Racism and Nationalism

Peter Rutland

Government Department, Wesleyan University, CT, USA
Email: prutland@wesleyan.edu

Abstract

This article reviews the current scholarship around racism and nationalism, two of the mostly hotly debated issues in contemporary politics. Both racism and nationalism involve dividing humanity into groups and setting up some groups as innately superior to others. Until recently, racism and nationalism were both widely seen as unpleasant relics of times past, destined to disappear as the principles of equality and human rights become universally embraced. But both concepts have proved their resilience in recent years. Scholars have been devoting new attention to the "racialization" of ethnic and national identities in the former Soviet Union and East Europe, the regions that are the main focus of this journal. The article examines the prevailing approaches to understanding the terms "racism" and "nationalism," which are distinct but overlapping categories of analysis and vehicles of political mobilization. Developments in genomics have complicated the relationship between perceptions of race as a purely social phenomenon. The essay explores the way racism and nationalism play out in two self-proclaimed "exceptional" political systems – the Soviet Union and the United States – which have played a prominent role in global debates about race and nation. It briefly discusses developments in other regions, such as the debate over multiculturalism in Europe.

Keywords: nationalism; racism; Eastern Europe; post-Soviet; Soviet Union

> There is a close relationship between nationalism and racism. They can't really be separated out and allocated to different disciplines of research.
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> – Paul Gilroy, Interview with Francis Wade, "Whiteness Just Ain't Worth What It Used to Be." *The Nation*, October 28, 2020

This article reviews the current scholarship around racism and nationalism, two of the mostly hotly debated issues in contemporary politics. Both racism and nationalism involve dividing humanity into groups and setting up some groups as innately superior to others. Until recently, both racism and nationalism were widely seen as unpleasant relics of times past, destined to disappear as the principles of equality and human rights become universally embraced (Balibar 2008). But both concepts have proved their resilience in response to dramatic political developments such as the European migration crisis of 2015, and the Brexit vote and election of Donald Trump in 2016. Trump's overt racism and xenophobia helped fuel the Black Lives Matter protests that followed the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020 (Stone et al. 2020). Those protests – the largest in American history – triggered a wide-ranging, global debate about racism.

In recent years there has been a resurgence of academic research into racism and nationalism, yet for the most part, the two scholarly communities have not been in close dialog with each other. This is particularly true for those studying nationalism in the regions traditionally covered by

Nationalities Papers: the former Soviet Union, East-Central Europe, and the Balkans (Association for the Study of Nationalities [ASN] 2020). In part, this reflects the fact that nationalism arose in 19th-century Europe, and it was seen as a phenomenon driven by language and culture, not race. That tradition continued to shape scholarly debates about European nationalism into the late 20th century. East-Central Europe played a very important role in the evolution of the study of nationalism. Key thinkers such as Karl Deutsch, Ernest Gellner, and Eric Hobsbawm themselves grew up in the region prior to World War II, and their understanding of nationalism was shaped by their experiences there. Their works profoundly shaped discussion of nationalism in the West and elsewhere.

Race was a key category of ideological polarization during the Cold War. Soviet propaganda pounded on the theme of racism as a central feature of both American society and European colonialism, while claiming that race was irrelevant in their own society (Wolczuk and Yemelianova 2008, 190). From the Western perspective, Soviet Communism posed an ideological threat, but it was not racially distinct from the "Free World." Indeed, that was part of the insidious threat of Soviet Communism, played up by McCarthyism in the 1950s – they looked just like us.

Until recently, racism rarely featured in analysis of nationalism in postsocialist Europe, with a few exceptions, such as the treatment of Roma or the Turkish minority in Bulgaria (Varsa 2017; Naxidou 2012). Recent years have thankfully seen a resurgence of academic attention to this topic (Zakharov 2015; Baker 2018a; Rainbow 2019). Apart from the intellectual legacy of focus on language and culture, discussed above, an additional factor contributing to the relative neglect of racism in the Soviet field may be the paucity of scholars from non-European backgrounds (St. Julian-Varnon 2020).

In Europe, overt racist thinking, such as Social Darwinism, was widespread in the late 19th century (Fredrickson 2002). The rise and fall of Nazism discredited and delegitimized race as an explicit category of analysis and tool for political mobilization. Even after 1945, however, the legacy of 19th-century racism continued to shape European politics. Britain and France tried to hold on to some of their colonies into the 1960s (and the Portuguese empire did not fall until 1974). Racism had been integral to the operation of colonial empires – and to the concept of modernity itself (Von Vacano 2012). Colonialism occupied a central place in the national identity narrative of the imperial powers, a point that many nationalism scholars tended to pass over, with the notable exception of Eric Hobsbawm (1983). With a rise in immigration from the former colonies in the 1960s, racism and the question of colonial legacies became a more prominent feature of domestic politics in many European countries.

In the United States, the issue of racism never went away. The civil rights movement faced bitter resistance from white segregationists, and the victories of the 1950s and 1960s did not solve endemic residential segregation and accompanying inequalities in education and life chances (Coates 2018). Moves to integrate urban schools accelerated white flight to the suburbs. The "war on drugs" led to an explosion in the prison population – in which African Americans were disproportionally represented. Mass incarceration of African American males had long been integral to the operation of Jim Crow in the South, but in the 1970s this problem expanded nationwide. At the same time, rising immigration from Latin America and Asia complicated the pattern of ethnic/race relations because the political interests of Asians and Hispanics did not always align with those of African Americans.

Race as an Analytical Category

There is near universal agreement among academics that "race" and "nation" are both *socially constructed* identity categories (Hall 1996; Coates 2013; Fields and Fields 2012; Morning 2018). Races and nations are not material objects in the natural world: they are "invented" or "imagined" into being by society (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Anderson 1983). As Étienne Balibar put it, "humankind is not a racially diverse species, but a species capable of racism" (Balibar 2008, 1635). Some observers refuse to use the very terms "race" and "nation," preferring to talk about "racism" and "nationalism,"

on the grounds that using the suffix form of these words underlines the fact that they are social processes. However, the fact that "race" and "nation" are "imagined" into being does not make them any less real than other types of social and political activity, and it does not prevent them being used as a basis for action in economic, political, and social life (Brubaker 2015, 48).

One challenge is the tension between the individual and the social. In contemporary debates, with our focus on individual choice and individual rights, race and nation are often treated as attributes of the individual. An individual chooses to express their identity by declaring their sense of belonging to a particular race or nation. Indeed, almost every definition of nationalism from Max Weber on starts off by saying that it is a subjective sense of belonging to a certain group.

Since the 1950s, psychologists have shown that individuals have an innate ability to identify themselves with groups while displaying suspicion and hostility toward outsiders (Jenkins 2014). The criteria that groups use to demarcate membership – to separate "us" and "them" – can be arbitrary and may well change over time. In a famous exercise, in 1968, Iowa teacher Jane Elliott easily persuaded her fifth graders that blue eyes were good and brown eyes were bad (Gupta 2020). Fredrik Barth's (1969) ethnographic studies showed how ethnic groups from Lapland to Darfur select certain criteria to demarcate themselves from neighboring groups while ignoring many other attributes (such as language or religion) that they share with the other group. Ethnic identity is built from the *outside in*, through contact with other groups, and not solely from the *inside out*, as an expression of the inner essence of the group (although ethnic groups themselves often talk about their identity as an expression of the group's essence – its core values).

Psychological experiments probe how individual brains are wired to process information about group identity. For example, researchers at Harvard in 1998 used an Implicit Association Test (IAT) to show the unconscious reflex bias of whites when shown photos of blacks and whites (Project Implicit 2021) – although there is no clear evidence that such bias correlates with discriminatory behavior. IATs have also been used outside the US context – for example, to test for ethnic identity in the Congo (Lowes et al. 2015).

Analysts now mostly prefer to stress the social origins of structural racism rather than looking to explain it in terms of individual prejudice. Overt expression of racial prejudice by individuals has been falling in the USA in recent years (Hopkins and Washington 2020). However, this does not mean that American society can declare that racism is no longer a problem, given that structural racism persists at the societal level (Bonilla-Silva 2017).

Even if identity formation does take place within an individual, there is still the reality that individuals live in society. The identity options available to them, and the choices they actually make, are the product of interactions between themselves and others. These social interactions are a mixture of the voluntary and involuntary. In Nazi Germany, Jews who were fully assimilated and who considered themselves German nevertheless found themselves treated as aliens by the state, and they were sent to their death. In the US Census, prior to 1960, people were not able to choose their own racial identity – their race was assigned to them by the enumerator, based on their appearance (Thompson 2016; Pew Center 2020). Since 2000, US Census respondents have the option of choosing more than one racial and ethnic identity. In the 2010 Census, 2.8% identified themselves as having two or more races. (The UK introduced that option in 2001.) France refuses to collect data about race, ethnicity, or religion, but recognizes the presence of "visible minorities."

There are some differences in the sorting mechanisms of racism and nationalism. In its 19th-century version, "race" assumes that humans can be sorted into a small number of categories that are typically visually identifiable, biological in origin, and fixed and unchanging (Morning 2011; McMahon 2009). Racists are generally hostile to the mixing of races, and they prioritize racial "purity." By the end of the 19th century, it was widely believed that humans could be grouped into five races (white, black, Asian, American, Polynesian), identifiable by skin color, hair, shape of eye,

nose, and other phenotypical features. An additional assumption was that other attributes (intelligence, sporting ability, morality, etc.) were bundled together in those racial categories – and that one could and should judge a person by the color of their skin (Fanon 1967 [1952]). This race science was an outgrowth of the Enlightenment – with its penchant for taxonomy and the rationalization of natural phenomena – combined with the spread of European colonialism. As colonial powers expanded their domain into the interior of Africa and East Asia in the 19th century, they were confronted with the challenge of managing those vast populations – and legitimizing their rule. The criteria used to demarcate races changed over time and varied from place to place: somebody might be considered "white" in one place but not in another. They included cultural attributes and were not limited to visible traits: a change in culture could lead to a change in race (for example, Hutu who acquired cattle could become Tutsi; Native Americans who converted to Christianity could become "white").

Up until the mid-20th century, "race" was often used interchangeably with "nation." People talked about the Jewish race, the Greek race, or the Irish race, and American southerners saw themselves as a separate race from northerners (Coates 2013). As noted above, the Holocaust fundamentally undermined the legitimacy of racial thinking in Europe and beyond. Explicit racism persisted in the far-right fringe, and it found some support in the work of sociobiologists who argued that there is genetic selection for group loyalty; that certain traits are genetically transmitted within social groups, and that this can help explain the differential performance of ethnic groups (Van den Berge 1978; Murray and Hernstein 1994). The racist implications of this work mean that it has largely been shunned by the mainstream academic community.

Critics of racial thinking note that genetic differences *within* a given population far exceed the variation *across* different racial groups and that genetic variation is a continuous, not discontinuous, variable. They are particularly critical of the notion that humans can be grouped into five races, from the five continents. We humans share 99.9% of our DNA with other humans (Fuentes 2016). (On the other hand, we also share 98.8% of our DNA with chimps, and 70% with sea worms.) Humans tend to migrate and procreate across ethnic or racial divides, so hybridity is the norm. Nevertheless, some traits are genetically transmitted, which enable some visible features to be used to demarcate racial groups (albeit with many false identifications).

Despite the imprecision of phenotypical markers of racial identity, they continue to be used as the basis for behavior in some social encounters, whether it be police stopping young black men in American cities or skinheads beating up Central Asians in Moscow. New technology brings new problems: Facebook and Google discovered that the algorithms they used to sort photographs were racially biased, having been trained on white faces (Metz 2021).

The fact that people do not fall neatly into simplistic racial or national categories is illustrated by the challenges faced by people of mixed racial or ethnic origins. They learn how to "pass" as members of one group or another and to "code-switch" as they encounter different social situations. Some important insights into the dynamics of race and ethnicity can be found in the autobiography of comedian Trevor Noah, who was born to a black mother and a white father in apartheid South Africa (Noah 2016). Noah was seen as white by blacks, and as black by whites. He learned multiple languages (Zulu, Tswana, and others) in order to navigate between rival ethnic groups within the black community.

Developments in genomics in recent decades has led to a revival of interest in the biological origins of group identities (Brubaker 2015; Von Vacano and Suzuki 2018). Cheap DNA testing enables companies such as 23andMe to offer breakdowns of one's ancestral geographical origins. This has fed into the boom in the study of family genealogies, aided by the internet, which has spawned popular TV shows (Gates 2014). This mundane hobby is a striking example of banal nationalism (and inadvertently, banal racism?) in everyday life. Some fear that this will see the return of race science (Saini 2019; Bryc 2015). On the other hand, revealing the varied genetic origins of contemporary ethnic groups may serve to puncture the claims of radical nationalists regarding racial purity and superiority. For example, in 2020, a PBS documentary reported an

exercise in which American students studied their own DNA (PBS 2020). They were surprised to discover that in the segment of DNA being examined, they often had more shared DNA with classmates from a different race than with those of the same race. DNA tracing is being undertaken for Russians and other East European populations – finding, for example, a high Finno-Ugric component in Russian DNA (Morozova 2012) – but it has not yet impacted political debates about national identity.

The Interaction of Racism and Nationalism

To some degree, the categories of "racism" and "nationalism" overlap. There is a sense in which all racists are nationalists, in that they tend to embed their racist worldview in loyalty to a particular nation. But not all nationalists are racist. On the other hand, racist thinking may be lurking beneath the surface of nationalist thinking – more often than nationalists are willing to admit.

Some scholars have proposed the concept of "cultural racism" to describe the antagonistic social construction of certain minority communities on the basis of socially learned characteristics such as religion, without any biological foundation (Blaut 1992). The concept has not become widely used, partly because the biological element is still seen as an essential part of racism, and partly because "racism" has such negative connotations that it tends to be used as a political weapon and not as an analytical category. Samuel Huntington (1993) got a lot of attention with his "Clash of Civilizations" essay, which argued that future conflicts would be between competing civilizations, not nations, defined largely by religion. Critics argued that it was a thinly veiled reintroduction of racist thinking.

Demarcating between racism and nationalism is a politically contentious issue. For example, in the 2016 Brexit debate, the Leave camp vigorously denied that it was racist, whereas the Remainers argued that Vote Leave's anti-immigration rhetoric and visual imagery was implicitly or even explicitly racist (Virdee and McGeever 2018; Kaufmann 2014, 2019). The Brexit campaign targeted immigration from the European Union – that is, people such as Poles and Romanians who are racially indistinguishable from the majority British population.

How does this relate to nationalism? Nationalists assume that people group themselves into communities based on a sense of a common culture, history, land, and descent (Gellner 1983). Nationalism is a political project – something that goes beyond the mere assertion of group identity (which can be seen as "ethnicity"). In some cases, the nation's political goal is sovereign self-rule: the belief that each nation should have its own state on its own land. Because there are only 193 sovereign states in the United Nations today and more than 6,000 nations in the world (Alesina et al. 2003), in most cases, the nation will merely seek autonomy and group rights in a polity shared with other ethnic groups. The United Nations recognizes the right of nations to self-determination, but sees this in terms of autonomy and identity, not sovereignty. Nationalists often argue that the very survival of their group is under threat, due to assimilation into a dominant culture or because of direct, genocidal attacks by that culture. Critics see nationalism as a negative phenomenon, reflecting an exaggerated sense of threat, or granting an unreasonable priority to one's own nation over other nations, or over other identities (family, religion, class, etc.).

Race is one criterion that sometimes serves to demarcate nations, but other attributes such as language or religion are more commonly used. Nationalists place less emphasis on phenotypical distinctions and on descent than do racists. A person's language ability or religion is not fixed from birth: it can be learned, or forgotten, with a little effort. Language and religion are not immediately visible to others, unless the person is wearing clothing (or facial hair) identified with a certain group. Sometimes, groups deliberately adopt clothing to signal their identity. Other times, the majority community either forces them to adopt such visual signals or denies them the right to do so.

The state often plays a key role in demarcating group identities by including this information in the census and in documents such as passports (Pap 2021). These state classification mechanisms are often more important than visual phenotypical differences in the political struggles around both race and nation. Important examples include the issuing of identity cards in Rwanda by the Belgian

colonial power that identified the bearer as either Hutu or Tutsi (or Twa) and the controversy over the wearing of the headscarf (*hijab*) or full face-and-body covering (*burqa*/*chador*) in schools and public places in France and other European countries. In these cases, the terms "racism" and "nationalism" seem interchangeable when it comes to characterizing the state's actions.

Nationalism scholars of the primordial or perennialist schools emphasize the importance of common descent – the idea that one is born into a nation – and continuity over time (Connor 1994; Smith 1987). This is usually seen as more of a *sense* of shared ancestry than an *actual* biological reality, so primordialists are not necessarily racist. In contrast to ethnic, descent-based definitions of national identity, "civic" nations proclaim their inclusiveness and openness to people of different ethnic backgrounds. This maps onto the distinction between *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli*: citizenship primarily based on *descent* (as in Germany or Japan), often crudely rendered as "blood," as opposed to citizenship based on *place of birth* (as in France or the United States) (Brubaker 1992). There is some evidence that the civic/ethnic distinction is present in popular attitudes (Reeskens and Hooghe 2010). Critics argue that the dichotomy glosses over the fact that even in self-proclaimed civic nations such as France or the US, ethnic minorities are expected to assimilate to a majority ethnic culture that stands behind the façade of civic inclusion (Shulman 2002).

In recent decades, the civic and ethnic models have converged, with the rise of various forms of multiculturalism (Modood 2013). The UK embraced multiculturalism under Tony Blair's Labour Government (1997–2007), making determined efforts to bring racial and religious minorities into the media, political parties, and education system while granting minority communities official recognition and some group rights. Multiculturalism is a two-way street: the majority culture also has to alter its own content in order to accommodate the presence of the minorities. France stuck with its assimilationist approach, which does not allow the counting of racial or religious minorities; nor does it have any place for hyphenated identities. Some French intellectuals reject critical race theory as yet another unwanted American import. The French state may be race blind, but French society is not, with persistent discrimination against Muslims in hiring, for example (Adida, Laitin, and Valfort 2016). Historically, Germany pursued a separation model, recognizing that the minorities (such as Turks) are part of society but treating them as temporary "guest workers," who were not expected (or allowed) to assimilate to German culture. The rise of a second generation of locally born "immigrants" forced a change of approach, and in 2000, a new law recognized *jus soli*, granting citizenship to immigrants' children born in Germany.

In the 2000s, an increase in immigration, combined with the rise of radical Islamic terrorism (from 9/11 to the Bataclan and Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris in 2015), caused most European political leaders to renounce multiculturalism (Chin 2017). Multiculturalism was seen as institutionalizing and ossifying ethnic differences, and delaying assimilation into the mainstream culture. In the UK, the fact that three of the four July 2005 London bombers were born and raised in that country was a rude awakening. All of them were from ethnic minorities – and all four were radical Muslims. In Britain, as in the rest of Europe, the exclusionary nationalist narrative has tended to shift from race to religion.

It is beyond the scope of this essay to consider the dynamics of racism and nationalism on a global scale. Suffice it to note that there has been an upsurge of nationalism in many regions in recent decades. It has been particularly prominent in India since the accession to power of Narendra Modi in 2014 (Chatterji, Hanson, and Jaffrelot 2019). In India, religion and class are more prominent than race in driving the nationalist revival (Baber 2021). China, Korea, and Japan all have strongly descent-based conceptions of national identity (Kowner and Demel 2012). Japan denies citizenship to second- and third-generation Koreans born in the country while bringing ethnic Japanese from Latin America as guest workers. Myers (2010) argues that North Korea's pseudo-Marxist ruling ideology is in reality a purely racist worldview.

Political philosophers are vexed by the question of whether a liberal society can recognize and protect group rights without violating individual rights (or the rights of other groups). Will Kymlicka (1995) argued that society has a moral obligation to respect the rights of indigenous

groups (now called "First Nations" in Canada) over immigrants/colonizers. US law has long recognized the "sovereignty" of the Native American nations. In recent decades, Latin America has seen the political mobilization of hitherto marginalized indigenous peoples: their numerical preponderance has led to the winning of political power in Bolivia and Ecuador (Telles 2014).

Contemporary race theory stresses the importance of intersectionality – the way that race interacts with gender and class (McCall 2008). Nationalism and racism have always been deeply gendered (Yuval Davis 1997; Mayer 2012). Somewhat surprisingly, the classics of nationalism scholarship from the 1980s, such as the works of Ernest Gellner (1983) and Benedict Anderson (1983), barely mentioned gender. Recent scholarship on national identity in Central Asia has focused on gender as a factor in national identity formation (Cleuziou and Direnberger 2016).

Gender is clearly key to the politics of racism and nationalism in contemporary Europe. The revival of nationalism in contemporary Russia, Poland, and Hungary is closely tied to a neo-traditionalist approach to gender roles and the introduction of pro-natalist policies to reverse declining birth rates (Thomson 2020). Most of the controversies around migrant communities revolve around the treatment of women – be it women's clothing, arranged marriages, "grooming" of young girls, or female genital mutilation (Farris 2017). In contrast, efforts to ban circumcision – common for Muslim and Jewish men – have gone nowhere. Women are seen (by both sides) as symbolic of national identity and purity. However, focusing on their plight plays into stereotypes of women being in need of protection. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) coined the phrase "white men saving brown women from brown men" to describe British efforts to ban widow burning in 19th-century India. Critical race theorists argue that a similar dynamic is playing out today in the treatment of immigrant communities in Europe.

The third leg of the intersectionality triad – class – has always received a wealth of attention in mainstream nationalism scholarship (Balibar and Wallerstein 1988). Eric Hobsbawm (1983) convincingly argued that nationalism was cooked up to divert workers from class struggle, whereas Donald Horowitz (1985) showed the instrumentality of ethnicity in economic and political competition in postcolonial states. Race and class also intersect in important ways. Racism steers ethnic minorities into marginal economic roles, which leads to fewer chances for social advancement and wealth accumulation. It becomes hard to unscramble the effects of structural poverty from the effects of racial discrimination.

American Exceptionalism

The case of the United States has shaped much of the research and popular thinking about racism and nationalism around the world. The USA was the dominant superpower after 1945 and the "sole superpower" after 1991. Its ideas and values framed global political debates, and it had a profound impact on the evolution of the social sciences.

The USA was exceptional in both the nationalism and racism dimensions. The USA proudly proclaimed itself to be the "first new nation" – the first to revolt against colonial rule – and the first republic to be based on principles of liberty and equality, anchored in a written constitution (Lipset 1964; Lind 1995). It claimed moral superiority over its European contemporaries in having no ruling monarchy or aristocracy, and no national religion. The federal system – another innovation – institutionalized the pluralism of regional identities and interests. The USA saw itself as a "land of immigrants," where most citizens were aware that their forebears had traveled to the USA a few generations back in search of better opportunities. African Americans were also immigrants – but not voluntary ones, so this narrative did not appeal to them. Asians faced various bans on entry, with major restrictions introduced in 1882 and 1921. The prevailing metaphor through most of the 20th century was the "melting pot," whereby groups assimilate into a common American culture while preserving the vestiges of their ancestral ethnic identity as hyphenated Americans (Alba 1992). Groups that were initially treated as alien races (such as Irish, Italians, Jews – and more recently, Russians) became absorbed into American "whiteness" (Sadowski-Smith 2018). After the

1960s, as it became clear that the achievement of civil rights for African Americans had not led to full equality, attention shifted toward recognition of multiple group identities – the "salad bowl."

Lurking behind this self-congratulatory narrative was the stain of racism. The Constitution had excluded Native Americans from citizenship and accepted the presence of slavery (counting a slave as two-fifths of a person when allocating congressional seats). Despite the US role in the Cold War as the leader of the "Free World," structural racism continued through Jim Crow laws in the South, and segregation and discrimination in the North. The European colonial powers had traded in slaves and depended on slave labor in their overseas colonies, but they did not have extensive slavery in their home country in modern times. The USA was unique in having slavery integral to its society even as it evolved from a republic to a democracy. Critics argue that freedom was color coded from the beginning – that the whole notion of social contract theory, the foundation of Western liberalism, was rooted in the exploitation of the labor of racially designated others (Mills 1997). In the same vein, Stovall (2021) suggests that the 1989 revolutions were enthusiastically welcomed as the "end of history" because they brought the freedom of *white* people from Communist rule.

The USA was also unusual in embedding its racism in a rigid and exclusionary legal framework: the "just one drop" approach that categorized someone with any African heritage as black. In Plessy v. Ferguson (1896), the Supreme Court ruled that Homer Plessy could be barred from a tram because he was one-eighth black. The case also introduced the idea of "separate but equal" to justify racial segregation. Anthony Marx (1998) argued that the USA introduced the legal segregation of the races because it had experienced a bitter civil war and needed to unify North and South by emphasizing their common whiteness at the expense of the black minority. He drew parallels with South Africa, which also went through a civil war and introduced apartheid in part as a way to unify the white Afrikaner and Anglo communities. One criticism of Anthony Marx's analysis is that the discrimination and social exclusion experienced by the black community in Brazil is just as pernicious as in the USA, despite the fact that there was no civil war or judicial segregation in Brazil (Telles 2014).

In the USA, African Americans amounted to some 15% of the total population, so they would only succeed if they were able to find allies among the majority white community. Consequently, their main strategy was to push for equal treatment – to claim the same rights enjoyed by other Americans. Some advocated a global strategy: find allies in the colonial world, given that non-whites make up a majority of the world population. Black nationalists advocated secession and the creation of a black-majority entity in the South. In the 1950s and 1960s, the federal government swung its support behind the civil rights movement – in part, to win support from newly-independent African nations in the midst of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. Basic civil and political rights were secured, but structural barriers to equality remained obstinately in place (Coates 2015; Wilderson 2020). With the election of Barack Obama in 2008, it looked as if the USA had entered a new age. But Obama achieved little to improve the lot of African Americans, and the election of Donald Trump – an open racist and misogynist, and a direct response to the Obama presidency – showed that America was far from being a post-racial society.

Ironically, although race was an ever-present factor in American domestic politics, it was treated as a nonissue in US foreign policy. Between 1945 and 1993, the five top international relations (IR) journals published only one article about race (Zvogbo and Loken 2020). This reflects the fact that from its inception at the turn of the 20th century, the IR discipline was deeply steeped in racist thinking (Vitalis 2015).

Soviet Exceptionalism

Like the USA, the Soviet Union's self-narrative aspired to transcend both racism and nationalism by building a workers' state in which racial and ethnic identities would become irrelevant. The Soviet model of territorial ethnofederalism went to some lengths to preserve and promote the identity of

ethnic minorities, classified as "nationalities" (*natsional'nosti*), with a view to preventing "Great Russian chauvinism." This led to the creation of what Terry Martin called an "affirmative action empire" (Martin 2001; Hirsch 2005).

The main racial divide in Russian history was between the Slavs and the Mongol-Turkic tribes that ruled Russia from 1240 to 1480, and then later – as the Russian Empire expanded – between the Russians and the indigenous peoples of Siberia and with the Crimean Tatars and Ottoman Turks to the south (Zakharov 2015; Shnirelman 2009). The Russian equivalent to the phrase "don't judge a person by the color of their skin" is the saying "don't judge a person by the shape of their eye." Race thinking was present in the Russian Empire, but in the absence of overseas colonies, the issue was complex, shifting from acceptance to suspicion of racial "mixing" over the course of the 19th century (Tolz 2019).

The official Soviet Marxist ideology saw racism as a reactionary concept, a tool of imperialism and fascism. In *Marxism and the National Question*, Stalin (1913) wrote that "a nation is not a racial or tribal … but a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture." However, the Soviet practice of treating nationality as based on descent, with ethnic identity recorded in the passport, and the popular tendency to attribute fixed values to national identities, meant that there was a certain blurring of the distinction between race and nationality (Edgar 2019). The main fault line was between Slavs and people from the Central Asia and the Caucasus – with the latter disparagingly referred to as *chernyie* ("darkies"). Ironically, in US parlance, "Caucasian" means "white," based on the theory of 18th-century German anatomist Johann Blumenbach that the Aryan peoples came from the Caucasus (the location of Mount Ararat, where Noah's Ark supposedly landed). The North Caucasus was absorbed by the Russian Empire relatively late in the game, in the 1820s–1850s. In 1944, Stalin deported half-a-dozen Muslim peoples from the North Caucasus and Crimea to Central Asia (along with the Buddhist Kalmyks), and they were only allowed to return home in the 1950s. The policy was framed in term of class enemies, but it can be seen as racist, given that entire ethnic groups were deported en masse (Weitz 2002). There was a small number of students from African and Asian countries in the Soviet Union, and although there were some clashes, most of the students encountered little racial hostility (Walke 2019).

In the 1950s, Soviet ethnographers tried to map the world's ethnic groups, primarily using language as a criterion, but also making some effort to measure skin color and facial phenotypes. Their labors resulted in the *Atlas of Peoples of the World* (Bruk and Apenchenko 1964), a work that 50 years later was still one of the sources for the cross-national databases used by political scientists to track ethnic groups (Fearon 2003). Racist thinking continued to percolate under the surface of Soviet society, the prime example being the thinker Lev Gumilev (1912–1992) (Bassin 2016; Anderson, Arzyutov, and Alymov 2019). His theories of Eurasianism and ethnogenesis were suppressed in Soviet times, but they surfaced during the Gorbachev years and became influential through the writings of Aleksandr Dugin and others (Laruelle 2012). The main frame of the "Eurasianist" school is that of clashing civilizations, but racial thinking is not far below the surface.

Ethnic Russians made up barely 50% of the population of the Soviet Union, but they constitute 80% of the Russian Federation today. There is some tension and mutual suspicion between the Russians and indigenous ethnic minorities, but relations are generally peaceful. The bitter legacy of deportation fed into Chechnya's declaration of independence in 1991, and after two bloody wars, Chechnya was forced to stay part of the Russia Federation (albeit with a high degree of autonomy). In post–Soviet Russia, casual racism is fairly widespread, with polls showing the strongest hostility toward Roma, Chechens, and other peoples of the Caucasus (Alexeev and Hale 2016). As Russia's economy picked up in the 2000s, large numbers migrated from Central Asia and the Caucasus to Russia for work, and they were increasingly treated as a racialized "other" (Roman 2002; Sahadeo 2019). They number 10–15 million people (7–10% of the total population), the second largest absolute number of immigrants in the world after the USA. There have been occasional attacks on

ethnic minorities by football hooligans and nationalist groups. At times, the Kremlin experimented with using radical Russian nationalists to mobilize popular support and undercut the liberal opposition, but since 2011, the main thrust of official policy has been to crack down on extremist groups and ban hate speech from the media (Verkhovsky 2017). There is some latent suspicion of Chinese influence in Russia, especially in the Russian Far East, where the 6 million Russians face off against 1.4 billion Chinese to their south. But officially, Russia and China are close strategic partners, and both sides are keen to keep ethnic tensions in check.

Outside of Russia, in the other post-Soviet states, the main "racial" divide is between Slavs – perceived as migrants and colonists – and native peoples (Zakharov and Law 2016). Most of the ethnic Russians who were living in the Caucasus and Central Asia moved to Russia in the 1990s, fleeing warfare, economic collapse, and political marginalization. Overt racial thinking does not seem to feature prominently in the nation-building programs of the post-Soviet states. The main dimensions of boundary-drawing seem to be religion (the rise of Islam) and fairly abstract and malleable notions of civilizational identities: European, Eurasian, Asian, and Turkic.

In East-Central Europe and the Balkans, national identity was demarcated along linguistic, cultural, and religious lines, and for the most part, the various nations were racially indistinguishable. Racial thinking (in the sense of attributing genetically determined characteristics) was mostly directed at Jews and Roma, two communities occupying very different niches in socialist society. The relative racial homogeneity of the region led the people of the region to convince themselves that racism was not an issue, and scholars generally followed their lead. Catherine Baker (2018a) explored the submerged role of race in communist Yugoslavia, from the way Tito played a role as an interlocutor between the developed North and Global South to the racialized perception of groups such as the Roma and Albanians. Beneath the ostensibly race-blind socialist ideology, she argues that socialist regimes operated with "spatialized hierarchies of modernity" that played an equivalent intellectual role (Baker 2018b, 779). This heritage has become particularly relevant since the immigration crisis of 2015, when the Balkan countries found themselves on the front line of "Fortress Europe," stemming the tide of refugees from the Syrian war and beyond. Similarly, Jaskulowski (2020, 1) argues that "Polish identity must be seen in terms of selective racism without racism—that is, it is an identity based on racial premises but which at the same time neglects its racial character" (see also Polynczuk-Alenius 2020).

Conclusion

This brief survey cannot hope to do justice to the complexity of the issues raised and the nuances in the arguments of the authors cited. Racist thinking and nationalist thinking intersect in complex ways. It is tempting to write off racism or see it as a subset of nationalism, but that might be wishful thinking. Part of racism's appeal is its scientific or pseudoscientific foundations, whereas nationalism has no such claim. But racism now has few defenders in the academic community, and it has no redeeming features. In contrast, nationalism does have its defenders, who see it is a way for communities to defend themselves against foreign oppression and as a tool for building solidarity to tackle social problems. Not all nationalists are democrats, but there is a sense in which all democrats are nationalists, because they need to identify a *demos* capable of self-rule (Greenfeld 1992). Early national states, notably France, were pioneers of democracy, and in the modern era, there are plenty of examples of nationalist slogans helping to win elections. It is not a coincidence that the wave of democratization that swept Eastern Europe in 1989 was accompanied by a surge of nationalism and the dissolution of the three socialist federations (Snyder 2000). Popular mobilizations such as the "color revolutions" in the former Soviet Union or the Arab Spring also had a strong nationalist element, with a central narrative of the people united against the corrupt dictator.

Both racism and nationalism are highly specific to their societal context: their dynamics often play out very differently in countries that are adjacent to each other. All nationalists view their own country as unique, worthy of recognition as a distinct entity. This narrative of exceptionalism was

taken to another level by large, powerful countries such as the USA and Soviet Union: they claim to have risen above the category of "nationalism" that is found in other, lesser countries. Although it is important to recognize the specificity of national identities, common patterns and trends do emerge. Ideas and examples flow quickly and easily across borders. Sometimes country A will follow the lead of country B; at other times, a country may react by heading in an opposite direction.

The revival of attention to the theme of racism in nationalist narratives is to be welcomed. Although it is productive to examine the experiences of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union in a global context, we should at the same time be wary of taking the Western pattern of racialization as the norm, and importing that framework and agenda into other regions where the dynamics are likely to be quite different (Bonnett 2018).

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