

Preface to the Turkish Translation of *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*, 2017

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This book was originally published 25 years ago – in December 1992. Its focus was historical – the emergence of the modern world in which we have lived for the past several centuries. At the time the nature of this world appeared particularly clear and this explained the book’s reception. In this respect, for once, its author was lucky.

At the same time, in some ways, the world of the 1990s was new. The Cold War that defined our understanding of politics during the previous 45 years was over. Its end, like the collapse of the Soviet Union which brought it about, was unexpected. Of course, the theories of the end of history, popular in its aftermath and still dominant today, continued to view social reality through the traditional historicist (whether Hegelian or Marxist) lens of predetermined historical stages. These stages of material as well as ideological development toward the realization of the known human purpose replaced each other in episodes of heroic struggle, represented by the Cold War in the last instance. The ostensible victory of the West demonstrated that the material and ideological stage of Western development was closer to the realization of that purpose (that it was its realization, in fact) than that of the East. The West was associated with the victorious party of the Cold War (politically and economically embodied in the United States of America) and therefore with liberal democracy and market economy, which during the conflict opposed authoritarianism (often called “totalitarianism”) and central planning. With this alternative in the dustbin of history, most Western observers prepared to watch, and help in, the transformation of the rest of the world into liberal democratic (or just “democratic”) and market (capitalist) societies. The academy geared to study and comment on the processes of “democratization” and “globalization.” To focus on the last stage of history, which would presumably extend to the rest of human life on earth, a new discipline came into being; ironically, it was called “Transition Studies.”

The turn of events from the first days of this by-definition-halcyon era was terribly disappointing. It became clear that, contrary to these Hegelian expectations, the force actually shaping the post-Cold-War society was nationalism, which so many believed gone forever at the end of WWII. This turn of events supported the central argument of the book that nationalism is the constitutive element of modernity, the cultural framework of modern society and, specifically, politics. The fervor of nationalist passions in Yugoslavia, the former Soviet Union, including Russia itself, and the rest of Eastern Europe

provoked a great interest in the study of nationalism and encouraged reconsideration of it in the pockets of Western Europe and Canada. While Western European states were taking major steps in the direction of transnationalism and continental unification, irredentist nationalism acquired new legitimacy in Catalonia and Basque country, and in Scotland. A similar retooling was happening in Quebec. The fact that *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* proposed that nationalism was the form democracy appeared in the modern world attracted to the book the attention of nationalists in the West as well as observers of nationalism, hoping for the eventual development of Western-type democracy in the East.

It is quite possible, unfortunately, that while they welcomed the idea that nationalism was responsible for most of the political advantages of modernity, they disregarded my distinguishing between *the three types* of the new (national) consciousness – individualist-civic, collectivistic-civic, and collectivistic-ethnic, which were conducive to these advantages to vastly different degrees, as they also disregarded the distinction between liberal, essentially individualistic, democracy, and the drastically opposed to it, authoritarian one. National consciousness is the view of social reality as consisting of sovereign communities of fundamentally equal members; nationalism is based on the principles of popular sovereignty and equality, which are the defining characteristics of modern democracy. Democracy as such is therefore logically implied in nationalism: a nation, which is a sovereign community of fundamentally equal members, is a democracy by definition. This is, however, neither good nor bad: this is a morally neutral statement. For someone who considers a liberal democracy a just society, an authoritarian democracy should be anathema, and vice versa. Inattention to these distinctions, I am afraid, has largely contributed to the persistent misunderstanding of nationalism and, as a result, of all the political processes inspired by it.

Looking back at the last quarter of a century for the purpose of the introduction to a volume I edited (*Globalization of Nationalism*, ECPR Press, 2016), I concluded that nationalism not only remains the major force behind politics in the parts of the world that have been affected by it from the onset of modernity in England of the 16th century through the Cold War, but that it became the major force all over the world, having *globalized* to large populations which it had not penetrated by the 1990s, specifically China, and made significant inroads throughout the Arab world under the guise of Islam. *Globalization of nationalism* is the only sense in which globalization has been a reality. In all other senses, it has been a desideratum of the American and EU elites that was misconceived from the

beginning and never had any chance of realization. It has been most staunchly championed by ideologues (or as they are often called, “theorists”) of the above mentioned, historicist formation, who, disregarding actual history, consider history as the succession of necessary stages, leading humanity to its predetermined self-fulfillment. For them, globalization means the unification of all the productive forces of humanity for the latter’s greatest benefit and ever-lasting happiness, and, as such, implies gradual diminution of all conflicts, eventually leading to eternal peace on earth. What regular folk think of this beautiful theoretical vision was recently demonstrated by Brexit and, across the Atlantic, the election of Donald Trump as the President of the United States.

Contrary to such dreams, what is actually happening is the spread of the same type of consciousness – nationalism – all over the world, and this kind of globalization, rather than contributing to greater welfare and peaceful coexistence of all, draws into the competition for economic, political, cultural, military supremacy, but, above all, for international prestige or dignity, ever increasing numbers of units. In this manner, globalization spreads conflict far and wide, instead of, as its champions prognosticate, limiting it. The reason for this is that national consciousness is inherently competitive. Nationalism endows individual identity with dignity. This endowment with dignity is the core difference between national identity and every other type of identity and it is this that makes nationalism so attractive, ultimately lying behind the globalization of this new consciousness. Before nationalism, dignified identity was the lot of narrow upper strata of every society. Ascription of sovereignty to the membership of the community in nationalism and its fundamental egalitarianism make it the lot of every national. Since this dignified identity derives from membership in the nation, members of nations are deeply invested in the dignity of the nation itself, measured by its standing in the world or international prestige. Experienced as national pride or sense of wounded national dignity, national sentiment reflects fluctuations in the nation’s standing and members are easily mobilized to contribute to the dignity of their nation and to defend it. This psychological dynamic results in the constant competition of nations for prestige.

In the second volume of the nationalism trilogy – *The Spirit of Capitalism: Nationalism and Economic Growth* – I showed, among other things, that this competitive spirit was born with nationalism itself and was in evidence in England even before England had any competitors. The English developed national consciousness about two centuries ahead of any other society and, seeing themselves as a nation, necessarily saw their neighbors as nations as well and competed with them in the face of the total

misunderstanding by these neighbors of the motives behind their aggressive actions. This competitive spirit led to the emergence of modern economy, first in England, then in its direct descendant the United States, France, and other countries. Indeed, capitalism is arguably the first and most important product of the inherent competitiveness of nationalism. But it is surely not its only product. With the coveted prize being always the same – dignity -- nations choose to compete only in races in which they have a fair chance to end at or near the top. Russia, for instance, despite its enormous natural resources, has throughout its national history stayed on the sidelines of the economic race. But it threw all its energies into the space race and military competition, on the one hand, and on the other, paradoxically, into such areas as ballet, classical music, and literature. The considerable *dignity capital* of Russian culture ensured its constant reinvestment.

The same implicit calculation explains the current capitalization on Islam in the interest of Arab (and Persian) nationalism. Islam is a great religion which for several centuries was at the forefront of Western – that is, monotheistic – civilization; from it Arab (and Persian) nationalists can draw dignity capital far exceeding any other human resources their nation possesses. Therefore, they make religion a national characteristic. That they secularize and betray it in the process does not concern them. The struggle, the competition for dignity or prestige (which is, by definition, a zero-sum game) is itself secular, it concerns the relative positions of living national communities in the here-and-now, and God in whose name they wage it is dragged down to earth to be used as a tool. This is not to say, of course, that some of the recruits to this struggle may not be animated by a true religious feeling or that the appeal to the religious sentiment of large populations as yet unconverted to national consciousness may not provoke episodes of genuinely religious conflict in the course of this essentially secular war. This adds the rise of militant fundamentalist Islam to other central trends of the last quarter of a century, such as “democratization” and “globalization,” wrongly interpreted as transnational, but in fact explained by the continued strength of nationalism in world politics.

As regards the internal politics of nations, once and again in these 25 years we have seen the specific types of nationalism reassert themselves where they originally took root, after what appeared to be a significant change in the traditional patterns of national behavior. Russia’s dalliance with Western-type freedoms, for instance, which charmed observers in Europe and North America, proved brief and it quickly returned to the characteristic authoritarianism and imperialism corresponding to its collectivistic-ethnic nationalism and the tendencies which mark its specificity, acquired in the process of

its development. The people very soon came to regret their lost super-power status, no less than the leadership. Together, they have reached the conclusion that a huge empire contributed far more to Russia's standing in the world, and individual Russians' sense of dignity, than individual liberty. This does not mean that Russians rejected democracy, only that they like it precisely the way they had it from the start, as an authoritarian (socialist) democracy, rather than liberal individualistic one in the American fashion.

American liberal democracy – implied in its individualistic and consequently civic nationalism – had its own share of trials and tribulations. The collapse of its erstwhile enemy, the Soviet Union, left the nation disoriented, without a moral compass. Deprived of the image of what they were against, many Americans, especially among the risk-averse and fearful of competition, lost the sense of what they were and turned against their own nation. American liberalism, in an Orwellian inversion, acquired the meaning of anti-individualism, expressed in the shift of emphasis from individual to group rights, virtual rejection of meritocracy, and insistence on absolute group equality in every sphere of social life. In the last twenty-five years, this attitude swept across universities, where it was imposed on ever larger populations of young people with a near-totalitarian determination, as the defenders of classical liberalism died out, and, by the end of the period, became the official ideology of the cultural and, to a large extent, political elite. It has developed its own Newspeak and “goodthink,” and people who thought and spoke differently, and who found value in traditional freewheeling American way of life, considered American history and society in general unproblematic, and insisted on self-reliance and individual responsibility were castigated as unenlightened and morally suspect. The democracy to which the elite continued to profess allegiance was increasingly understood, if not named, as the Soviet-type, i.e., social (or socialist) democracy. But this attitude was offensive to a very large segment of the American population (risk-takers by temperament who welcomed competition), who felt that it denied them the respect – dignity -- which was their due as Americans and as individuals. The developing antagonism between the liberal elite and its following, on the one hand, and the equally large American population who, in fact, defended liberal democracy, came to a head during the last (2015-2016) presidential election cycle, when Donald Trump made Newspeak and “goodthink” – i.e., anti-American political correctness – the issue. His victory has been attributed to the appeal of “populism.” But “populism” is the exact synonym of “nationalism” – in this case, the traditional American, individualistic and civic, nationalism.

Politics in the modern world are constituted by nationalism, because in this world nationalism shapes the way we think and feel, the way we see and experience reality, because our very consciousness, is national. This will remain so in the foreseeable future for the simple reason that we lack the conceptual wherewithal to imagine future beyond nationalism. Given the enormous role it plays in our life, we should do our utmost to understand it. It is particularly important to keep in mind that nationalism is a dynamic and complex phenomenon that is unlikely to lend itself to simplistic explanations of whatever kind and that demands broadest transdisciplinary cooperation. Twenty-five years ago, in this book, I made my first contribution to the exploration of this great subject. I am glad that it is still relevant and very glad that it is now appearing in Turkish.