orbán's illiberalism took more explicit form as he openly claimed to defend the national state against liberalism and its 'foreign'-funded activists (Orbán 2014; cited in Kim, 2021, p. 341).¹⁰ In Poland, PiS also

carried out legal reforms, creating a Central Anti-Corruption Bureau (CBA), passing a new lustration law, as well as legislation increasing state control over judicial appointments (Sadurski, 2016).

Thirdly, demographic fears play an important role in Central Europe's cultural nationalism. The region experienced brain drain, emigration and demographic decline from 1989. The exodus of people from Central and Eastern Europe after the 2008 financial crisis exceeded the total number of refugees entering Western Europe, including the Syria crisis (Krastev & Holmes, 2018, p. 125). Demographic concerns leave Central European societies particularly vulnerable to fears of foreign immigration. The Syrian refugee crisis brought these issues to a head from 2015 onwards. Orbán's 2018 re-election campaign paid specific attention to immigration and Hungary's vanguard role in protecting Europe from a migrant deluge. Jewish-Hungarian billionaire George Soros was singled out as a key enemy from within (Palonen, 2018, p. 317) In Poland, the migrant threat was also played up, with state media portraying refugees as economic migrants and fraudsters or dangerous terrorists, certain to damage Polish society (Rydliński 2018: 103).

The three central aspects of Polish and Hungarian definitions of the nation sharply clash with the post-national version that is hegemonic in certain segments of Western European societies. Conflict with the EU has emerged over refugee allocation, 'illiberal' reforms of the state and increasing divergences in social and cultural policy. In essence, Central European cultural nationalism inverts the empathy bias behind the civic-ethnic binary in the West to present cosmopolitan, globalist, post-national elites as retrograde and harmful, while advocates of nation-states, borders and traditional values are the valorous heroes. A 2018 speech from Orbán aptly summarises his own binary thinking:

On the one side we, the millions with national feeling, on the other side the cosmopolitan elite. On the one side we who believe in nation states, in the protection of borders, in the value of family and work, and facing us those who want open society, a world without borders and nations, new-style families, devalued work, and cheap labour [...]. (Orbán 2018; cited in Kim, 2021, p. 341)

Thus, the inverted binary of Central Europe sees the 'West' as having lost its way under the force of globalisation, which is destroying collective structures and cultural values. It is here we find a stark contrast between Hungary and Poland, and their powerful neighbour Germany, which advocates a radically different vision, taking in huge numbers of refugees in 2015, treating ethnonationalism as unacceptable, and pushing on to a post-national future that decouples 'citizenship from hereditary membership in a national community' (Krastev & Holmes, 2018, p. 120).

Even a rudimentary glance at Central Europe's modern history is enough to reveal why the pathway taken by Germany is alien to Hungary and Poland. Nationalism is viewed as a far more progressive force in Central Europe, central to the end of foreign imperial rule in 1918 and bringing down communist tyranny in 1989. The linking of democracy and nationalism as partners and viewing the nation-state as something to be preserved and protected is linked to historical experience. Key components of today's West, such as multiculturalism, gay marriage, and secularism, were not understood to be salient in 1989. Central European leaders like Kaczyński and Orbán refuse to imitate the West's 'diversity' programmes; instead, they wish to prevent their countries from becoming 'diverse' in the first place (Krastev & Holmes, 2018, p. 126).

In rejecting the post-nation turn and the social policies of the West post-1968 they demand the retention of their own cultures and identities. In doing so Central Europe's cultural nationalists attract right-wing voters with their overturning of 'liberal' social and cultural policy. Meanwhile, some left-wing voters are attracted by the overturning of 'liberal' economics. Party policies are wrapped up in specific nation narrative that is coherent enough to bring a consistent electoral majority. Crossing from the 'illiberal' democracies of Hungary and Poland to the 'illiberal' autocracy of Putin's Russia, a number of similarities and divergences are visible. Russia's 'civilizational-state' project is also shaped by complex interactions with the West and the global order which have led to a rejection of liberalism, the global order and the post-national future. Yet, the intensity of anti-Western feeling and the drive to secure independent great power status makes the Russian case distinct from Central Europe.

Part three: the Russian case

Russia's nation-building: 1991–2012

Moving to the case of Russia, the Yeltsin period (1991–2000) was similar to the situation in Central Europe in as far as the goal was wide-ranging transformation in imitation of the West. Democracy, the Market, civil society and civic nationhood was to transform the RFSFR¹¹ into a modern nation-state, the Russian (*rossiyskaya*) Federation. This brings us to a non-trivial point on Russian language usage. There are two ways to render 'Russian' in the Russian language. The first, *russkii*, denotes an ethnic Russian. The second, *rossiyanin*, refers to a citizen of the Russian Federation of any ethnicity. This emerges from the two historical names for Russia: *Rus'*, the original ethnic heartland around Muscovy, and *Rossiia*, the 'greater' or 'imperial' Russia from the late sixteenth century onwards (Wortman 2006: 17). Most observers of post-Soviet Russia agreed that the Yeltsin administration pursued a 'rossiyskii' nation modelled on the West civic model, resisting the alternative visions of Russia's 'ethnic' nationalists or the red-brown 'empire-saving' nationalists (O'Connor, 2006).

On the one hand, this involved encouraging adherence and loyalty to the new political system, institutions and the constitution (Shevel, 2011, p. 180; Tolz, 1998, pp. 995–996), with little emphasis on Russians as an ethnic group (*russkie*). An acceptable balance was sought between the recognition of rights of 'national' republics within the country, while also seeking an element of homogenization, welding the various ethnic groups of Russia into a common nation.¹² Russian multiculturalism assumed its form based on the pre-existing arrangements of the USSR with territorially institutionalised notions of ethnicity. The Russians (*rossiyanie*), meanwhile, were defined as a 'multinational people comprising of many ethnic nations': something that sits rather uneasily with the conceptualisation of nation as a 'community of citizens with equal rights' (Shevel, 2011, p. 184).

In the first two terms of Vladimir Putin's presidency (2000–2008), analysts struggled to interpret whether the country was continuing or abandoning Yeltsin's nation-building style. Coming to power in 2000, it is generally agreed that Vladimir Putin did seriously innovate in nation-building policies; most of his attention was on state-building: making 'state power' the 'object of veneration' (Rutland, 2010, p. 124). Putin's reforms in 2000–2008 focused on centralisation and the imposition of an effective 'power vertical'

(*vertikal vlasti*).¹³ Beyond efforts to subordinate regional elites to the Federal Centre, little substantial action was taken to overhaul, revitalise or dismantle Yeltsin's nation-building programme.

Since 2012: the civilizational-state nationalism as neither civic nor ethnic

Returning to office for his third presidential term in 2012, a great deal had changed since Putin handed the presidency over to Dmitri Medvedev for four years in 2008. Firstly, the geopolitical situation had shifted and Russia was in more direct confrontation with the West (Szostek, 2017; Trenin, 2015). Secondly, the domestic political situation changed as economic crisis (2008–2011) brought an end to a decade of sustained growth. The Bolotnaya protests of 2011–2012 were a sudden and unexpected challenge to the political *status quo* (Gel'man 2013). A new direction in state discourse became visible in 2012, one that focused more on the need for internal unity and patriotism, emphasising Russia's distinctiveness from the West as a civilization and underlining the need to struggle against Western-backed anti-Russian schemes.

How to understand the 2012 shift in discourse and policies? Especially after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, a number of analysts argued this shift signified an 'ethnic turn' (Alexseev, 2016; Blakkisrud, 2016; Teper, 2015).¹⁴ Thus, Putin shifted from 'a civic understanding based on citizenship and identification with the state, to a more ethnic one focused on Russian language and culture' (Blakkisrud, 2016, p. 250). A similar claim was that the 'conceptual shift to *russkie* has been institutionalised and promoted' (Alexseev, 2016, p. 161). Yet, beyond the semantic shift in the use of the adjective *russkie*, it is hard to find serious evidence, in terms of policies, of a substantive turn to ethnic nationalism (Blackburn, 2021).

State discourse in Russia focuses far more on great power status, patriotism, state-centred (statist) sentiment and rhetoric on Russian people (*rossiiskii narod*) being a 'multi-ethnic and multi-confessional union of peoples' (Blakkisrud, 2016, p. 252), than it does on achieving some radical transformation in the relationship between the ethnic core nation and the state. The 'State Strategy on Nationalities Policy' (2012)¹⁵ retained its *rossiiskii* focus and, subsequent discussions rejected inclusion of the *ruskii* into state documents.¹⁶ In March 2020, mention of the Russians (*russkie*) as the 'state-forming people' did find its way into a constitutional amendment in relation to article 68 making Russian the state language.¹⁷ This provision's significance should not be exaggerated; the preamble of the constitution continues to refer to the 'mnogonatsional'nyy narod' of the Russian Federation as the subject of political sovereignty.¹⁸

Furthermore, during the incorporation of Crimea in 2014, there was no announcement over which ethnic group could be considered titular: the Russians or the Crimean Tatars. Russian, Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar languages were given equal status in the territory. Meanwhile, the Kremlin clearly moved away from nationalist demands for more decisive intervention to support Donbass separatists. The Kremlin also conducted a campaign of selected repression against Russia's 'ethnic' nationalists. In the wake of the Crimean annexation, a wave of arrests brought down a number of prominent nationalist figures such as Dmitri Deumshkin and Aleksandr Belov, who refused to support the regime's actions in Ukraine.¹⁹

To reiterate, the 2012 turn in policies and discourse is not a move toward a 'civic' or 'ethnic' model (Laruelle, 2017, p. 146; Pain, 2016; Ponarin & Komin, 2018; Verkhovsky & Pain, 2012); in many ways, we are better served thinking of it as a way out of this binary. Three components make up the Russian 'civilization-state' discourse: (i) the rejection of both 'ethnic nationalism' and the 'Western civic model', the demand for a specific Russian alternative (Putin, 2012c); (ii) the emphasis on a strong state, 'holding the fort' in hostile conditions of clashing civilizations; (iii) the emphasis on Russian culture and language as the civilizational code holding the Russian state together.

In 2012, Putin put his name to a series of articles that outlined official stances on Russia as a nation. One article, entitled 'Russia: The National Question', was particularly comprehensive. In it, the West's civic model is explained in terms of the 'general failure of European multiculturalism', to which the Russian experience compared favourably: 'Russia is neither an ethnic state nor an American 'melting pot' in which everyone is, one way or another, an immigrant (Putin, 2012a, p. 2). Ethnic nationalism is also rejected and portrayed as a dangerous malaise. According to the article, ethnic slogans, such as 'Stop feeding the North Caucasus', are only likely to cause state collapse and civil war (Putin, 2012a, p. 3).

The rejection of ethnic and civic models is based on the idea that 'Russia emerged and has developed for centuries as a multi-ethnic (*mnogonatzional'noe*) state' (Putin, 2012a, p. 2). Central to this is the myth that Russia is founded on one thousand years of peaceful, harmonic and gradual development, where a variety of different ethnic and religious groups integrated into one people (*narod*). This multinational people (*mnogonatzional'nii narod*) is threatened both by divisive Western-style multiculturalism, Russophobia and 'caveman' ethnic nationalism (Putin, 2018b). The version of Russianness used in the state-civilization identity is one 'based on culture not ethnicity' (Putin, 2012a), is combined with elements of classic patriotism (loyalty to the state and the demand for unity against internal and external threats) and a degree of ethno-symbolism: the *russkie* as the cement holding the nation together, the visible influence of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The second main theme in the state-civilization turn is security and geopolitical struggle: Russia must battle to maintain her statehood, sovereignty and identity/civilization against the designs of external and internal foes. Failure to do so will spell the end of Russia. The implication is that countries and territories without a clear identity or unity of purpose will be vulnerable to the forces of globalisation and/or foreign domination (Putin, 2018a). Central here is the idea that a strong state is the only guarantee of stability and progress for Russia, that bringing 'steadiness and stability to practically all spheres of life (...) is critically important for our huge multinational country with her complex federal structure and diverse cultures' (Putin, 2018a).

Another of Putin's penned articles in 2012, 'Russia is Concentrating', argues Russia's key goal is to 'restore real unity to the country ... the establishment of the sovereignty of the Russian people (*rossiyskii narod*) across the whole territory of the country, rather than the supremacy of certain people or groups' (Putin, 2012b).²⁰ Naturally, Russia's enemies are opposed to this as they

want a weak, ill state, they need a demoralised and disorientated society ... so they can orchestrate their operations behind our backs, to carve things up for their own benefit ...

and sadly there are those in our country who go cap in hand to foreign embassies ... they plan on receiving support from foreign funds and governments rather than their own people. (Putin, 2018a)

The call for patriotism, unity and vigilance is clear; this is combined with grim warnings of the dire consequences of complacency.

The third element of state-civilizational discourse is the focus on using Russian language and culture alongside 'traditional values' as the glue holding society and state together. Importantly, the emphasis on promoting Russian language and culture is combined with a commitment to Russia as a multinational, multiconfessional civilization; in other words, there is ethnic, religious and cultural diversity but also a sufficiently coherent all-Russian (*rossiyskii*) identity to give unity and purpose (Linde, 2016, p. 607, 620). The discourse of traditional family values and respect for religion, which has gained prominence since the 2012 Pussy Riot affair, supplements the idea of Russia as distinct from the West, as the protector of Europe's traditional values while the West 'abandons its own heritage'. Thus, the key claim is that Russia must struggle to maintain her unique cultural identity (*samobytnost'*) in order to hold her own in an increasingly competitive and hostile multipolar world. Certain actors want to 'destroy traditional values and cultural-historical spaces that have formed over centuries' in order to 'create various kinds of nondescript "protectorates"' (Putin, 2018c). To do this both 'caveman nationalism' (i.e. the promotion of separatist ethnic nationalism both within Russia and in neighbouring states) and 'Russophobia' are deployed in the Post-Soviet space to create 'atomised peoples denied national memories and reduced to the level of vassals that are easier to control and use' (Putin, 2018c). To resist this, policies have been developed to ensure cultural unity in the face of Russophobia, information war, hostile powers and geopolitical rivalries.²¹

Overall, the Russian civilizational-state vision can be conceived of as a way out of the civic and ethnic binary which was imported from the West. For some this direction is a form of 'state' nationalism (Laruelle, 2017, p. 146), for others it is 'imperial nationalism' (Pain, 2016), for others still, it is not even a type of nationalism in the Gellnerian sense – a political ideology that holds each nation should control its own political unit – but a reflection of the way the Putin-era elite thinks, a 'code' built on a blend of 'statism', 'anti-Westernism' and 'conservatism/anti-liberalism' (Taylor, 2018, pp. 20–21).

Whichever adjectives we use, be they 'civic', 'ethnic' or 'imperial', what we are observing is an eclectic blend. Visions of a multi-ethnic and multicultural Russia celebrate and claim to preserve ethno-cultural diversity while, at the same time, Russian culture and language are promoted alongside a common sense of citizenship and patriotism, a pride in the state and its achievements. Thus, it is possible in one breath to say non-Russian minorities will preserve their unique ethno-cultural habitats, while the Russians (*russkie*) act as the state-forming people holding the country together. All of this is framed against a context of geopolitical pressure, external threat and the need to hold Russia, the world's largest state, together in one piece.

Conclusion

This article has highlighted some of the issues inherent to applying typologies to the study of nationalism. Despite critiques of the civic–ethnic binary, this way of thinking, in terms of

good/bad nationalism, constantly reappears in the literature on nationalism. I have argued that the 'post-national' camp displays a certain methodological *anti-nationalism* – they advocate a post-national world and a kind of global citizenship and slide into binary thinking and stigmatising opponents they view as unacceptably nationalistic. When we think in terms of the civic–ethnic binary, it can appear that the post-national camp and liberal nationalists belong in one camp, united against the 'ethnic nationalists', who are wolves hiding in the sheep's clothing of 'civic nationalism'. Yet, I have argued there are serious differences between the 'post-national camp' and 'liberal nationalists': while the former are mainly preoccupied with resisting the 'paternalistic/coercive' dominance of majority culture, obliterating 'hierarchies of dominance' and protecting minority culture/identities, the latter group, while sharing a disdain for xenophobia, racism and ethnic nationalism, is also worried about the functioning and survival of the pre-existing civic political culture, which depends on a national community of values, a sense of 'we' as a nation.

Dismissing nationalism as pathological in the manner of the post-national camp entails rejecting Durkheim's point on anomie 'Man cannot become attached to higher aims and submit to a rule if he sees nothing above him to which he belongs. To free him from all social pressure is to abandon him to himself and demoralise him' (Durkheim, 1951, p. 389). Given this difference, it may be that some of those in the 'cultural nationalist' camp have more common concerns with those in the 'liberal nationalist' group than would appear at first glance. Overall, it is clear that the application of binaries in Western Europe increases political polarisation, at a time when, in many cases, people from all three camps (post-national, liberal and cultural) most likely agree on key principles such (i) equality of sexes and races, of opportunity and legal status; (ii) secularism; (iii) freedom of speech, religion and assembly. Yet, binary thinking encourages a Manichean vision that reduces the chances of civil discourse.

The civic–ethnic binary not only fails to adequately represent division in the West over which model of the civic nation is correct, it is also inadequate for understanding different kinds of cultural nationalism that have emerged in Central and Eastern Europe in the last decade. In Central Europe, the age of imitating the West is over; economic 'liberalism' is rejected, social and cultural 'liberalism' overturned. A more socially conservative, economically social-democratic model of the nation-state is advocated that rejects increasing diversity and immigration as threatening to national cohesion, stability and survival. Central Europe's cultural nationalism has the potential to continue its electoral successes and creates the prospect of a two-track European Union with diametrically opposed values.

Moving further east, the Russian case shows important similarities with Central Europe in advocating traditional values and the 'silent majority' and rejecting the automatic normative superiority of the West. What sets Russia apart from Central Europe is its great power nationalism, pretensions to hold together a distinct 'civilizational space' across Eurasia's multi-ethnic population and its anti-Western geopolitical alignment, factors that give Russia more in common with other former non-Western empires such as Turkey, India, Iran and China. The civilization-state model of nationhood legitimises autocratic great powers with diverse populations who imagine themselves to be struggling against hostile forces in 'the West' intent on inflicting state collapse or regime change.

Overall, it does appear trends in Central Europe and Russia are closer to the norm across the world, where a single majority identity is pursued and postmodern, post-national notions hold little sway. Perhaps it is worth acknowledging that the West, and Western European states in particular, are undertaking unprecedented efforts to reach

a post-national future. Countries in the West are pioneers in a type of officially promoted post-national civic identity that, first and foremost, prioritises 'inclusion of all'. The rest of the world, meanwhile, is on a different course. Time will tell how nationalism will evolve over the twenty-first century. Sadly, one safe prediction emerging from this review is that binaries will continue to be deployed in much of the analysis.

Notes

1. As Weber himself put it: 'such presentations are of great value for research and of high systematic value for expository purposes when they are used as conceptual instruments for *comparison* with and the *measurement* of reality' (Weber, 1949, p. 97)
2. A fourth group, which I do not cover in this article, made up of the extreme right of the political spectrum, demand a radical transformation of the relationship between state and the core ethnic group, explicitly focus on race and ethnicity, and advocate a racialist reordering of society, most often to be achieved through ethnic cleansing and the suspension of democracy and civil rights.
3. This approach views any kind of 'othering' as the first step to totalizing, oppressive, retrograde nationalism. Any use of 'exclusionary rhetoric' is against the rules of acceptable conduct as it is 'dehumanising'. Wodak (2013, p. 30): outlined three basic elements to this: (i) 'othering' is damaging, especially when it results in exclusion, marginalization, victimization; (ii) the far/radical/populist right is the main threat in this and plays the role of 'oppressor'; (iii) the 'victims' are women, ethnic minorities.
4. Will Kymlicka (1995, p. 126) outlined this concern in the following way:

People dislike ethnic and racial diversity, but they do not want to appear as racists or xenophobes, so they look around for some more 'acceptable' reason to oppose immigrant multiculturalism, such as fears about illiberal practices or security threats (or crime, economic burdens, abuse of asylum procedures, etc.) If necessary, people invent or exaggerate these risks . . . in order to hide the true nature of their opposition to immigrants.
5. Mudde defines 21st populism as 'an illiberal democratic response to undemocratic liberalism'. In other words, years of TINA politics and the outsourcing of decision-making to supranational organisations, has led to the current 'democratic' backlash of support for populist groups. Yascha Mounk (2018) has also developed this argument and presents it very interesting terms as an 'undemocratic dilemma'.
6. Mill did not want national feeling to outweigh commitment to liberalism but, on the other hand, he felt 'boundaries of government should coincide with those of nationalities' and 'free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities' as 'the united public opinion, necessary to the working of representative government, cannot exist' (Kennedy, 2013, p. 30).
7. Miller outlined his basic position in an earlier article:

Nationality answers one of the most pressing needs of the modern world, namely how to maintain solidarity among the population of states that are large and anonymous, such that their citizens cannot possibly enjoy the kind of community that relies on kinship or face-to-face interaction. (Miller, 1993, p. 9)
8. The 'conflict theory' (that competing for limited resources in conditions of diversity increases out-group distrust and in-group solidarity) and the 'contact theory' (increased physical proximity with groups of different ethnic backgrounds increases out-group trust and tolerance) have been very popular in the sociology of interethnic relations.
9. As Putnam himself put it: 'Diversity seems to trigger *not* in-group/out-group division, but anomie or social isolation (...) people living in ethnically diverse settings appear to "hunker down" – that is, to pull in like a turtle' (Putnam, 2007, p. 149)

10. Orbán underlined that

'the Hungarian nation is not a simple sum of individuals, but a community that needs to be organized, strengthened and developed, and in this sense, the new state that we are building is an illiberal state, a non-liberal state'. (Full text of Viktor Orbán's speech at Băile Tuşnad (Tusnádfürdő) of 26 July 2014, cited in Palonen, 2018, p. 316)

11. The Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic: the largest republic of the USSR that without substantial border alterations became the Russian Federation in 1991. It is worth noting the 'Russian' in the RSFSR is 'rossiyskii' not 'russkii' i.e. denoting *Rossiya* and not *Rus'*.
12. Although the Russian Constitution declared Russia to be a 'unitary state' in which 'Federal Laws' take precedence (article 76/77), President Yeltsin signed a number of bilateral agreements with the Russian regions, granting autonomy in the promotion of official languages and cultural preservation programmes (Rutland, 2010).
13. This can be seen in the elimination of Yeltsin's bilateral agreements with Federal subjects, the merging of some autonomous regions and the replacement of the election of governors with a system of presidential appointment (Petrov & Slider, 2007).
14. Key examples include '*russkie* in Ukraine', Crimea as '*russkaya* land' and Sevastopol as a *russkii* town. Putin (2015) himself highlighted how the '*russkie*' had lived in one country as one family and were split up suddenly and unexpectedly in 1991, leading to Russia becoming the 'largest divided nation in the world today'. <https://kuban24.tv/item/putin-russkie-samaya-bolshaya-razdelenaya-natsiya-v-mire-132259>
15. <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/902387360>
16. Vyacheslav Mikhailov, ex-minister of nationality affairs, proposed to clarify matters by providing a clear definition of *российская нация* in law, as is the case in the USA and France but also including the sense of Russia as a unique civilization. His proposal was rejected, with the main fear that this would set up an assimilationist Russian (*russkaya*) nation concept. Thus, even the words on the 'Russian (*russkii*) people as the state-forming people' was not passed. Terms such as 'Russian nation' (*российская нация*) and 'Russian people' (*русский народ*) continue to lack any fixed legal status. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3235995>
17. <https://lenta.ru/news/2020/03/10/gosudarstvoobrussian/>
18. <http://www.constitution.ru>
19. <https://meduza.io/feature/2015/10/28/zapret-dvizheniya-russkie>
20. The world is facing a

systemic crisis, a tectonic process of global transformation ... a transition into a new cultural, economic, technological and geopolitical epoch. The world is entering a zone of turbulence ... in these conditions, Russia can and must honourably play the role dictated to her by her civilizational model, great history, geography and cultural genome, all of which is an organic mix of the fundamental basic units of European civilization and the many-centuries experience of interacting with the East, where at the current moment new centres of economic strength and political influence are actively developing. (Putin, 2012b)

21. For more details see the 'Foreign Policy Concept' (2013), 'The Doctrine of National Security up to 2020' (2014), and 'The Foundations of Cultural Policy' (2015). In these texts the focus is on avoiding destabilization and the loss of identity, which leads to losing 'national unity' and 'territorial integrity'. These documents can be found at http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCk86BZ29/content/id/122186, <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/424> and <https://www.mkrf.ru/upload/mkrf/mkdocs2016/OSNOVI-PRINT.NEW.indd.pdf> respectively.

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