

- Andrija Krešić  
U svom i našem vremenu
- Ка бољој демографској  
будућности Србије
- Multiculturalism  
in Public Policies
- Ка европском друштву -  
ограниčenja i perspektive
- Филозофија кризе и отпора  
- мисао и дело Љубомира  
Тадића
- Xenophobia, Identity and New  
Forms of Nationalism

The book presents valuable contributions to contemporary interpretations of nationalism, which has proved to be a uniquely destructive force in the last century. Understanding of nationalism and xenophobia in the region will be aided by perspectives offered by these contributors, and one could only hope that the subject of this study will become less relevant in the years to come.

*Aleksandar Bošković*

This fine collection of essays dealing with recent forms of national identity and nationalist politics is organized in three well-integrated sections, beginning with studies of the recent revival of xenophobic political movements in Europe and the USA. The middle section contains studies of the "new nationalism" in its political, philosophical, and legal dimensions, and includes several articles concerned with post-Yugoslav countries, as well as comparative studies of Hungarian and Arab nationalism. The final section looks at possible responses to the challenge of nationalistic and xenophobic politics in the current period.

*Omar Dahbour*

We particularly appreciate the effort made by this book to arrive at a typology of the different contemporary nationalisms. The volume is characterized by a very good balance between experienced and young researchers, representatives of South-West Europe and international guests, as well as between philosophy (a discipline in which several of the instigators of this symposium belong) and other approaches (human sciences, exact sciences, law, literature, journalism in particular).

*Arnaud François*



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הַפֶּזֶר

XENOPHOBIA, IDENTITY AND NEW FORMS OF NATIONALISM

# XENOPHOBIA, IDENTITY AND NEW FORMS OF NATIONALISM

EDITED BY | VLADIMIR MILISAVLJEVIĆ AND NATALIJA MIĆUNOVIĆ

Edited Volumes

הַפֶּזֶר

Dealing with the phenomenon that we have termed "new nationalism", strongly colored by xenophobia and framed in identitarian slogans, is an intellectually challenging task. Is new nationalism merely a sequel to the historical one, or something radically different and novel? Nationalism's most striking feature is perhaps its Protean character, an extraordinary capacity to change and adapt to different political and philosophical standpoints: postmodernism, communitarianism, multiculturalism or even liberalism. By appropriating the arguments of their opponents, by appealing to justice, equality or right to difference, new nationalist narratives and practices blur the distinctions between different theoretical positions and their usual political implications. They provoke distortions and inversions in our ideological maps, and testify to their inadequacy for understanding the issues of contemporary world.

XENOPHOBIA, IDENTITY  
AND NEW FORMS OF NATIONALISM

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# **XENOPHOBIA, IDENTITY AND NEW FORMS OF NATIONALISM**

EDITED BY

Vladimir Milisavljević and  
Natalija Mićunović



Institute of Social Sciences | Belgrade 2019

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Aleksandar Prnjat

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# Xenophobia and Identitarian Nationalism

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## Abstract

In this paper, the author considers the concepts of xenophobia and nationalism. He distinguishes between three different forms of nationalism: 1) classical nationalism, 2) anti-colonial nationalism, and 3) identitarian nationalism. The first is based on a belief in the racial and civilizational superiority of one's nation, and is used to justify colonialism as a kind of messianic civilizing of the "inferior" Other. The second type emerges as a reaction to the first one and acts as a defense against the cultural subordination carried out by colonizers. To these two categories, the author adds a new kind of nationalism: identitarian nationalism. This type of nationalism shares with anti-colonial nationalism a defensive rhetoric, but it also advocates the preservation of the home culture's specificity, which is believed to be threatened by impoverished immigrants. In today's Europe, we see this in the reaction to Muslim immigrants. The author argues that the right of foreigners to settle in other countries as immigrants cannot be unlimited, but also suggests that the demand of identitarian nationalists to preserve their own cultural identity from foreigners who change it does not apply in the case of wealthy foreigners who contribute to the economy of the country they come to.

*Keywords:* cultural identity, identitarian nationalism, nationalism, xenophobia

■ It could be said that xenophobia *prima facie* denotes an aversion to foreigners, an aversion to those who are not from "here" – "here" referring to the region or country on which the subject has staked their identity – but who come and stay "here" anyway. These outsiders have their own customs, their own beliefs, and their own manners, all of which appear to the subject as different, unusual, and strange.



## 1.

The aforementioned *prima facie* definition of xenophobia is so general, that, for reasons which will be presented below, we can only call it a half-truth. Even faultier a definition would result if we were to refer only to the word's etymological meaning which states simply that it is a fear of foreigners. Staying away from a certain group of people or being suspicious towards it may have its origins in the fear of the unknown, but the term "xenophobia" is not primarily about fear. Like many other compound nouns in which the Greek word "phobia" is applied (Judeophobia, Russophobia, etc.), the term is actually meant to designate certain negative political attitudes and hostilities.

The decision to label an aversion to foreigners "xenophobia" depends on the type of aversion and the type of foreigners in question. It depends on the power relations involved. These relations often come to the fore when observing how foreigners navigate their adopted culture's norms and the expectations to adhere to them. They play an even more important role in the way foreigners relate to that culture. In the medieval period, groups of travelling entertainers usually stood out to the native population as different in some way, but these visitors would never insist on their cultural superiority in places where they considered the inhabitants to be less polite or perhaps even barbaric – they wanted to be well-received and accepted. Contrast this with the attitude of conqueror types, who always emphasized their superiority in their dealings with native populations.

European colonizers used to justify their colonization of their conquered territories and nations by laying claim to cultural superiority. They only "civilized" these barbarians. They tried to provide eternal life for them. They educated them. Of course, through all this the colonizers kept their own customs. This was the situation of the Indian subcontinent under British rule. It was only later on in history that British and other Westerners would come to India with the belief that that culture had something to offer *them*. Specifically, they would seek guidance for spiritual salvation from Indian religious teachers. Even today, such individuals often accept local cultural norms. In their minds, Western society is still

scientifically and technologically superior, but it is spiritually impoverished. And because they believe so fervently in the spiritual superiority of Hindu religious systems, they often adopt the mindset of the convert and embrace wholeheartedly the cultural practices of their new environment, including things like diet, dress code, and so forth. Or at the very least they do not show open disdain or scorn for these practices.

Lack of respect by colonial authorities for the culture of the colonized is so common as to be almost an official position, and equally common are two types of reaction on the part of subordinated cultures. Some members will attempt to ingratiate themselves with their new masters by accepting certain aspects of the colonizers' cultural norms. Others, in their struggle to preserve or regain their identity, adopt a defensive nationalism, which strives to affirm and elevate everything that is one's own culture and traditions. Sometimes they will do this by attaching especially positive connotations to those practices which the colonizers find unattractive.

Defensive nationalism emerges in colonized places as a reaction to the messianic or civilizing nationalism of the colonizers.<sup>1</sup> Under certain circumstances it may even eventually adopt some features of that same messianic ideology. When Swami Vivekananda, at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in England and America, held lectures on Vedanta and yoga during one of his Hindu counter-missionary campaigns, he emphasized the universal aspects of these teachings and practices, thereby endowing them with a messianic character that was promoted as benefiting the entire human race.

In contrast to messianic nationalism, which seeks to supply the world with a universal cultural practice, the defensive nationalism of small nations can develop microcolonial forms – not by colonizing distant overseas countries, but by colonizing neighbouring territories. As a result, this leads to the subjugated population of these territories developing their own defensive nationalism. This type of nationalism is often influenced by ideals of religious and ethnic homogeneity, and it always results in the oppression of

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<sup>1</sup> Important insights on anti-colonial nationalism can be found in a study by Manela 2007.

minority groups who do not fit these ideals. The violent potential of defensive nationalism is well known.

When the colonized are freed from their former oppressors, this liberates the potential for mutual oppressions applied from within the postcolonial state. This then provides the opportunity for the former oppressors of the rejected empire to rejoice cynically in the belief that the colonized “were better off when they were under our rule”. As if the former oppressors had nothing to do with the violence that arose after they relinquished their rule.

## 2.

The term nationalism is sometimes used to denote any form of preference for the members of one’s own ethnic or cultural group, that is to say, the members of one’s own nation state as viewed in relation to members of other ethnic and cultural groups, or citizens of other nation states.

This definition is closely related to the colloquial use of the term. It is also related to Svetozar Stojanović’s understanding of it, according to whom the meaning of the term nationalism “can best be seen as a situation of conflict between national claims” (Stojanović 1999, 17) and therefore he defines it as “*the favouring of one nation over another in such a conflict*” (*ibid.*). Although such definitions concur with the usual use of this term in everyday language, they might be objected to as being too broad.

In the case of nation states, these definitions largely coincide with the notion of patriotism. But one of the differences between patriotism and nationalism is that patriotism generally connotes affirmative and commendable meanings; most citizens of any state would identify themselves as patriots under normal circumstances.

Exceptions to this can be found in those cases where the term “patriotism” and real patriotic feelings are used to mobilize a population for warfare or to anesthetize them into ignoring certain moral impulses, for example the urge to condemn atrocities committed by members of our armed forces against the civilians of the other side. Examples of this could include the US–Vietnam War or wars in the territories of the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s.

Due to this history, some citizens of the countries formed after the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia feel uneasy in situations where they are asked to identify themselves as patriots. Or when they do use it to describe themselves, they use it consciously to differentiate themselves from nationalists.

In support of the objection that such definitions of nationalism are too broad, it could be argued that they cover too wide a range of meanings, ranging from the support of the national sports team of one's country all the way to the urge for military protection of the interests of one's nation, which no one unbiased could consider a legitimate request, regardless of the number of potential civilian victims on the other side. The kind of protection of national interests that military intervention involves usually requires the partial or total extermination of the members of the other nation.

Although it is very broad, this definition follows the way the term "nationalism" is used in ordinary language, and perhaps then it is best to retain it, simply with some added specifications, rather than to construct a special new meaning – philosophical or sociological – for the same expression.

### 3.

An aversion to foreigners can be expressed as eye-rolling and unspoken indignation over their distinctive characteristics, but also as an open call for a ban on further immigration and the cancellation of hospitality to those immigrants already in the country, which can include drastic measures like deportation. Extreme examples of xenophobia would include attempts to physically liquidate even one's own nationals, those who might in some respects appear "strange" for ethnic, religious or cultural reasons. In any case, the term xenophobia is coined with a critical intent and has a pejorative meaning.

Granting foreigners the right to enter a certain territory or denying that right is a state decision. It is based on certain security and economic considerations. No country wants to accept outsiders who present a security risk – for example, terrorists or people with a deadly infectious disease. Most countries today want

tourists or investors. Modern states that publicly advocate the application of certain principles like human rights and rule of law obviously have some kind of moral obligation to provide protection to asylum seekers who are persecuted and threatened in their own countries for advocating those same principles.

Authorities of a democratic legal state may be concerned about how their citizens perceive their legitimacy if they refuse to provide asylum to a supporter of rule of law or human rights, or if they extradite him/her to another country in which he/she is an object of persecution. Despite the fact that the issue of human rights in some discourses has been transformed into the ideology of human rights, and despite the fact that this ideology is sometimes used as an excuse to interfere in the business of other states, especially the weak ones, one should not lose sight of the fact that outside North America and Europe, rule of law and respect for human rights are often reserved for members of the privileged classes.

#### 4.

It is somewhat inadvisable to draw an analogy between the right of a state to deny entry into its territory for those who are not its citizens and the right of an owner of a boat to deny boarding to those he/she does not want on the boat. However, certain similarities cannot be overlooked. As the owner of a boat, you have, at least, a moral obligation to take a stranger into your boat if his/her staying outside of the boat would endanger his/her life. Let us imagine that you and your family, including little children, found yourselves in a boat in the middle of a storm. There is no imminent danger of overturning the boat, but waves continue to pour water in.

Because of the amount of water that is filling the boat, it seems like it could sink. The water is very cold and the sinking of the boat would be fatal to those currently on it. Nearby in the water there are about thirty people drowning. Two or three of them might be able to get onto the boat without making it sink. They might even help get the water out. However, if all the drowning people tried to get onto the boat, it is obvious that it would immediately sink.

Who should have priority if the drowning people are our relatives, neighbours and friends? For an ethnic nationalist, “compatriots” refers to some sort of very distant relative. There are also questions such as: “Is it morally justified to give priority to those drowning individuals we had previously met and who we found likable over those we had previously met and to whom we felt a groundless aversion?” Also: “Is it morally justified to give priority to those foreigners who come from countries that we consider friendly and allies, over foreigners who come from countries that we consider hostile or competitive?” These questions are justified provided that all the drowning individuals are in the same medical and physical condition, that everyone has the same chance to survive once they are rescued from the water, and that everyone can participate equally in throwing water out of the boat.

I want to emphasize the fact that one is not in a position to take all the drowning people onto the boat. This clearly indicates that one state cannot accept an unlimited number of immigrants. It does not mean that three or four times more inhabitants could not be settled on the territory of that state than there are now. But such settlement, in most cases, would completely jeopardize the existing population. One cannot see why the citizens of that state would have a moral obligation to undermine their own economic structure to such an extent that it would decrease the future prospects of their children in order to provide better opportunities to economic immigrants.

The analogy with the boat is not tenable in the following important aspect: if all thirty drowning people try to climb on the boat, it will overturn, and those who are now in the boat and all who tried to enter it will die. In the case of settling a significantly larger number of immigrants, not everybody will suffer: the standard of living of those already there will greatly decrease, but the standard of living of those who have entered, if they come from a state where there is famine, will increase. But not in the case of unlimited immigration. Unlimited settlement of a large number of inhabitants could mean a complete collapse of the rule of law and the destruction of the economy, which were the reasons for the immigration in the first place. But if the cause of migration is climate change, the inability to survive in areas where extreme

droughts or uncontrolled floods have occurred, for those who struggle to survive, the question of the standard of living will not be a decisive one.

If they want to preserve their well-regulated society, do citizens of any state have the moral right to leave people who are fleeing from affected areas in which it is no longer possible to organize life at the mercy of their destiny? Compared to the mass migrations that we are likely to face in the not-so-distant future because of climate change, the flight we've seen from war-affected areas begins to look like nothing more than a dress rehearsal for the final premiere.

Let us focus on the issue of the growing new nationalism in Europe and the United States. Contrary to the messianic form of nationalism, which is based on an ideology that treats one's nation as a culturally superior force that brings salvation, here we find a more modest form of nationalism. Its dominant narrative is the endangerment of one's cultural identity by the arrival of foreigners. According to this ideology, foreigners bring their own cultural norms with them that they refuse to relinquish. They continue to practice their religion and customs in our societies.

This new form of nationalism shares with the defensive nationalism of colonized peoples a common belief in the essential vulnerability of one's own identity. Classical nationalism strives to preserve one's own racial identity, whereas the defensive nationalism of colonized nations and the new nationalism of the rich countries create a narrative of endangerment surrounding one's cultural identity. Because the intellectual left has legitimized the narrative of anti-colonial defensive nationalism as a defensive mechanism against the threat to cultural identity, identitarian nationalism appropriated this rhetoric of preserving cultural identity for its own purposes.<sup>2</sup>

Identitarian nationalism is directed primarily against poor foreigners. By refusing to assimilate, they, as the narrative of

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<sup>2</sup> Sometimes, the advocacy of secularism comes from the left too, but this time secularism is no longer directed against the Church, but against Muslim immigrants (Brubaker 2017, 10–11).

identitarian nationalism claims, change the character of the host culture in a bad, damaging way.

The rise of German identitarian nationalism as a reaction to the influx of Muslim immigrants during the migrant crisis follows previous resistance to the Turkish labor force that immigrated to Germany decades ago. That this is not merely a religious-based resistance to foreigners can be seen in the structural similarities it has with the older German fear of migration that was directed at cheap labor from Poland in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Referring to Polish peasants who settled in Germany, Max Weber wrote that they “were gaining ground” (Weber 1994, 9).<sup>3</sup>

To summarize, I would propose that we can distinguish between three types of nationalism:

1. Classical nationalism. It is based on a belief in one’s racial and civilizational superiority. When expressed in a colonial context, such action is justified by the messianic mission of civilizing others.

2. Anti-colonial nationalism. It is based on defensive efforts, that is, it has the function of defending one’s nation against cultural subordination to colonizers. It does not exclude the possibility of undertaking messianic missions against other smaller state and ethnic entities, nor against ethnic and religious minorities in one’s own society.

3. Identitarian nationalism. It is a defensive nationalism which advocates the preservation of the specificity of one’s culture and is directed against poor immigrants. In today’s Europe we see it levied against Muslim immigrants.

## 5.

Xenophobia and identitarian nationalism lack any vigor in situations where wealthy foreigners are concerned. There are few very wealthy immigrants and generally they are expected to contribute to the local economy. Foreigners who are not very wealthy but who still contribute to the economy and stay with us only temporarily are treated similarly. The common attitude towards

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<sup>3</sup> For a balanced account of Weber’s nationalism, see Bellamy 1992.



tourism is an example of this. Let us imagine a small place on the coast of any sea where tourists start to pour in at the start of summer. They bring new and unusual customs, including even sunbathing. Only some of the older inhabitants, most often those whose houses are more distant from the beach, and where guests do not stay during holidays, might grumble occasionally against these unusual foreigners, whom they have never seen before. They might also point out that by returning year after year, the foreigners start to have an influence on the views and opinions of the local youth. This observation is not incorrect. But most of them do not see anything alarming about it.

There is no moral panic, nor are there hostile feelings towards foreigners in this situation, partly because so much of the local population gains financially from their presence. Once a locale has acted as a tourist destination for enough years, its economic structure becomes altered to such an extent that most of the people who live in it benefit either directly or indirectly from the earnings they gain from tourists during the summer months. The place becomes a holiday destination. Not only because of its natural beauty – the sea, the beach, the beautiful landscape, etc. – but also because of the traditional culture of the region, including its architecture, culinary customs, and musical heritage. Everything becomes a tourist attraction. To be honest, in this situation different aspects of traditional culture will change more or less, but it does not tend to bother anyone very much, even when some old customs have been turned into folklore entertainment for tourists. Xenophobia is barely present – on the contrary, I would say rather that it is xenophilia that predominates. Perhaps it is not entirely sincerely felt, but it is plainly visible nonetheless. Foreigners are forgiven even when they disrespect local customs and local laws and regulations. Nobody chastizes them for their *faux pas* and smaller incidents are tolerated by the local population with a high degree of lenience.

It is true that tourists stay briefly whereas poor immigrants tend to stay for a very long time or even forever. Poor immigrants do not invest in local economy and are potential users of various forms of social welfare. Another difference between these two types of foreigners is that poor immigrants provide a low-cost

labor force to employers and at the same time are a threat to others when they take their jobs. There will always be more those endangered by poor immigrants, of course. They could be more sensitive to the differences between the cultures that immigrants bring with them and their own local cultures. There is less sensitivity to the cultural differences of foreigners of other ethnic and religious backgrounds when they are very wealthy. Naturally, even then, their showing off their wealth will cause negative comments, sometimes with a hint of xenophobia and identitarian nationalism, but never to such a degree as the kind expressed towards poor immigrants who will sooner or later need the help of state welfare to survive.

The concern of an identitarian nationalist to preserve the cultural identity of his/her community is partly a selfish desire to preserve the social services and collective goods of the state, which they themselves might use (cf. Wimmer 1997). Indicating the selfish motives behind some fears, will not reduce these fears. Poor immigrants will not become wealthy tourists, nor will they return to their homes, so identitarian nationalism in Europe will not lose its strength in the times ahead.

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