Milliyetçilik Araştırmaları Dergisi
MAD-JNS
The Journal of Nationalism Studies

Milliyetçilik Araştırmaları Dergisi | The Journal of Nationalism Studies | 2026 | *8*(2) | 111-124 |

DOI: 10.53425/madergisi.1917966 Araştırma Makalesi | Research Article

OPEN ACCESS

Modernist Theories in Nationalism Research and an Attempt at Classification

Milliyetçilik Araştırmalarında Modernist Teoriler ve Bir Tasnif Denemesi

Hasan Bozkurt ÇELİK* Tevfik ERDEM**

* Asst. Prof., Trabzon University, Faculty of Political Sciences, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Trabzon-Türkiye.
0000-0002-3641-2299

** Prof., Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Ankara-Türkiye.
0000-0001-7658-1735

Sorumlu yazar | Corresponding author:
Hasan Bozkurt Çelik

E-posta | E-mail:
hbozkurtcelik@gmail.com

Başvuru | Submitted:
28.03.2026

Revizyon Talebi | Revision Requested:
14.07.2026

Son Revizyon | Final Revision Received:
22.07.2026

Kabul | Accepted:
09.08.2026

Atıf | Citation:
Çelik, H. B., & Erdem, T. (2026). Modernist Theories in Nationalism Research and an Attempt at Classification. *Milliyetçilik Araştırmaları Dergisi*, *8*(2), 111-124. https://doi.org/10.53425/madergisi.1917966

ISSN: 2667-4459
E-ISSN: 2667-7911

Abstract: Research on nationalism encompasses various theories concerning fundamental areas of debate, such as the emergence and development of nations and the essence of nationalism as a sentiment or ideology. Among these, the modernist approach comprises the views of numerous theorists who address the subject through diverse perspectives. Within the literature, various approaches exist regarding the classification of these theorists who examine the phenomena of nation and nationalism from a modernist lens. This article aims to propose an original classification by drawing upon two existing taxonomic efforts in the literature. To provide a more functional framework for research, the theoretical diversity in the literature can be synthesized under three primary headings. In this context, "Modernists Adopting a Socio-Economic Approach" focus on the economic infrastructure and class dynamics of nationalism. "Modernists Adopting a Political-Ideological Approach" bring together theorists who evaluate nationalism within the framework of the state apparatus and political strategies. Finally, under the heading of "Cultural Constructivists," studies emphasizing the constitutive effect of culture are integrated with approaches that view nations as designs, fabrications, or inventions. By addressing a subject whose susceptibility to diverse interpretations often creates limitations, this article contributes to the literature by creating original value—both in terms of facilitating scholarly readings and enabling a reconsideration and discussion of the causal relationships and linkages between the ideas of various theorists. Methodologically, the study primarily utilizes a literature review and a theoretical typological analysis.

Keywords: nationalism theories, modernist theories, socio-economic approach, political ideological approach, cultural construction

Özet: Milliyetçilik araştırmaları; milletlerin doğuşu ve inkişafı, milliyetçiliğin bir hissiyat ya da ideoloji olarak muhtevası gibi temel tartışma alanlarında farklı teorileri içermektedir. Bu teorilerden olan modernist yaklaşım kendi içerisinde konuyu farklı yaklaşımlarla ele alan pek çok teorisyenin görüşlerinden oluşmaktadır. Millet ve milliyetçilik olgularını modernist perspektiften ele alan bu teorisyenlerin sınıflandırılmasına dair literatürde çeşitli yaklaşımlar mevcuttur. Makale literatürde mevcut tasnif çabalarından ikisine yer vererek özgün bir tasnif yapma amacındadır. Literatürdeki kuramsal çeşitlilik, araştırmalarda daha işlevsel bir kullanım sağlamak adına üç temel üst başlık altında sentezlenebilir. Bu bağlamda "Toplumsal-İktisadi Yaklaşımı Benimseyen Modernistler", milliyetçiliğin ekonomik altyapısını ve sınıfsal dinamiklerini merkeze almaktadır. "Siyasi-İdeolojik Yaklaşımı Benimseyen Modernistler" ise milliyetçiliği devlet aygıtı ve siyasal stratejiler çerçevesinde değerlendiren teorisyenleri bir araya getirmektedir. Son olarak "Kültürel İnşacılar" başlığı altında milletleri bir tasarım, imalat veya icat olarak gören yaklaşımlar ile kültürün kurucu etkisini vurgulayan çalışmalar birleştirilmektedir. Makale, çok farklı şekillendirme imkânlarına dayanmasının sınırlılık yarattığı böyle bir konuyu hem literatürdeki okumayı kolaylaştırabilmek hem de teorisyenlerin fikirleri arasındaki neden-sonuç ve illiyet bağıntılarının yeniden düşünülmesini ve tartışmaya açılmasını sağlayabilmek anlamında bir özgün değer yaratarak literatüre katkı sağlamaktadır. Makalede temel olarak literatür taraması ve teorik bir tipolojik analiz yöntemlerinden yararlanılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: milliyetçilik teorileri, modernist teoriler, toplumsal-iktisadi yaklaşım, siyasi ideolojik yaklaşım, kültürel inşa

© 2026 Hasan Bozkurt Çelik & Tevfik Erdem

Bu eser, Creative Commons Atıf-GayriTicari 4.0 Uluslararası Lisansı ile lisanslanmıştır.
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 International License.

Introduction

According to modernists, the concepts of nation and nationalism emerged alongside or as a product of modern processes such as industrialization, the establishment of centralized states, secularization, the rise of capitalism, and urbanization. This is because it is impossible to speak of the existence of political, social, or economic conditions that would have enabled nationalism to develop in ancient times. These conditions began to emerge with modernity. In effect, with the modern era or the era of nationalism, nations became a sociological necessity. In short, nationalism creates nations; nations do not create nationalism. While sharing this common ground, we can also say that modernists attribute different dates to the birth of nations. In other words, different theorists locate the birth of nations and nationalism in different stages of the modern era (Özkırımlı, 1999). Two main types of modernism can be identified. The first is chronological modernism. In this type of modernism, the focus is on the novelty of nations and nationalism in the historical process. Even if there were structures similar to nations in the pre-modern era, this was entirely coincidental. The birth of the community known as the nation is based on the democratic revolutions that took place after the eighteenth century. The second type of modernism is called structuralist modernism. This perspective holds that the structure of the nation itself is a modern type. This is because pre-modern societies did not have the political, social, and cultural structures that could be called nations (Smith, 2017).

There are other theories that approach the nation and nationalism in an independent manner, starting from the periphery of the modernist paradigm and then developing by diverging from it. According to these theories, the nation, defined on the basis of territory, is a group belonging to a sovereign state within certain borders and distinguishing itself from other communities by these borders. Another fundamental argument of this perspective is historicity. Elites play a major role in instilling this historicity in society (Smith, 1998). One of the main tasks of this type of intelligentsia is to mobilize a community that was previously passive to form a nation around its rediscovered historical culture (Smith, 2016). However, this does not mean that nations were invented by elites, as will be discussed later. Situations where the people played a complementary role from the bottom up should not be overlooked (Smith, 1998). There are also differing views on how to classify thinkers and ideas that look at the phenomena of nation and nationalism from a modernist perspective. For example, drawing inspiration from Breuilly, Özkırımlı (1999) examines modernists under the headings of *economic transformation* for theorists who base their analyses on economic issues and concepts, *political transformation* for those who focus on political factors, and *socio-cultural transformation* for those who focus on social and cultural elements. Anthony Smith (2013), by contrast, identifies five distinct modernist views. The first is the socio-economic perspective, which explains nations and nationalism in terms of economic issues and concepts such as regional inequalities,

class conflicts, and industrial capitalism. The second is the socio-cultural understanding that centers on the mutual influence of industrialization and cultural elements, with Ernest Gellner's concept of high culture being particularly central here. The third is the political perspective that places the pursuit of interests by dominating the state and political life at the core of nationalism. The fourth is an ideological understanding that emphasizes the ideological aspect of nationalism and argues that nations are designed by an elite cadre. The fifth and last is the constructivist approach, which views nations as directly invented traditions or imagined political entities. Although later excluded from this categorization, postmodern and gender-based nationalism studies have also become the focus of many social scientists and contributed to the literature (Smith, 2017). Discussions have also emerged in the literature suggesting that the core tenets of postmodernism—such as relativism, plurality, and difference—have given rise to new conceptions of nationalism. In addition, concepts such as postnationalism, trans-nationalism, and supranationalism have been introduced to account for these evolving perspectives (Çelik, 2023). However, as the scope of this article is confined to modernist theories of nationalism, a detailed discussion of these issues falls beyond its scope.

Anthony Smith's (2010) classification is one of the most functional classifications in nationalism studies. Remaining true to the essence of this classification, researchers with a socio-cultural or constructivist perspective can be evaluated under the same heading, as can those who adopt a political perspective and emphasize the ideological aspect of nationalism. However, distinguishing political and ideological approaches from one another, while simultaneously treating cultural and constructivist approaches as separate categories, may generate conceptual ambiguity. Merging these categories is therefore a useful way of overcoming such confusion. Yet, the objective of the typology proposed in this article extends beyond mere simplification. Theorists who conceive of nations as products of a process of social construction cannot be meaningfully compared when assigned to separate categories. Accordingly, this integration offers not only greater theoretical coherence but also a more robust analytical framework for making accurate assessments at both the ontological level and the level of practical political life.

In this way, modernist nationalism researchers can be examined under three main headings: “Modernists Adopting a Socio-Economic Approach,” “Modernists Adopting a Political-Ideological Approach,” and “Cultural Constructivists.” Those who adopt the socio-economic approach focus more on issues and concepts related to the economic infrastructure. Among those who adopt the political-ideological approach, theorists who evaluate nationalism within the framework of politics and ideology can be examined, while among cultural constructivists, researchers who separately highlight the relationship between nationalism and culture and those who view nations directly as inventions, fabrications, or designs can be examined.

Table 1

Comparison of Modernist Classifications of Nationalism

Özkırımlı's Classification (Özkırımlı, 2010)	Smith's Classification (Smith, 2010)	The Classification Proposed in This Study
	Socioeconomic	
Economic transformations	Sociocultural	Socio-Economic Approach
Political transformations	Political	Political-Ideological Approach
Social/cultural transformations	Ideological	Cultural Constructivists
	Constructionist	

As this study aims to develop a new classification system inspired by two distinct classifications, it has primarily employed a narrative literature review approach. Alongside a comprehensive review of the relevant literature, this study adopts theoretical typological analysis, a core methodological approach for developing classifications in the social sciences. Rather than constructing an entirely new categorization, however, the study aims to develop an original typology through the reinterpretation and synthesis of two existing classifications. In line with the logic of theoretical typological analysis, this reinterpretation is undertaken by reorganizing the relevant theoretical approaches into analytically distinct ideal types.

Modernists Adopting a Socio-Economic Approach

The modernist approach that links issues such as the emergence of nations on the historical stage, the rise of nationalism, or the degree of individuals' sense of belonging to their community to economic factors and developments can be termed economic modernism. The theorists examined under this heading are Tom Nairn, who focuses on the uneven or unequal development between countries he calls the center and the periphery, and M. Hechter, who attempts to explain nationalism through the concept of internal colonialism as the source of unequal development within a country.

According to Nairn (1981), the rise of nationalism is a product of uneven development within a country. In his view, uneven development gives rise to nationalism as a self-defence mechanism among disadvantaged groups within the country. It is the leaders who set this mechanism in motion. The people who defend their identity against this economically powerful and exploitative ruling class are the ones who give rise to nationalism. This is the cause and foundation of nationalism. The role of mobilizing the masses who must defend themselves falls to the new nationalist middle-class intelligentsia. These intellectuals invited the masses to engage with history. They had to do this through appeals written in clear language. Uneven development is a dialectic, and nationalism emerged as an antithesis to metropolitan hegemony. Serves as evidence that Marxist theory has historically failed.

The essence of Nairn's views is a concept that captures the uneven development of the capitalist economy from the eighteenth century to the present day. The domination of industrialized core countries over the rest of the peripheral countries and the national consciousness, awakening, or simply national sentiment that this domination engendered have been the

main drivers of nationalism and, consequently, nation-building (Özkırımlı, 1999). The most important role here is played by the industrialized core countries. According to Nairn (as cited in Roger, 2008), peripheral countries are forced into the “circle of nationalism” by “structural imperatives.” The mechanism of the world political economy, based on unequal development, is a strategy of exploitation (p. 53).

Nairn (2015) defines nationalism as a modern Janus, associating it with the two-faced Roman god Janus, one of whose faces looks toward the future and the other toward the past. According to Nairn, while one face of nationalism is oriented toward progress, the other must turn backward—that is, toward the past—in order to make that progress possible. The point Nairn emphasizes is that the nation and nationalism are modern realities and, at the same time, one of the primary dynamics that give rise to modernity. This two-faced modern Janus emerges from conditions of unequal development, gains strength through the calls of intellectuals, and ultimately becomes an element that shapes modernity. One significant criticism directed at Nairn is that, while he explains the emergence of nationalism as a reaction by underdeveloped countries to unequal development, he fails to explain why this reaction took the form of nationalism rather than some other form.

Orridge (1981), who voices this criticism, also emphasizes that unequal development does not always produce the same result, citing the examples of Southern Italy and Northern England. Another criticism is that of Anthony Smith (1983), who argues that Nairn's approach is reductionist. According to Smith, nationalism is not a phenomenon that can be explained by a single argument such as uneven development. Moreover, given that the histories of nationalist movements themselves differ, it is impossible to expect the conceptualization of unequal development alone to explain this.

Michael Hechter (1975), who, like Nairn, focuses on economic foundations, centers his analysis on the concept of internal colonialism. He argues that an approach focused on internal colonialism would be more effective in explaining nationalism. The general development model in the literature, which he terms a model of expansion, consists of three stages. The first is a pre-industrial society, the second is an industrial society, and the third involves a democratic society where cultural differences between the center and the periphery no longer matter and representation is ensured for all groups. He argues that this model of social change is unrealistic and ignores the conflicts of the age of nations. Hechter claims that the relationship between the center and the periphery is based on the exploitation of the periphery, using the concept of internal colonialism, which he states was first used by Lenin. He asserts that unequal modernization creates development disparities among communities. According to Hechter, this stratification leads to the formation of two distinct ethnic groups. Over time, the disadvantaged group begins to view its own culture as equal to or superior to the dominant

culture of the center. This often leads to the belief that it constitutes a separate nation and to a struggle for independence.

Modernists Adopting a Political-Ideological Approach

Researchers who approach nationalism as a tool of political domination or as a purely ideological phenomenon tend to view it instrumentally, evaluating nations from this perspective. According to this view, nations have emerged through the use of nationalism by groups seeking to seize power. Among modernists who adopt this political-ideological approach, John Breuilly and Paul Brass stand out.

Breuilly (1993) criticizes the tendency in the literature to approach nationalism from an identity-centered perspective and argues that it should be treated as a matter solely within the political sphere. He contends that nationalism cannot be explained through class conflict or the cultural sphere. According to him, the primary goal of nationalism is to establish a state. He seeks to support this claim through the methodological analysis of specific examples. He states that the internal differences among nationalisms can be understood through a comparative historical analysis of specific examples, a conclusion he reached through such analysis.

The most important point that distinguishes Breuilly from other theorists in nationalism studies is that he approaches nationalism through the logic of political demand and emphasizes the importance of the public sphere for nationalisms. Beyond the bureaucratic ideal of taking over public administration, nationalisms also oppose the expansion of the private sphere at the expense of the public sphere. One of the main reasons for this is that defending the public interest in a collective context is stronger than defending private interests. Moreover, the expansion of the public sphere will not result in the erosion of the private sphere, but rather in the dismantling of feudal powers—or at least that is the expectation (Roger, 2008).

Breuilly, who views nationalism in general as a means to a political end, has been criticized, like many theorists, for having a reductionist approach. According to Smith (1998), one of the theorists who most clearly articulates this criticism, Breuilly engages in political reductionism by overlooking the social and cultural dimensions of nationalism.

Paul Brass (1991) is an American political scientist who views nationalism as an instrumental element in politics and is a renowned researcher, particularly for his work on nationalism in South Asia. Instrumentalists, and Brass in particular, argue that personal choices and the guidance of elites are fundamental elements in the formation of ethnicities. According to him, studying ethnicities means examining how elites select the fundamental dynamics of group culture and attempt to gain the group's support by assigning new and unique meanings to them. This is because the primary goal of elites is to secure political gains. In this sense, ethnicity studies also become instrumentalized.

According to Brass (1994), with the advent of modernity, innate characteristics hold no significance for most people. In his view, people do not form a special bond with their language

or their relatives and may even harbor negative feelings toward them. Similarly, one's homeland may also be insignificant to a person. In his view, the primary factors in shaping the understanding of nation and nationalism are political movements and the self-interest of socio-political groups. Common ancestry and other nationalist elements are purely instrumental. According to Brass, the fundamental goal of nationalists is to secure their political interests to the highest degree. For nationalism consists, in essence, of culturally driven efforts that are directly politically motivated. In other words, cultural change is merely a consequence of the political interest that serves as the primary focus. For example, according to Brass, the main reason ethnic group leaders emphasize traditions is to unite the community's attention around a common point and thereby establish a shared social structure.

Another key element of Brass's (1994) approach is the decisive role played by the relationship between the state and the elites. By the term elite, he refers to specific groups within an ethnic community. According to him, in most cases, the concept of the elite overlaps with that of class. In explaining this, he cites aristocrats as an example for the pre-modern period; however, he notes that in the pre-modern era, there were also religious elites not grounded in class. In the modern period, he speaks of multi-class, privileged elites that include high-ranking bureaucrats and military leaders from different social classes, including those from the rural or urban middle class. In conclusion, according to Brass, elites—regardless of the societal structure they inhabit or their class background—constitute the fundamental determining factor of nationalism in terms of the relationships they establish with the state.

His work, in line with Breuilly's research, views nationalism as the result of political conflicts and carefully considered choices. However, while Breuilly examines the external forms of nationalist political opposition to the existing order, Brass believes that understanding the conflicts within this opposition is more illuminating in explaining nationalism. Both dimensions are quite important because, considering that nationalism is not a simple lobbying activity, it can be said that the works of Brass and Breuilly complement each other in this sense. According to both, the aim of nationalists is not to obtain the state's support in any way, but to revise it in a way that better protects their interests in the long term or to take direct control of the government (Roger, 2008).

Cultural Constructivists

Anthony Smith's (2010) classification, which examines nationalism studies under five headings, divides researchers into two broad groups: advocates of the socio-cultural approach and constructivists. Although Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, and Benedict Anderson explain nationalism by prioritizing different concepts, the elements all three consider are cultural phenomena. Hobsbawm, who views traditions as inventions; Anderson, who foregrounds print capitalism; and Gellner, who emphasizes constructed high culture, all ultimately see nations as the product of a culture-based construction process.

Gellner (1992) explains nationalism not through political or economic instrumentalism, but through the influence of cultural phenomena. He also links this cultural transformation to industrialization. According to Gellner, nationalism is a new form of social organization based on high cultures created through education. In his view, the idea that nations are natural and spontaneous formations is nothing more than a myth. Gellner argues that while nationalism in some cases facilitates the transformation of existing cultures into modern nation-states, in other cases it can directly create nations on its own. Each of the high cultures he refers to aims to possess its own state. Consequently, the origins of modern nations lie in the high cultures that emerged as a result of the Industrial Revolution. The political counterpart of this is the nation-state. Gellner also notes that the intellectual expectation of an international world emerging after the Industrial Revolution did not materialize in this process; rather, it was replaced by the age of nationalism. According to Gellner, literacy, which separates peasants from the upper classes in agrarian societies, is also a requirement for being part of an industrial society. Achieving literacy goals can provide a social advantage in terms of industrialization if there is kinship or closeness within the community. However, for this advantage to be valid, the language of education must be the same as the language spoken.

Additionally, Gellner (1992) discusses the Wrong Address Theory. According to this theory, the spirit of history or human consciousness made a grave error: the awakening message intended to mobilize the classes was delivered to nations instead. The entire endeavor of revolutionary activists is therefore focused on delivering this message to its intended recipient. Leaving aside the content of the mail or the role of the postman, Gellner compares the transition from the imperial age to the nation-state age and the nationalism that brought it about with pre-modern patriotism, stating that pre-modern cultural chauvinism differed from nationalism because it had no political goals. He argues that consciousness resembling the nation-state structure was sometimes seen in agrarian societies, but that it became a necessity in the era of the nation-state. This era is the period when the monopoly on legitimate violence, the monopoly on culture, and the power to provide and protect everything necessary to perpetuate the dominant culture are in the hands of the nation-state.

Ernest Gellner (1998), who attributes the emergence of nationalism to cultural differences between central and local communities within the same country, initially argued that nationalisms would eventually disappear but later revised this view. According to Gellner, classical Marxism argues that ethnic identities will disappear in four stages:

- Societies organized along industrial lines tend to erode existing social structures.
- Structural differentiations underlying cultural diversity are, in turn, sustained and reproduced through these cultural differences.
- Ethnicity is constituted through differences that mutually activate cultural distinctions and position competing cultures in opposition to one another.

- The concluding stage is the dissipation of cultural differentiation, whereby ethnicity loses its political significance and, ultimately, ethnic identity disappears.

Gellner argues that these four propositions of Classical Marxism fail to accurately reflect the political realities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. On the contrary, he maintains that nationalism expanded and acquired even greater significance during this period.

Eric Hobsbawm (1993), by contrast, approaches the concepts of nation and nationalism from a Marxist perspective, though not primarily on economic grounds; rather, he argues that the nation is a political invention. In all his relevant works, Hobsbawm argues that everything national is the result of a process of construction or invention. He notes that emotional affiliations existed even before the emergence of nationalism and refers to them collectively as popular proto-nationalism. The symbols and sentiments of pre-national communities have been instrumentalized in the mobilization of modern nationalism. However, the two are fundamentally different because while pre-national bonds are insufficient to form a nation—or even a nationality—modern nationalisms create modern nations.

One of the key concepts through which Hobsbawm (2006a) articulates these views is the "invention of tradition." Inventing traditions is a process of formalization and routinization that draws on the past. Hobsbawm defines traditions as the status quo's objectives, which impose fixed practices and seek to organize a segment of social life around these fixed elements. This concept is often confused with "custom," with which it is frequently treated as interchangeable. Customs, on the other hand, are social practices that anticipate changes consistent with social norms (pp. 3-5). Hobsbawm (2006b) notes that in-vented traditions were particularly concentrated during the period between 1870 and 1914. Examples of invented traditions include Bastille Day in France, the transformation of the Olympic Games into a national objective, military parades in various countries, monumental statues, or elements performed annually during national holidays (p. 351).

Hobsbawm (2006b) also grounds this idea directly in the well-known statement of the Italian nationalist leader Massimo d'Azeglio: "We have made Italy; now we must make Italians" (p. 310).

Another figure who may be characterized as a cultural constructivist is Benedict Anderson. Anderson, who became widely known through his work *Imagined Communities*, first published in 1983, has seen this book interpreted in ways that have generated various misunderstandings, beginning with its very title. The clearest and most immediate example appears in the translation of the title itself. In Turkish, the work was translated as *Hayali Cemaatler* (Anderson, 2015).

Yet the word used in the original English title is not imaginary, which conveys the meaning of something unreal or fictitious, but imagined, which denotes something conceived or envisioned. The distinction between these two terms also reflects a broader disagreement

concerning the reality of nations. To describe the nation as imaginary is to deprive it of its status as a sociological reality. Such a perspective disregards people's loyalty to cultural resources, traditions, and political institutions. Therefore, regardless of claims that nations are products of design or construction, it would not be accurate to argue that they are fabricated or false entities (Smith, 1998).

One of the principal points of departure in Benedict Anderson's (2015) explanation of nations and nationalism is his identification of three paradoxes embedded within modernist approaches. The first of these paradoxes lies in the contrast between the novelty of nations in the eyes of modernist theorists and their subjectively ancient character in the eyes of nationalists—a perception that, in many contexts, proves difficult to overcome. The second paradox concerns the universal character of possessing a nationality, contrasted with the particularity of the specific nationality one holds. While belonging to a nationality—much like gender—is a universal condition, being of Greek nationality, for instance, is particular and distinctive. The third paradox within the modernist perspective is the remarkable effectiveness of nationalism despite its apparent inability to produce major political or philosophical thinkers who might intellectually sustain it. As Anderson notes, nationalism has produced neither Thomas Hobbes nor Alexis de Tocqueville nor Karl Marx nor Max Weber. Indeed, this absence has at times led cosmopolitan intellectuals to adopt a condescending attitude toward nationalism. Departing from these observations, Anderson defines nations—distinct from other modernist theorists—as imagined communities in which individuals who do not personally know one another can nevertheless converge around a shared identity. Nations are imagined because it is impossible for even the members of the smallest nation to know one another personally. What transforms such a community into a nation is the awareness among individuals that others exist who think and speak as they do, and the capacity to hold in mind the collective presence of those individuals. For example, even if an American never encounters millions of other Americans and does not know their names, they will nonetheless perceive themselves as belonging to the same community, while the existence of those others remains continually present in their consciousness.

One of the key arguments that contributes to the imaginability of nations, according to Benedict Anderson (2015), is print capitalism. The increase in the number and distribution of printed works strengthened the sense of unity among individuals living in different parts of a country. Among the print media that Anderson emphasizes most prominently are newspapers. The calendar sections, which are typically located in the opening pages of newspapers, represent a practical manifestation of Walter Benjamin's concept of homogeneous, empty time. Moreover, Anderson argues that the newspaper is, in a sense, an extreme form of the book. Newspapers can reach enormous circulation numbers; however, their popularity is short-lived. To describe this situation, Anderson characterizes newspapers as *one-day bestsellers*.

While Anderson (2015) explains the emergence of nations through such arguments, he attributes the rise of nationalism to the disappearance of three cultural phenomena. The first of these is the decline in the importance of sacred script-languages and the concurrent strengthening of vernacular languages. The second is the collapse of a centralized and hierarchical worldview in which societies were organized around a supreme center—an understanding comparable to a doctrine of divine authority. The third is the separation of cosmology from history, accompanied by the gradual decline in the significance of the belief that all human beings share identical origins. The emergence of more secular, local, and historically grounded themes and concepts in place of these three elements constituted a major factor in the rise of nationalism.

Another aspect that makes Anderson significant in the field of nationalism studies is his attempt to provide a coherent answer, from his own perspective to questions about why individuals are willing to sacrifice their lives for their nations. According to Anderson (2015), the nationalist imagination aspires to immortality. This aspiration lends nationalism a quasi-religious character and distinguishes it from other ideologies. The concept of the nation offers the most suitable means to transform fatality into continuity and contingency into meaning, while doing so in a worldly manner. In Anderson's view, the enchantment of nationalism lies precisely in its ability to transform chance into destiny. In this sense, nationalism performs—within a modern framework—the function that religion once fulfilled. To illustrate this point, Anderson refers to Unknown Soldier memorials, which he notes exist in almost every country and stand as bastions of nationalism. Together with the previously mentioned elements, such memorials demonstrate the significance of symbols rooted in the cultural foundations of nations in the emergence of nations and nationalisms.

The emergence—or, according to some perspectives, the reawakening—of nationalisms has been facilitated by the expansion of communication channels. This view, which Benedict Anderson (2015) frequently emphasizes, is also articulated by Sadri Maksudi Arsal (1979) through the example of the Czech nation. According to Arsal, the latent or concealed national spirit of the Czech nation re-emerged with the invention of the printing press and the consequent proliferation of works containing elements of national culture. The dissemination of such works made it virtually impossible for nations possessing a distinct national culture to disappear.

Conclusion

Research on nationalism began with the work of theorists who examined it as an independent concept, distinct from nationalist discourse. This process, grounded in the question of what a nation is (Renan, 1990), has given rise to different theories depending on the answers provided to the questions of when and where nations and nationalism first emerged.

Within these research circles, the dominant perspective—particularly in the second half of the 20th century—posits that nations are constructed or invented entities that emerged under the influence of the French Revolution. Theorists who advance this view through various forms and arguments are referred to in the literature as modernist theorists. This article argues that it is beneficial to group these modernist theorists, each of whom approaches the subject through a different conceptual or event-based lens, under three primary headings.

Inspired by the classifications of Smith (2010) and Özkırımlı (2010), this original framework sharpens the distinctions between economic, cultural, and political foundations, placing these divisions at the center of the interplay between various perspectives. In doing so, the study moves beyond a purely economy-centered Marxist outlook or a solely culture-and-status-based perspective; instead, it offers a classification that evaluates each viewpoint according to its own internal dynamics. The proposed classification diverges from Özkırımlı by merging the social and economic spheres, as well as the political and ideological ones. Furthermore, to underscore the prominence of constructivism within modernist theories, the study aligns the cultural dimension, one of the principal components of the theoretical typology, with constructivism. Similarly, it distinguishes itself from Smith by grouping theorists who center on cultural elements with those of the constructivist school, while also unifying the political and ideological domains. Accordingly, the classification proposed in this article offers a typology that is more compatible with the shared characteristics of the aforementioned theorists while remaining more attentive to the conceptual framework of the broader literature. This feature highlights the comparative strengths of the proposed typology over existing alternatives.

However, differences also exist among the theorists grouped under the same heading, and these differences constitute the primary limitation of the classification. To mitigate this limitation, the classification emphasizes their substantial commonalities. Accordingly, theorists who regard nations as socially constructed and emphasize cultural factors are grouped under one heading, whereas those who emphasize political interests and ideological legacies are classified under another.

Consequently, beyond a mere categorical rearrangement, this approach offers an original contribution to understanding the intersections and points of contention between various theorists. This validates the original contribution of the text in two distinct contexts: the act of categorization and the assessment of internal correlations.

One key finding of the article regarding this classification is that nationalism was understood to play an emancipatory role for both early liberal thinkers, such as Rousseau, and certain figures inspired by Marxism, such as Hechter. On the one hand, nationalism is regarded as the power of the people against despotism and monarchs; on the other hand, in different periods and through different perspectives, it can incite secessionist movements against the

homogenizing tendencies of existing states, which some theorists evaluate as efforts toward liberation. Certainly, the debate could be enriched by formulating counterarguments to secessionist nationalisms through conceptualizations such as "plural nation"; however, the crucial point to emphasize is that both perspectives—notwithstanding their contested validity—prioritize nationalism by virtue of its inherently emancipatory character.

References

Anderson, B. (2015). *Hayali cemaatler* (İ. Savaşır, Trans.). Metis Yayınları.

Arsal, S. M. (1979). *Milliyet duygusunun sosyolojik esasları*. Ötüken Neşriyat.

Brass, P. R. (1991). *Ethnicity and nationalism: Theory and comparison*. SAGE Publication.

Brass, P. R. (1994). Elite competition and nation-formation. In J. Hutchinson & A. D. Smith (Eds.), *Nationalism* (pp. 83-89). Oxford University Press.

Breuilly, J. (1993). *Nationalism and the state*. Manchester University Press.

Çelik, H. B. (2023). *Postmodern milliyetçilik: Millet ve milliyetçilikten milletler ve milliyetçiliklere*. Cedit Neşriyat.

Gellner, E. (1992). *Uluslar ve ulusçuluk* (B. E. Behar & G. G. Özdoğan, Trans.). İnsan Yayınları.

Gellner, E. (1998). *Milliyetçiliğe bakmak* (S. Coşar, S. Özertürk & N. Soyarık, Trans.). İletişim Yayınları.

Hechter, M. (1975). *Internal colonialism: The Celtic fringe in British national development 1536-1966*. University of California Press.

Hobsbawm, E. J. (1993). *1780'den günümüze milletler ve milliyetçilik* (O. Akınhay, Trans.). Ayrıntı Yayınları.

Hobsbawm, E. (2006a). Giriş: Gelenekleri icat etmek. In E. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger (Eds.), *Geleneğin icadı* (M. M. Şahin, Trans., pp. 1–18). Agora Kitaplığı.

Hobsbawm, E. (2006b). Seri üretim gelenekler: Avrupa, 1870–1914. In E. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger (Eds.), *Geleneğin icadı* (M. M. Şahin, Trans., pp. 305–356). Agora Kitaplığı.

Nairn, T. (1981). *The break-up of Britain: Crisis and neo-nationalism*. Verso Books.

Nairn, T. (2015). *Milliyetçiliğin yüzleri: Janus'a yeni bir bakış* (S. Kırdar & M. Ratip, Trans.). İletişim Yayınları.

Orridge, A. W. (1981). Uneven development and nationalism: 2. *Political Studies, 29*(2), 181-190. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.1981.tb00486.x

Özkırımlı, U. (1999). *Milliyetçilik kuramları*. Sarmal Yayınevi.

Özkırımlı, U. (2010). *Theories of nationalism: A critical introduction*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Renan, E. (1990). *Ulus nedir?* (G. Yavaş, Trans.). Pinhan Yayıncılık.

Roger, A. (2008). *Milliyetçilik kuramları* (A. U. Kılıç, Trans.). Versus Kitap.

Smith, A. D. (1983). *Theories of nationalism*. Duckwort.

Smith, A. D. (1998). *Nationalism and modernism*. Routledge.

Smith, A. D. (2010). *Nationalism: Theory, ideology, history*. Polity Press.

Smith, A. D. (2013). *Milliyetçilik: Kuram-ideoloji-tarih* (Ü. H. Yolsal, Trans.). Atıf Yayınları.
Smith, A. D. (2016). *Milli kimlik* (B. S. Şener, Trans.). İletişim Yayınları.
Smith, A.D. (2017). *Etno-sembolizm ve milliyetçilik* (B. F. Çallı, Trans.). Alfa Yayınları.

Declarations

Additional Information: This article is derived from relevant sections of the thesis titled "Analysis of Turkish Nationalism in the Context of Ethnosymbolism," prepared by Hasan Bozkurt Çelik under the supervision of Prof. Tevfik Erdem.

Ethics Statement: The authors declare that this study was prepared in accordance with the principles of research and publication ethics. Given its content and methodology, the study did not require ethics committee approval.

Author Contributions Statement: The authors declare that they contributed equally to the study.

Financial Support Statement: The authors declare that no external funding or financial support was received for the preparation or publication of this research.

Conflict of Interest Statement: The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest concerning this study.

Copyright and Licence Statement: Copyright in the article remains with the authors, who have granted the right of first publication to the Journal of Nationalism Studies. The article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) licence. The authors declare that they accepted the journal's Copyright and Open Access Policy when submitting the manuscript.

Declaration on the Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools: According to the authors' declaration, no generative artificial intelligence tools were used in the preparation of this study.
