Nationalism: European and Non-European

Introduction

Nationalism is a powerful political ideology and movement that has shaped the modern world in profound ways. At its core, nationalism asserts that people who share common **cultural, linguistic, historical, or ethnic ties** should form an independent and sovereign **nation-state**.

The **origins and expressions of nationalism** vary significantly across regions. **European nationalism** emerged during the late 18th and 19th centuries, inspired by **Enlightenment ideas**, **revolutions**, and the decline of **dynastic rule**. It focused on **unifying fragmented states** and creating nation-states based on shared **ethnicity and culture**.

In contrast, nationalism in **non-European regions**—such as **Asia, Africa, and Latin America**—largely developed as a response to **colonial domination** and **imperial control**. Non-European nationalism was intertwined with **anti-colonial struggles**, seeking not only **political independence** but also **cultural revival** and **social justice**.

I. Understanding Nationalism

Nationalism can be understood as both a **political ideology** and a **social movement**.

At its heart, nationalism is the belief that a group of people who share common characteristics—such as **language, culture, ethnicity, religion, or a shared historical experience**—should be united within a **sovereign political entity**, usually a nation-state.

In other words, nationalism argues that **"the nation" and "the state" should ideally be the same**.

Political theorists and historians have identified various **types of nationalism** i.e

1. Civic Nationalism

Civic nationalism is based on the idea of **shared citizenship and commitment to common political values** such as democracy, liberty, equality, and the rule of law.

In this form, belonging to the nation is not determined by birth, ethnicity, or religion, but by accepting the **political identity** and **constitutional values** of the nation.

- **Example: French nationalism** during the French Revolution. People of different regions, languages, and backgrounds were united through their loyalty to the French Republic and its ideals—**liberty, equality, fraternity**.
- **Key Features:** Inclusive, based on law and civil participation, rather than cultural or ethnic identity.

2. Ethnic Nationalism

Ethnic nationalism is rooted in the belief that a nation is defined primarily by **shared ethnicity, ancestry, and cultural heritage**.

It emphasizes blood ties, common language, and historical continuity, often seeing the nation as a natural, organic community.

- **Example: German nationalism** in the 19th century focused on uniting German-speaking peoples based on shared ancestry and cultural identity.
- **Key Features:** Exclusive, often excludes those who do not share the ethnic background; can lead to ethnic chauvinism or xenophobia if taken to extremes.

3. Cultural Nationalism

Cultural nationalism lies somewhere between civic and ethnic nationalism. It places emphasis on the **preservation and promotion of a shared culture**, including language, literature, arts, values, and traditions. Unlike ethnic nationalism, it may not require shared ancestry, but it still values **cultural unity** as the basis for national identity.

- **Example:** The **Celtic revival** in Ireland or the **Bengal Renaissance** in India during the colonial period.
- **Key Features:** Focus on cultural heritage, education, and language revival; may exist without full political independence.

4. Religious Nationalism

Religious nationalism links **national identity** with **religious belonging**. In this form, a particular religion becomes central to the definition of the nation. It may seek to build a nation around shared religious values, symbols, and practices.

- **Example: Hindutva** in India sees Hinduism as central to Indian national identity; **Zionism** seeks a homeland for Jews based on shared religion and history.
- **Key Features:** Can unify people across ethnic lines, but may marginalize religious minorities or lead to sectarian conflict.

5. Anti-Colonial Nationalism

Anti-colonial nationalism emerged in countries that were under **colonial rule**, especially in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It was driven by the desire to end **foreign domination**, reclaim political sovereignty, and build independent nation-states. This form of nationalism combined traditional cultural pride with modern political consciousness.

- **Example: Indian nationalism** led by leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru against British colonial rule; **Algerian nationalism** against French colonialism.
- **Key Features:** Often mass-based, involved both peaceful resistance and armed struggle, linked with identity revival and social reform.

II. Nationalism in Europe: Historical Development

The origins of modern nationalism in Europe can be traced back to the **late 18th and early 19th centuries**, during a time of great political and intellectual change.

This period witnessed the decline of **monarchical absolutism** and the rise of ideas centered on **popular sovereignty**, **individual liberty**, and **nationhood**.

Nationalism emerged as a **new political consciousness**, demanding that people with shared language, culture, and history should have the right to form their **own political communities or nation-states**.

The development of nationalism in Europe took place in several major **historical phases**, each contributing uniquely to the shaping of modern national identities:

1. The Enlightenment and the French Revolution (Late 18th Century)

- The **Age of Enlightenment** introduced the idea that **human reason**, not divine right, should guide politics. Philosophers like **Rousseau**, **Voltaire**, and **Kant** argued for **liberty, equality, and self-rule**.
- The **French Revolution (1789)** marked a dramatic shift by declaring that **sovereignty belongs to the people**, not kings or dynasties. The French nation was seen as a collective body of free and equal citizens.
- This revolution **challenged feudalism and monarchies**, promoting the idea that nations have a right to **self-determination**.
- Nationalism here was **civic in nature**, based on shared political values and commitment to the republic, rather than ethnicity.

2. Napoleonic Wars and the Spread of Nationalist Ideas (Early 19th Century)

- **Napoleon Bonaparte** carried the revolutionary ideals across Europe as he conquered vast territories. Although he ruled as an emperor, he spread ideas of **legal equality, meritocracy, and nationalism**.
- His invasions unintentionally **stimulated nationalist sentiments** in countries like **Italy, Germany, Poland, and Spain**, where people began to resist foreign domination and demand their own unified nation-states.
- Nationalism here was both a **tool of liberation** and a **reaction against imperial rule**, sparking the birth of modern European national movements.

3. Romantic Nationalism (Mid-19th Century)

- In this phase, nationalism became closely tied to **culture, emotion, and identity**. Thinkers, poets, and historians glorified the **folk traditions, myths, and languages** of their nations.
- In **Germany**, the idea of the **Volk** (the common people) became central, emphasizing a shared spirit or "Volksgeist".
- In **Italy**, nationalist leaders like **Giuseppe Mazzini** promoted the idea of a united, independent Italy based on common cultural roots and historical pride.
- This period marked a shift toward **ethnic and cultural nationalism**, where **language, customs, and collective memory** were seen as essential to national identity.

4. National Unification Movements (Mid to Late 19th Century)

Nationalist ideology played a crucial role in the unification of fragmented states in Europe:

- **Italy:** The movement for Italian unification, known as the *Risorgimento*, was led by three key figures:
    - **Giuseppe Mazzini** (the idealist and philosopher)
    - **Giuseppe Garibaldi** (the revolutionary fighter)
    - **Count Cavour** (the diplomat and statesman)
      Together, they united various Italian kingdoms and regions into a single nation-state by 1871.
- **Germany:** The unification of Germany was orchestrated by **Otto von Bismarck**, the Chancellor of Prussia. He used a pragmatic and militaristic strategy called **"blood and iron"**, meaning war and diplomacy, to unite German-speaking states under Prussian leadership, culminating in the formation of the German Empire in 1871.

These unifications were **ethno-cultural in nature**, but also involved **statecraft, war, and diplomacy**, showing how nationalism could be both emotional and strategic.

5. Imperialist and Chauvinistic Nationalism (Late 19th – Early 20th Century)

- By the late 19th century, nationalism in Europe began to take a **more aggressive and expansionist turn**. It was no longer just about liberation and unity—it became associated with **imperialism**, **militarism**, and **racial superiority**.
- European powers competed to **colonize Africa and Asia**, justifying their actions through the belief that their nations and races were superior. This period is often referred to as **imperialist nationalism**.
- National identity became closely tied with **military strength, racial ideology, and economic power**.
- This form of nationalism contributed to the tensions that led to **World War I**, as countries like Germany, Britain, France, and Austria-Hungary pursued **national glory and expansion** at the cost of peace.

Case Studies of European Nationalism

A. France: The Cradle of Civic Nationalism

France is often regarded as the birthplace of modern nationalism, particularly **civic nationalism**. The **French Revolution (1789)** was a landmark event that transformed the idea of political community. Instead of being subjects of a monarch, people began to see themselves as **citizens of a nation**, united by shared political values.

- **Key Drivers:** Enlightenment thought (liberty, equality, fraternity), opposition to monarchy, and desire for popular sovereignty.
- **Impact:** A **modern secular republic** emerged where loyalty was directed not to a ruler but to the **nation and its constitution**.
- **Example:** The French tricolour flag and the Marseillaise (national anthem) became symbols of this national unity.
- **Legacy:** Set a global precedent for nationalism rooted in **citizenship, legal equality, and civic participation**, rather than ethnicity or religion.

B. Germany: Ethnic Nationalism and Unification

German nationalism developed in the early 19th century, influenced by **romanticism, culture, and ethnic identity**. The German-speaking regions were

fragmented into many kingdoms and principalities. The idea of a united Germany took root based on **shared language, traditions, and historical memory**.

- **Thinkers like Johann Fichte** argued that German identity was grounded in a unique spiritual and cultural essence.
- The unification process was led by **Otto von Bismarck**, who used a policy of **"blood and iron"**—diplomacy backed by military force—to unite the German states under Prussian leadership.
- **Key Event:** The creation of the **German Empire in 1871** following victory in the Franco-Prussian War.
- **Impact:** Germany became a powerful modern state, and its nationalism took a strong **ethno-cultural form**, laying foundations for future tensions in Europe.

C. Italy: Nationalism as a Unifying Force Against Foreign Rule

In the early 19th century, Italy was a patchwork of kingdoms, many under foreign control (especially Austria). Italian nationalism was driven by the dream of **liberating and unifying the peninsula into one nation**.

- **Giuseppe Mazzini** envisioned a united, republican Italy based on popular sovereignty and cultural unity through his "Young Italy" movement.
- **Giuseppe Garibaldi** led revolutionary military campaigns, especially in southern Italy.
- **Count Cavour**, a pragmatic statesman from Piedmont, used **diplomacy and alliances** (especially with France) to secure the north.
- **Key Event:** The final unification of Italy was achieved by **1870** when Rome was annexed.
- **Impact:** Italian nationalism combined **liberal ideals with cultural revival**, but post-unification Italy still struggled with regional disparities and political fragmentation.

III. Nationalism in the Non-European World

The emergence and evolution of nationalism in **Asia, Africa, and Latin America** followed a **distinct path** compared to Europe.

While European nationalism was shaped by Enlightenment ideals, revolutions, and unification efforts, nationalism in the colonized world arose primarily as a **response to foreign domination, imperial exploitation, and cultural suppression**.

In these regions, nationalism was not merely a political ideology—it was a **movement of resistance, assertion, and self-rediscovery**.

Anti-Colonial Nationalism: The Core Expression

Anti-colonial nationalism developed as a powerful **reaction to imperialism and colonial rule**. It became a vehicle for people under colonial domination to **assert their right to self-rule**, reclaim cultural identity, and rebuild socio-economic systems.

Key Characteristics:

- **Response to Oppression:** Nationalism in the colonized world emerged in the context of **political subjugation, racial discrimination, economic exploitation**, and **cultural marginalization**.

- **Synthesis of Western and Indigenous Thought:** While colonial education systems introduced **modern political ideas** like liberty, equality, and democracy, anti-colonial nationalists **reinterpreted these ideas through indigenous cultural frameworks**.

- **Freedom as the Central Goal:** The focus was on **national liberation**—breaking free from foreign control. This included not only **political independence**, but also **economic self-reliance, cultural revival**, and **social justice**.

- **Multi-Ethnic and Inclusive Nature:** Anti-colonial nationalism was often **pan-national**, cutting across **linguistic, religious, ethnic, and regional divisions**.

- **Elite-Led but Mass-Oriented:** Many of these movements were initiated by a **small, Western-educated elite**—lawyers, journalists, reformers, and scholars—who had access to **European liberal and socialist ideas**. However, these leaders gradually **mobilized peasants, workers, students, and the middle class**, transforming nationalism into a **mass movement**.

IV. Case Studies of Non-European Nationalism

A. India: From Colonial Resistance to Democratic Nationhood

Indian nationalism evolved under the shadow of **British colonialism** and matured through **multiple phases**—moderate, extremist, Gandhian, and post-independence.

1. Early Phase (Moderate Nationalism):

- Leaders like **Dadabhai Naoroji**, **Gopal Krishna Gokhale**, and **Pherozeshah Mehta** advocated **constitutional reforms, civil rights, and economic justice**.

- The focus was on creating political awareness and influencing British opinion.

2. Assertive Phase (Extremist Nationalism):

- Figures like **Bal Gangadhar Tilak**, **Bipin Chandra Pal**, and **Lala Lajpat Rai** rejected moderate politics and demanded **Swaraj** (self-rule).
- They emphasized **Swadeshi (use of indigenous goods)** and **boycotts of British institutions**.

3. Gandhian Phase (Mass Nationalism):

- **Mahatma Gandhi** transformed Indian nationalism into a **mass movement** by connecting **political freedom with moral values**.
- His ideas of **Ahimsa (non-violence)** and **Satyagraha (truth-force)** united peasants, workers, students, and women across class, caste, and religious lines.
- Movements like the **Non-Cooperation Movement**, **Civil Disobedience**, and **Quit India** mobilized millions.

B. China: Nationalism through Revolution and Communism

Chinese nationalism developed in response to **imperial decline, foreign domination**, and internal fragmentation.

1. Republican Nationalism (Early 20th Century):

- The fall of the **Qing dynasty in 1911** led to the rise of nationalist ideas under **Sun Yat-sen**.
- Sun's **Three Principles of the People** were:
    - **Nationalism (Minzu Zhuyi)** – Reclaiming sovereignty from foreign powers.
    - **Democracy (Minquan Zhuyi)** – Promoting republican governance.
    - **People's Livelihood (Minsheng Zhuyi)** – Advocating social welfare and equitable development.
- The **Kuomintang (KMT)** tried to modernize China but faced internal instability and Japanese aggression.

2. Communist Nationalism (Mid-20th Century):

- Under **Mao Zedong**, Chinese nationalism merged with **Marxist-Leninist ideology** to form a unique version of **Communist nationalism**.
- Mao emphasized:
    - **Anti-imperialism** (against the West and Japan),
    - **Land reforms**, and
    - **Peasant mobilization** as the revolutionary class.

- The **1949 Communist victory** led to the creation of the **People's Republic of China**, where nationalism was tied to **self-reliance (Zili Gengsheng)**, anti-colonial solidarity, and development.
- Post-Mao, nationalism in China continues under the slogan of **"national rejuvenation"**, focusing on economic power, military strength, and cultural pride.

C. Africa: Pan-African Unity and Post-Colonial Struggles

African nationalism gained momentum **after World War II**, when European colonial powers weakened, and anti-racist consciousness grew across the continent.

1. Anti-Colonial Struggle and Leaders:

- African nationalism was led by charismatic leaders such as:
  - **Kwame Nkrumah** (Ghana): Advocated **Pan-Africanism**, socialism, and African unity.
  - **Jomo Kenyatta** (Kenya): Emphasized cultural heritage and self-rule.
  - **Julius Nyerere** (Tanzania): Promoted **Ujamaa** (African socialism) and rural development.
- Movements often involved both **peaceful protests** and **armed revolts**, especially in settler colonies like **Algeria** and **Mozambique**.

2. Pan-Africanism and Cultural Revival:

- African nationalism went beyond territorial borders and embraced **Pan-Africanism**—a vision of **continental solidarity against racism, imperialism**, and **economic dependence**.
- Writers and thinkers like **Leopold Senghor** (Senegal) promoted **Negritude**, a literary-cultural movement to reclaim African identity and dignity.

D. Latin America: Nationalism Rooted in Independence and Social Justice

Latin American nationalism dates back to the **early 19th century**, when colonies fought for independence from **Spanish and Portuguese rule**. Over time, it evolved into various forms—liberal, populist, revolutionary, and anti-imperialist.

1. Early Nationalism and Liberalism:

- Inspired by the **French and American Revolutions**, leaders like:
  - **Simón Bolívar** (Venezuela),
  - **José de San Martín** (Argentina),
  - **Bernardo O'Higgins** (Chile)
    launched movements to **liberate Latin America** from colonial rule.

- Bolívar envisioned a **united Latin America** (Gran Colombia), though it eventually fragmented into nation-states.

2. 20th Century: Populist and Economic Nationalism:

- New waves of nationalism arose as a **reaction to U.S. economic and political influence**, known as **Yankee imperialism**.
- Leaders like:
    - **Getúlio Vargas** (Brazil): Promoted **state-led industrialization and national pride**.
    - **Juan Perón** (Argentina): Mobilized workers, introduced social welfare policies, and emphasized **economic self-sufficiency**.
- Cultural nationalism emerged through **Indigenismo**, which celebrated **indigenous heritage and identity**, especially in countries like Mexico, Bolivia, and Peru.

3. Revolutionary Nationalism:

- The **Cuban Revolution (1959)** led by **Fidel Castro** and **Che Guevara** represented a radical form of **Marxist nationalism**.
- It emphasized **anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism**, and national sovereignty against U.S. interventions.

V. Differences between European and Non-European Nationalism

Aspect	European Nationalism	Non-European Nationalism
Origin	Post-Enlightenment revolutions	Reaction to colonialism and imperialism
Key Goals	State-building, unification, identity	Independence, decolonization, anti-imperialism
Nature	Ethnic or civic (based on common culture/language)	Often pluralistic, including multiple ethnicities
Method of Mobilization	Cultural revival, military campaigns	Mass movements, civil disobedience, armed struggle
Role of the State	Central to unifying national identity	Often built after independence with nation-building

Challenges	Imperial competition, war	Ethnic conflict, post-colonial instability

VI. Theoretical Perspectives on Nationalism

Understanding nationalism requires more than just historical facts—it also demands a look at how different scholars explain *why* nationalism emerges and *how* it operates in different societies.

1. Ernest Gellner: Nationalism as a Product of Industrial Society

Key Idea: Nationalism is not ancient; it is a modern phenomenon that arises from the needs of industrial societies.

- According to **Ernest Gellner**, nationalism did **not exist in traditional agrarian societies**, where local customs and limited mobility meant that people could live without a shared national culture.
- But with the rise of **industrial capitalism**, societies required:
  - **Mass literacy**, so that people could read instructions, manuals, and newspapers.
  - **Standardized education**, to ensure a uniform way of thinking, working, and communicating.
  - **Mobility of labor**, where individuals moved to cities and worked in jobs that required coordination and cooperation.
- For such a system to function efficiently, **cultural homogeneity** was needed—people had to speak the same language, follow common laws, and share national symbols.

2. Benedict Anderson: Nations as "Imagined Communities"

Key Idea: Nations are socially constructed entities, imagined by people who see themselves as part of a larger community—even if they never meet most of its members.

- In his famous book *Imagined Communities* (1983), **Benedict Anderson** argued that nations are not based on face-to-face relationships or biological ties, but are **imagined into being** through modern tools of communication and shared experiences.
- **Key elements that help create this imagined community:**
  - **Print capitalism** – the printing of newspapers and books in local languages allowed people to imagine themselves as part of the same story or history.

- ○ **Education systems** – taught a shared history, geography, and national heroes, fostering a common identity from a young age.
- ○ **Media and rituals** – like national anthems, flags, and public holidays reinforced a sense of belonging.

3. Partha Chatterjee: A Postcolonial Critique of Western Theories

Key Idea: Non-European nationalism is **not merely an imitation** of European nationalism—it has its own unique foundations rooted in anti-colonial resistance and cultural self-assertion.

- In his work *The Nation and Its Fragments*, **Partha Chatterjee**, a prominent Indian political theorist, **criticized Western scholars** like Anderson and Gellner for assuming that nationalism originated in Europe and was later "borrowed" by Asia and Africa.

- He argued that colonial societies developed nationalism **within the context of imperial domination**, which made their experience **qualitatively different**.

- Chatterjee introduced the concept of the **"inner" or "spiritual domain"**:
  - ○ While colonial rule controlled the **outer domain** (economy, administration, legal systems), nationalist thinkers in India and elsewhere **carved out a cultural inner space**—comprising **religion, family, language, tradition, and morality**.
  - ○ It was in this space that **national identity was nurtured**, using indigenous values and symbols rather than European rationality or secularism.

VII. Nationalism Today: Challenges and Contemporary Trends

In the 21st century, nationalism has not faded away—in fact, it has re-emerged with new complexities and contradictions. While globalization was once believed to make nationalism irrelevant, recent global developments show that nationalism continues to be a **powerful and adaptive political force**. However, its forms and implications have changed significantly from its 19th and 20th-century versions.

1. Rise of Ethnic and Cultural Nationalism

In both developed and developing countries, there has been a resurgence of **ethnic and cultural nationalism**. This form of nationalism is not inclusive but draws sharp boundaries between "us" and "them," often defined by **language, religion, race, or cultural history**.

- **In Europe:**

- ○ **Brexit** in the United Kingdom reflected a desire to "take back control" from supranational institutions like the European Union, driven by fears over immigration, economic control, and national sovereignty.
  - ○ **Hungary and Poland** have seen the rise of right-wing ethnic nationalism that emphasizes Christianity and traditional European identity, often opposing migrants and liberal democratic norms.
- **In non-European contexts:**
  - ○ In **India**, the rise of **Hindutva nationalism** emphasizes Hindu identity as central to Indian nationhood, sometimes marginalizing minority groups.
  - ○ In **Turkey**, under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, nationalism is being redefined through a combination of Islamic values and Turkish ethnic pride.

Such trends often lead to **polarization, social conflict, and the erosion of secular or pluralistic traditions**.

2. Growth of Secessionist and Sub-National Movements

While nationalism seeks to unify, paradoxically, it also gives rise to **sub-national movements** that seek independence or greater autonomy based on cultural, ethnic, or historical claims.

- **Catalonia (Spain):** Catalan nationalists argue for a separate identity, language, and political autonomy. Despite legal obstacles, they have pushed for independence through referenda and mass mobilizations.
- **Scotland (UK):** After Brexit, Scottish nationalists renewed their demand for independence, arguing that Scotland did not vote to leave the EU.
- **Quebec (Canada), Balochistan (Pakistan), Aceh (Indonesia):** Similar sub-national identities challenge centralized national narratives.

3. Globalization and Its Impact on National Identity

Globalization, with its flows of people, capital, media, and ideas, has put pressure on traditional forms of nationalism in several ways:

- **Migration** has made societies more **ethnically and culturally diverse**, raising questions about integration, citizenship, and national identity.
- **Multiculturalism** as a policy attempts to accommodate this diversity, but it is often seen by nationalist groups as a threat to the "core culture."
- **Transnational institutions** like the European Union, United Nations, and global trade organizations challenge state-centric sovereignty, which some nationalist groups resent.

This creates a tension between **cosmopolitanism** and **identity-based nationalism**.

PYQ Insights on Nationalism

1. **Civic vs Ethnic Nationalism** is a recurring theme; students are asked to compare values-based vs ancestry-based nationalism. *Example: France (civic) vs Germany (ethnic)*

2. Questions often ask about **nationalism's role in decolonization**, especially in Asia and Africa. *Example: Indian freedom struggle against British rule*

3. **Theories of nationalism** by scholars are frequently tested. *Example: Benedict Anderson's "Imagined Communities"*

4. **Postcolonial perspectives** are gaining weight, especially Chatterjee's critique of Eurocentric models. *Example: Chatterjee's idea of a spiritual domain in Indian nationalism*

5. UGC NET emphasizes **comparative nationalism**, asking for differences between European and non-European models. *Example: Romantic nationalism in Germany vs anti-colonial nationalism in Kenya*

6. **Unification movements** in Europe are tested under historical nationalism. *Example: Unification of Germany by Bismarck (blood and iron)*

7. **Case studies** are commonly asked to explain nationalism in context. *Example: Kwame Nkrumah's role in Ghana's independence*

8. **Modern challenges to nationalism** are also emerging as PYQs. *Example: Brexit as a case of ethnic and economic nationalism*

Conclusion

Nationalism is a diverse and evolving ideology that cannot be understood through a single framework. In Europe, it arose from Enlightenment ideals like liberty, self-rule, and cultural unity, becoming a force for unification and state-building.

In contrast, non-European nationalism emerged largely as a response to colonial domination, blending local traditions with modern political aspirations to achieve freedom and dignity.

Over time, nationalism has taken on many forms—civic, ethnic, religious, cultural—each shaped by its unique historical and social context. In the 21st century, it continues to play a powerful role, often resurfacing through populism, identity politics, and resistance to globalization.

While it can unite people under a shared identity, nationalism can also fuel exclusion and conflict when based on narrow or aggressive ideologies.

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