Abstract

Contemporary European policies and discourses regarding immigration and citizenship seem to be increasingly oriented towards strengthening the national identity. The typologies and analytical frameworks typically used to make sense of these trends, however, are in dire need of further elaboration. The goal of this paper is to help in this endeavour. The pre-dominant analytical approach for a long time has been to separate between ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ national identities, and to assume that the more liberal and universalistic their content, the less nationalistic they are per definition, and vice versa. A great deal of recent research has suggested we need to go beyond these dichotomies, however – both because they are theoretically too crude, and because they hamper rather than help us in understanding the trend of purportedly universal liberal values being invoked as the very basis for exclusive, particularistic national identities after all (cf. Mouritsen & Olsen 2013). The most recent solution suggested by previous research is to leave the content of national identities aside altogether, and instead focus entirely on whether the boundaries of a given national identity are constructed in a voluntaristic or a deterministic way (Kriegbaum Jensen, 2014; Laegaard, 2007; Zimmer, 2003). In contrast, while this paper agrees with the need to go beyond the civic-ethnic and liberal-nationalist dichotomies, it offers an alternative solution to the problem. Instead of discarding ideal types like civic or ethnic nationalism as analytical categories altogether, I propose they can be further nuanced, by bringing in the literature in political theory that differentiates between ‘conservative nationalism’, ‘liberal nationalism’ and ‘civic patriotism’. These ideal types, I argue, can be spelled out along five different dimensions – and a number of additional policy dimensions – that the theoretical literature has failed to specify. Doing so allows us to create an analytical tool that is likely to help future research analyze and assess contemporary national identity trends in a way that connects the discussion to normative theory, especially regarding the recent empirical cases where liberal values are presented in a nationalistic way.
I. Introduction

How should we describe and indeed assess the recent surge across Western Europe in policy initiatives and media discourses aimed at strengthening the national identity – especially when this identity, paradoxical as it may sound, is often defined in universal and liberal terms (cf. Gustavsson, 2014a; Mouritsen & Olsen, 2013)? Although this trend has sparked a vast scholarly literature, its normative aspects have largely escaped scrutiny. This is not to say, of course, that previous research has passed no judgment on this renewed focus on national cohesion. Many researchers in the field of immigration and citizenship studies are clearly skeptical of what they see as the turn to a repressive or illiberal liberalism in civic integration policies (Joppke, 2007; Kostakopoulou, 2010; Triadafilopoulos, 2011). A few others, by contrast, have taken the opposite stance, and by contrast defended these very measures (Hansen, 2011; Müller, 2007).

The problem, however, is that these evaluative positions – whichever side they have taken – have rarely been the result of a thorough normative analysis. Any normative discussion is indeed made rather difficult by the fact that most attempts to categorize and label the recent changes in national identity discourses and policies have been rather decoupled from the concepts and analytical frameworks that already exist in the normative literature on different types of nationalism (a term that will be used as a synonym for national identity throughout this paper). Instead of trying to classify contemporary national identity projects as, say, ‘liberal’ or ‘conservative’ types of nationalism (Miller, 1995), the typical approach has namely been to ask whether they exemplify an ‘ethnic’ or a ‘civic’ nationalism; or, lately, whether the national identity at hand is perceived as ‘voluntaristic’ or ‘deterministic’ (cf. Kriegbaum Jensen, 2014).

Now, these typologies are certainly helpful for tracing the empirical roots of integration and citizenship policies back to different national identities. Such an empirical focus has also been the predominant goal in previous research. Although normative labels and judgment often form an implicit undercurrent that runs beneath the main analysis, this has rarely been an explicit purpose, and it is thus understandable that it has not been reflected in the design, conceptual apparatus and analysis of such studies. Nevertheless, this means that there is also a great need for more normatively oriented approaches, and analytical frameworks and typologies that can help further such, rather different, purposes. As Karin Borevi and Per Mouritsen note in their outline for this workshop, it is indeed ‘quite surprising that so few have argued about whether civic integration policies are normatively defensible in their different designs’.

The research project of which this paper forms a first and tentative part seeks to help remedy this gap. Before I describe the main argument in this specific paper, let me briefly situate it in the context of this larger project. Liberal Nationalism in the Welfare State: Bridging the Gap Between Political Theory and Political Psychology on National Identity and Economic Solidarity is a Marie Curie funded research project I have just started, and which I will pursue in Uppsala and Oxford over the next four years. Its goal is to theoretically develop, empirically update, test, and critically question the theory of liberal nationalism in relation to the novel problems of nationalism which face us today.

Roughly, liberal nationalism holds that the mutual cooperation and economic solidarity upon which a redistributive welfare state relies requires a strong yet inclusive sense of national cohesion among its citizens. According to liberal nationalists, a robust national identity, albeit one that is inclusive enough towards immigrants and minorities to qualify as liberal, is thus the glue with
which different ethnic and cultural minorities will stick together and make sacrifices for one another (Miller, 1995, 2008; Miller & Ali, 2013; Moore, 2001; Tamir, 1993).  

In recent years, the theory of liberal nationalism has gained a renewed political relevance due to precisely the many new citizenship and integration policies adopted by several European countries, which often have the purported goal of creating a stronger national identity more prone to solidarity, for example through expanded citizenship and culture tests (Cantle, 2001). The two main assumptions on which the theory of liberal nationalism relies, however, are in dire need of much further scrutiny – and this is what my project hopes to remedy. The first assumption is the empirical claim that citizen support for economic solidarity within the welfare state in increasingly multicultural societies can be, and is indeed boosted by a strong sense of national identity. This actualizes my first research question ‘What are the empirical effects of national identity on attitudes to economic redistribution?’ The second assumption is normative and conceptual, and holds that the type of national identity that does this empirical work can at the same time be legitimately called liberal, which is typically defined at least partly be being ‘thinner’ than ethnic or conservative nationalism, yet ‘thicker’ than Habermas’ notion of constitutional patriotism (a case of civic nationalism). This prompts my second research question: ‘Is a genuinely liberal nationalism empirically and normatively possible?’.

This specific paper constitutes my first attempt to approach the second, conceptual and normative part of the project. Its main goal is to reconstruct the implicit framework and typology for national identities in the literature on liberal nationalism – which, I suggest, is both more theoretically sophisticated, and normatively fruitful today than the typical ethnic-civic dichotomy, as well as indeed the more recent alternatives, such as the voluntaristic-deterministic typology.

My argument unfolds as follows. Section II recapitulates the predominant focus on the civic-ethnic typology in previous research, and the critique that has been mounting against it, not least in the light of the contemporary mixture of liberal values and exclusive narratives in national identities such as the Danish one. Section III suggests that bringing in the literature on liberal nationalism might be a better solution than to discard the ‘content’ focus on national identity altogether. Section IV then introduces the literature on liberal nationalism, and suggests that it has yet to spell out precisely what the characteristic are that make liberal nationalism both liberal, on the one hand, and nationalistic, on the other. Section V therefore takes on this task and attempts to reconstruct the implicit framework and typology that liberal nationalist David Miller draws on when defining a specifically liberal national identity, as well as a conservative and a civic one, respectively. Section VI, finally, summarizes my main conclusions and the contributions they offer to the two related yet hitherto disconnected literatures that I have tried to bring to bear on one another: on the one hand, the literature on civic integration and contemporary discourses of a nationalization of liberal values; on the other hand, the political theory discussions on liberal national and constitutional patriotism.

1 Liberalism in this context, then, should not be mistaken as a synonym for neo-liberalism or any other related economic position. ‘Liberal’ here instead refers to a progressive societal ideal on the opposite end of conservatism or even authoritarianism. In this sense, then, the fact that John Rawls famously advocated a principle of just distribution which only allows differences in wealth if these can be shown to benefit those worst off in society makes him no less liberal than Robert Nozick, who believed that such a redistribution of resources infringed upon our right to own the fruit of our labour. David Miller thus for example notes that he uses the term ‘liberal’ ‘in a broad sense to embrace a spectrum of political thinking that runs from liberal conservatives to democratic socialists’ (Miller, 1995, pp. 192, also see p.112, p.115).
II. Previous research: beyond the civic-ethnic typology of national identity

Although we have heard of a variety of different types of nationalisms over the years, our scholarly imagination has for a long time remained dominated by the dichotomy between civic and ethnic nationalism. This distinction harks back to the end of the 19th Century, when Ernest Renan distinguished between the French view of nationalism as a daily plebiscite, and the German view of it as something that is rather connected to blood and soil (Renan, 1995/1882). Friedrich Meinecke was soon to invoke a similar distinction in separating the idea of the Staatsnation from that of the Kulturnation (Meinecke, 1917/1907); as did Hans Kohn a few decades later, in separating between a ‘Western’ nationalism that was mainly political, and an ‘Eastern’ nationalism that was more connected to blood and soil (Kohn, 1945).

In later years, a rather similar dichotomous approach has been employed by Anthony D. Smith (1991), Liah Greenfeld (1992), Rogers Brubaker (1992), William Pfaff (1993) and Michael Ignatieff (1994). Although some, like Brubaker, prefer labels that differ from the ‘civic-ethnic’ terminology, and instead distinguish between a ‘state-centred and assimilationalist’ and an ‘ethno-cultural and differentialist’ approach, the underlying theoretical framework is still largely the same. The shared assumption underlying all these studies is namely that most national identities, or nationalisms as I also call them in this paper, can be classified as either one or the other of two major types. It is assumed that either a national identity is connected to issues that can be voluntarily chosen, such as political or civic ideals – or it consists of values and phenomena such as kinship or mother tongue, that are the result of organic and thus more determined processes, rather than subject to voluntary choice.

However, over the past two decades, this theoretical assumption has become increasingly criticized (Brown, 1999; Brubaker, 1999; Kymlicka, 2001b; Nieguth, 1999; Yack, 1996). Will Kymlicka for example points out that previous research is wrong in assuming that any cultural and historical element of a national identity makes it ethnic rather than civic, since in fact all national identities draw on both culture and history. This means that the civic nationalism that is purely political and forward-looking ends up being a myth rather than a type of national identity we can find in the real world. In fact, says Kymlicka, because they tend to ‘downplay the cultural component of nationalism’, previous research has neglected the many important variations in how culture is interpreted (Kymlicka, 2001b, pp. 246-247).

In his later work, Brubaker has also suggested that the civic-ethnic distinction may need to be reconsidered if we are to analyze national identity as ‘a contingent, conjuncturally fluctuating, and precarious frame of vision and basis for individual and collective action, rather than as a relatively stable product of deep developmental trends in economy, polity, or culture’ (Brubaker, 1996, p. 19). Building on this insight, historian Oliver Zimmer has proposed that while the civic-ethnic distinction has certainly helped us understand the philosophical origins or different nationalisms, and the divergent citizenship regimes which they have inspired, when it comes to studies of short term changes in national identity in public discourse, however, this theoretical framework hampers more than it helps – because a national identity can remain anchored in, say,

2 (Brubaker, 1992; Greenfeld, 1992; Ignatieff, 1993; Pfaff, 1993; Smith, 1991)

3 Greenfeld, it should be noted, however, further differentiates between an ‘individualistic-libertarian’ and a ‘collectivistic-authoritarian’ form of civic nationalism. For a longer discussion on how these different studies and typologies can be lumped together, see Zimmer 2003, p.175 ff.
civic values, yet shift in its inclusiveness if these civic values come to be seen as organically
determined rather than voluntarily chosen (Zimmer, 2003).

Zimmer’s point is thus that, if we want to make theoretical sense of how the national
identity is continuously created and re-created through the media, public speeches or national
movements, we should redirect our focus from what we might call the raw material of the
national identity to another dimension altogether, namely the mechanisms for upholding the
boundary of the national identity. ‘What matters with regard to the construction of national
identities’, as Zimmer puts it, ‘is less what resources political actors draw upon than how they put
these resources to practical use: the voluntarist conception of nationhood processes the available
resources in voluntaristic terms – as a product of human action; the organic conception of
nationhood, by contrast, processes the resources in deterministic terms – as manifestations of the
communal organism called ‘the nation’ (Zimmer, 2003, p. 181). In other words, instead of
focusing on whether or not the symbolic resources of the national identity are civic or ethnic, we
should ask in what way these resources are invoked – whichever their nature, and however
inclusive in theory.

The suggestion to leave the content of the national identity aside and instead focus on how it
is invoked has also found its way into a debate that concerns a related yet more recent conceptual
dichotomy that has structured much of the recent scholarly literature on immigration and
citizenship: the one between what is typically called liberal convergence, or civic integrationism,
on the one hand, and national particularity – or nationalism, quite simply – on the other. Before
we go into the recent critique against this distinction (Kriegbaum Jensen, 2014; Laegaard, 2007),
perhaps it is wise to briefly recapitulate what it amounts to in the first place.

The liberal convergence thesis, which has been put forward most notably by Christian
Joppke, holds that the previously divergent national identities and citizenship regimes across
Europe – e.g. the assimilationism, universalism and multiculturalism that have been attributed to
different countries – have now become increasingly replaced by one single, shared approach,
namely that of civic integration along liberal lines. Integration and citizenship policies in, say,
Denmark, France and Britain are all, the proponents of liberal convergence suggest, increasingly
aimed at creating good liberals, rather than good Danes, Frenchmen or Brits (Joppke, 2005, 2007,
2008).

The opponents of this view object that we are still in fact dealing with the same old
nationalism as before, only that it has now cloaked itself in liberal rhetoric (Kostakopoulou,
2010). Importantly, however, both sides here tend to share a crucial conceptual assumption: the
more civic or liberal a certain understanding of citizenship, the less it must per definition be
nationalistic, since liberal values do not allow us to distinguish the particularity of any one specific
nation. In other words, both sides assume that either it is indeed the case that liberal notions of
citizenship are taking over at the expense of national particularities – in which case nationalism
is assumed to have become a rather obsolete notion altogether; or the liberal convergence thesis is
in fact mistaken, and we are dealing with nationalism after all – in which case, however, there is
nothing really liberal about it except for its rhetoric, which is nothing but a façade to cover up
what is really the old national identity of blood and soil, only now in a liberal disguise.

Recent research gives us good reasons, however, to move beyond the assumption that the
more an identity is liberal or civic, the less it must per definition be truly nationalistic, and vice

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4 A better reference?
versa. The contemporary move to liberal perfectionism is in many cases namely not in fact a move away from nationalism, because the boundaries of the nation can very well be construed by invoking liberal values of civics after all (Smith, 2000, p. 18). The work of Halikiopoulou and colleagues for example shows that many anti-immigrant parties on the radical right portray the content of the national identity as liberal and civic, but nevertheless do so in a deterministic manner that manages to exclude non-nationals at the same time (Halikiopoulou, Mock, & Vasilopoulou, 2013). In his work on the case of Denmark specifically, Per Mouritsen (2006, 2013) has similarly shown that although the content of the Danish identity is dominated by universal liberal values, at the same time it is also typically portrayed as rooted in the specific Danish history of close-knitted and Lutheran egalitarianism, supposedly harking back to the 19th Century (Mouritsen & Olsen, 2013, p. 707).

Political theorist Sune Laegaard has proposed that this type of national identity might perhaps best be described as a ‘nationalisation of liberal values’ (Laegaard, 2007). This, indeed, is where Zimmer’s turn away from the content of the national identity comes into the picture again. In order to make sense of cases such as the Danish one, Laegaard namely urges us to follow Zimmer’s suggestion to refocus our attention from whether the values on which the national identity is centred are civic or ethnic, and instead ask how these values, whatever their nature, are invoked. ‘Some cases that are relevantly similar to nationalism are not captured’, argues Laegaard, by the focus in previous research on ‘the substantive content of conceptions of the nation’. One of his main conclusions is thus that ‘a liberal concern with nationalism needs to consider the ways in which the elements of nationality are invoked as well’ (Laegaard, 2007, pp. 51-52).

The most recent suggestion pushes us even one step further in leaving aside the content dimension aside altogether, and instead tells us to focus solely on the matter of boundary mechanisms. This is the gist of the argument made by political scientist Kristian Kriegbaum Jensen, which holds that ‘by making cultural content a central parameter in distinguishing types of nationhood, we obscure the fact that these are of minor importance for the exclusivity of the national self-understanding’ (Kriegbaum Jensen, 2014, p. 567). Building on Zimmer, Kriegbaum Jensen instead proposes that our analytical focus should be entirely directed at the logic of boundary construction. In addition to Zimmer, Kriegbaum Jensen further suggests we differentiate between the individual and the collective dimension of such boundary construction. The former issue refers to where each individual’s identity is portrayed between the two opposite poles of voluntarism and determinism; i.e. the extent to which each person is seen as in control of her own identity formation. The latter issue instead revolves around the analytically separate issue of how much the national collective’s self-understanding is voluntaristic or deterministic; i.e. the extent to which it is something that can be intentionally reconstructed by political means and through democratic deliberation (Kriegbaum Jensen, 2014, p. 568).

The resulting framework – the usefulness of which Kriegbaum Jensen goes on to demonstrate by comparing the case of Denmark with that of Norway – is a two by two matrix, which contains four ideal types of national identity: first, one that operates on a voluntaristic logic on both the individual and the collective dimension; second, one that on the contrary employs a deterministic

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5 Also see (Betz & Johnson, 2004).
7 This latter dimension, Jensen notes, is reminiscent of Suvarierol’s discussion of nation freezing (2012).
logic to both; third, one that assumes the individual’s identity is voluntaristic but that the collective’s is deterministic; and, fourth, one that assumes the individual’s identity is deterministic, whereas the collective’s, by contrast, is seen as voluntaristic.

III. Discarding the content of national identity, too drastic a solution?

The up-shot of the previous section is that both the civic-ethnic dichotomy and the closely related liberal-nationalist distinction have become increasingly challenged over the past decade. If we want to understand the contemporary shifts in political discourse over national identity, then it certainly seems that we must go beyond these analytical dichotomies. Other, more nuanced, theoretical frameworks and typologies are needed in order to make sense of how civic and liberal elements are increasingly, it seems, invoked in a nationalistic, exclusionary and indeed deterministic way across several countries in Europe.

So far I agree with previous research. The dichotomous approach of civic-ethnic and the liberal-nationalist frameworks is indeed a problem. I remain hesitant, however, about the predominant solution that seems to be gaining more and more ground in the recent scholarly literature. The proposal of Zimmer, Laegaard, Kriegbaum Jensen and others, we have seen, is that the inadequacy of the civic-ethnic distinction, as well as that of the liberal-nationalist dichotomy, should be overcome by refocusing our attention to another dimension of national identity altogether. Instead of trying to specify its type of content, we should look at how this content, whatever its nature, is in fact invoked. More specifically, we should ask whether this is done in a voluntaristic or a deterministic manner.

However, discarding the content dimension altogether appears to me a somewhat premature and drastic remedy to the problem at hand. The fact that previous research has oversimplified the content dimension of national identity by identifying it as a matter of being either civic and liberal, on the one hand, or ethnic and particularistic, on the other, does not necessarily imply that the content of a national identity itself is unimportant. Nor is it clear what is gained by replacing a dichotomy on one dimension (e.g. the content of national identity) with a new dichotomy on another dimension (e.g. the boundary mechanisms) – or, in Kriegbaum Jensen’s case, on two additional dimensions (e.g. the collective and the individual boundary mechanisms).

In what follows, I shall instead pursue an alternative analytical strategy. Rather than leave the content issue aside altogether, I suggest we pay this matter even further attention. More specifically, I suggest we replace the civic-ethnic ideal types with a tripartite approach, which distinguishes between conservative nationalism, liberal nationalism and civic patriotism, and which, we will soon discover, further allows us to specify each of these ideal types along several distinct dimensions.

The ideal type of liberal nationalism offers a welcome refuge from the constant navigation between the Scylla and Charybdis of the civic-ethnic and the liberal-nationalist dichotomies. This also allows us to connect the contemporary phenomenon of civic integration that is taking place across Europe, on the one hand, to long-standing debates in political theory, on the other. Such connections have been largely hampered by the fact that, although liberal nationalism is a much-discussed concept among political theorists, these discussions tend to remain on a rather high level of abstraction, and have yet to be applied specifically to empirical cases and contemporary trends in national identity discourse. At the same time, as we saw in the previous section, the more empirically oriented civic integration literature seems largely to assume that there can be nothing liberal about nationalism of any kind, after all. To the extent that this field
mentions liberal nationalism at all, then, it tends to be understood as little else than a synonym for civic nationalism, or constitutional patriotism (Laegaard, 2007, pp. 42, 51). This, as the next section will show, however, gravely misrepresents the considerably complex concept of liberal nationalism, which – although it certainly has several aspects in common with civic as well as with ethnic nationalism – is nevertheless a third ideal type that needs to be distinguished from both.

IV. What is a liberal nationalism?

Although most liberal thinkers do not explicitly discuss nationalism, they still assume that the very society in which we are to strive for the liberal values of freedom and equality are nations – as opposed to, say, municipalities, regions or trans-national organizations. Rawls is a point in case. In fact, in this broad sense, ‘most liberals are liberal nationalists’ (Tamir, 1993, p. 139). The liberal nationalism with which this paper is concerned, however, is a more narrowly defined position. When I use the term here, I do not mean just the background assumption among most liberals of the existence of the nation state, but rather the explicit normative stance that national identity is a legitimate and indeed crucial aspect of the liberal project itself.

Now, despite being defended by several leading liberal theorists, such as Will Kymlicka and David Miller, it must nevertheless be recognized already here that this second kind of liberal nationalism is far from a mainstream position in liberal thought. The vast majority of liberal thinkers from Voltaire in the 18th Century to Jeremy Waldron in the 21st have looked on the idea of nationhood with suspicion, if not downright horror.

According to liberal nationalists, however, this cosmopolitan distaste for nationalism is not only historically one-sided, but also politically naïve and conceptually misguided. This story, they namely argue, neglects that many devoted liberals and democrats throughout history, from John Stuart Mill to more politically oriented figures such as Giuseppe Mazzini in Italy, or Jules Michelet in France, were strong defenders of both nationalistic and liberal-democratic ideals, for the very reason that they saw these two causes as closely entwined with one another. Nor were they wrong in this conviction, liberal nationalists today insist, because the liberal values of social justice, deliberative democracy and individual autonomy in fact all require a shared sense of national identity to begin with – indeed especially so in our contemporary, pluralistic societies (Kymlicka, 2001a).

More specifically, liberal nationalists claim, first, that without a shared sense of identity, and the loyalty to our co-nationals which this provides, citizens will simply not be willing to support a redistributive welfare state (Miller, 1995, p. 185). The cohesive side to national identity, it is typically pointed out, is perhaps especially crucial in the increasingly diverse societies of today, where sociological evidence seems to suggest that both trust and democratic engagement are waning (Cf. Alesina & Glaeser, 2004; Putnam, 2007). Secondly, liberal nationalists also argue that, without a common language and a shared public culture, citizens will be unable to engage in the mutual public deliberation which democracy is held to require (Canovan, 1996; Miller, 1995). After all, as Will Kymlicka puts it, ‘democratic politics is politics in the vernacular’ (Kymlicka, 2001a, p. 212). Thirdly, liberal nationalists also point out that the liberal ideal of autonomy itself is in fact dependent on a shared national identity, paradoxical as that may sound. This is both because the very alternatives among which we choose must come from somewhere – and often

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8 This appears to be how Gellner uses the word too (look this up more).
do, liberal nationalists claim, derive from one’s national culture – and because our very idea of what is a meaningful choice is also shaped by our national culture in turn (Margalit & Raz, 1990). Our culture does not only give us an array of experiences as such to choose between; it also offers us the very ‘spectacles through which we identify experiences as valuable’, as Dworkin puts it (Dworkin, 1985, p. 228). For these reasons, then, liberal nationalists insist that personal autonomy in fact requires ‘the presence of a cultural context’ (Tamir, 1993).

In sum, then, liberal nationalists believe that the liberal project of a redistribution of economic resources, a lively public debate and independent citizens who take their life in their own hands are all liberal values that require a sense of national identity. ‘So clearly, it is a mistake to start out thinking of liberalism and nationalism as opposing ideologies or value-systems’, liberal nationalists like David Miller conclude (Miller, 1995, p. 192). On the contrary, if these empirical assumptions are correct, it seems that liberals have good reason to promote national identities of a specific kind.

None of this, however, answers the more specific question of what kind of national identity qualifies as liberal. Or, as we might also put it: What makes a liberal nationalism different from one that is, say, civic? Clearly, the answer to this is not exhausted by saying that a liberal nationalism is one that respects the core principles of the liberal state, such as freedom of speech, toleration, rule of law etc.; for so, surely, does civic patriotism. A liberal nationalism, in other words, must amount to something more specific than merely being compatible with a liberal regime – contrary to what is sometimes assumed (Kymlicka, 2001a, p. 209; Zimmer, 2003, p. 187).

Nor is the answer that liberal nationalism is just any type of national identity that de facto leads to and facilitates the liberal goals of social justice, deliberative democracy and individual autonomy.9 A liberal national identity is by definition ‘thinner’ than ethnic nationalism, we are for example typically told, and at the same time it is also ‘thicker’ than civic nationalism (Miller, 1995). This implies that, aside from its empirical consequences, there are also certain predefined characteristics that a liberal nationalism must live up to in order to qualify as liberal to begin with. The more precise nature of these characteristics, however, has not been made entirely explicit in previous research. For example, it still remains unclear in terms of what, more precisely, liberal nationalism is thicker and thinner than other nationalisms, i.e. on what dimension or dimensions it places itself somewhere between ethnic and civic nationalism.

It seems, then, that in order to define liberal nationalism as an ideal type of national identity, we must first undertake some detective work. In the following, I will try to do so by taking a closer look at David Miller’s discussion of liberal nationalism – implicit in which, we will soon discover, we find a rather useful and indeed multi-dimensional analytical framework that has yet to be explicitly spelled out, however.

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9 Although, in the larger project of which this paper forms a part, my goal is to look closer at these empirical assumptions as well, and especially the first, which concerns the link between feeling a strong sense of national cohesion and being committed to economic redistribution.
Towards a tripartite typology

What characterizes a liberal national identity? The first answer to this question is that it differs from what Miller calls ‘conservative nationalism’. The central assumption for the conservative nationalist is that nationalism ‘integrially involves allegiance to authority’ (Miller 1995, p.124). This means that the ties that bind the nation together are primarily conceived of as vertical, i.e. as ties linking us together through our common allegiance to, indeed reverence for, certain established authorities. The attitude that the conservative nationalist wishes to foster towards the nation is thus best described as piety.

For the liberal nationalist, by contrast, the attitude that we should cultivate towards the nation is not piety but loyalty, Miller tells us. For this type of national identity, the ties that create national cohesion are namely not vertical but horizontal; they link us to our fellow-nationals, in the present as well as in the past (124). A national identity of a liberal kind does not, then, require any kind of reverence or deference to our established institutions (129). Rather, it asks us to take them as a starting point for a constantly on-going public conversation about who we are and should be as a nation:

The alternative to piety is not ‘the lonely heights of abstract choice (where) nothing comforts and nothing consoles’, in Scruton’s evocative phrase, but common membership in a nation where the meaning of membership changes over time. Ideally, the process of change should consist in a collective conversation in which many voices can join. No voice has a privileged status: those who seek to defend traditional interpretations enter the conversation on an equal footing with those who want to propose changes. The conversation will usually be about specific issues: which language or languages should be given official status; which version of national history should be taught in schools; what changes, if any, should be made to the constitutional arrangements; and so forth. But behind these lie the wider questions: what kind of people are we? What do we believe? How do we want to conduct ourselves in future? In this perspective established institutions have no sanctity; they serve as a point of reference, but have authority only in the sense in which a cookery book has authority for an aspiring chef, namely that it lays out the existing principles of cuisine and provides a base from which experimentation and innovation are possible (127).

Liberal nationalism, then, further implies that liberal rights, such as freedom of speech, are crucial prerequisites for the nation itself – because without a public debate, we will not be able to constantly challenge, develop and uphold our national identity in the way that liberal nationalism demands (127). Conservative liberalism, by contrast, sees liberal rights such as free speech as a political principle that may on the contrary threaten the national identity, by allowing critique of it that for example diminishes its authority in the eyes of the population (125).

A similar difference can be found in the stances these positions commit us to when it comes to immigration. For the conservative nationalist, any change of the national identity is per definition a problem, and thus an influx of immigrants who do not, at least to begin with, share the allegiance of the majority to the established authorities, is always something that threatens to undermine national cohesion (126). For the liberal nationalist, however, immigration is in most cases not a threat to the national identity, since a change in its content is not a problem per se. On this view, however, immigrants must be willing to accept current political structures and to

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10 All page references in this section refer to Miller 1995.
engage in dialogue with the host community so that a new common identity can be forged’ (130). This means that immigration can become a threat even to a liberal nationalism – when it happens at such a high rate or in such a short time that mutual adjustment does not take place (128).

Now, from what has been said so far, it might seem that liberal nationalism is nothing but civic or constitutional nationalism. This, however, would be a mistaken conclusion. Miller in fact suggests that there can really be no such thing as a civic national identity, and thus perhaps we should prefer terms like constitutional or civic ‘patriotism’ (189). The reason for this is that Miller argues that such constitutional loyalty cannot really serve as a basis for national cohesion, since it only provides us with a basis which we have in common with all liberal democracies, and fails to tell us what, beyond that, we have in common with our co-national specifically (163, 176). A national identity, Miller seems to assume, must orient us both historically and geographically – and as opposed to a liberal national identity, which can do this, a civic one does not (164, 175; also see 138, 141).

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We have now seen that a liberal national identity differs from a conservative one both when it comes to the ties that create national cohesion, the attitude we should take towards the nation, the way we are to treat established authorities and institutions, and, finally, the policy implications for liberal rights and for immigration. At the same time, a liberal national identity also differs from a civic one in that it situates us geographically and historically, and demands that we really do see ourselves as connected to our co-nationals.

Yet we still lack any kind of over-arching analytical framework which tells us what these ideal types have in common – or, rather, on which dimensions or issues they differ or resemble one another. I shall now try to show that we can reconstruct such a framework, however, from Miller’s discussion of what defines a national identity to begin with. A national identity, Miller namely tells us, is a ‘collective source of personal identity’ (p.27) that differs from other identities in that it contains all of the following five elements:

1. **A belief in some kind of shared belonging.** A national identity requires there to be a common belief among its members that they belong together as a nation, as well as the intention to continue as such.

2. **The experience of historical continuity.** As opposed to for example sports teams or professional associations, national identities always transcend time in that they stretch ‘back and forward across the generations’. This means that for the present generation, they always carry with them an irrevocable obligation to the past generations: that of continuing their work for the nation.

3. **Shared activity.** As opposed to passive communities, such as some religious congregations, Miller insists that national identities are never a tidal wave that merely happens to us, but always an actor that purposefully engages in its own creation. Rather than a subconscious need that we succumb to, a national identity is in other words ‘something that is created and sustained by active processes of thought and interchange among the relevant body of people’ (p.6)

4. **A geographical home.** A national identity always connects a group of people to a certain geographical place, which is typically referred to as the homeland.
5. **A common public culture.** A national identity requires a stronger bond to our co-nationals than the attitude that we are as a group of people randomly thrown together in a life boat. We must see each other as sharing a common public culture. Now, this public culture need not be monolithic and all-embracing; indeed, what makes it a public, not a private, culture is that it leaves private issues such as eating habits or sexual arrangements largely to the individual’s own choice. At the same time, a public culture, as opposed to a purely political one, goes beyond mere allegiance to shared political principles, and also includes for example language and social norms.

Now, although Miller himself does not seem to recognize this, these five elements are in fact helpful in disentangling the more precise nature of liberal nationalism, conservative nationalism and civic patriotism. Each of these ideal types namely relates to these five issues differently.

Beginning with the first dimension – the belief in some kind of shared belonging – it seems that conservative nationalism specifies that something as the vertical ties we all are assumed to have to our established institutions, while liberal nationalism rather focuses on horizontal ties to our fellow-nationals. Civic patriotism, finally, does not really require any kind of belief in already sharing something with our co-nationals at all; all it requires along these lines is instead a wish rather than a belief: the wish to continue coexisting under the same political principles.

On the second dimension – the experience of historical continuity – again, the three types of national identity specify the relation to this history differently. Conservative nationalism requires us to revere and follow our history, taking it as a given authority. Liberal nationalism in turn sees our history as a starting point for an on-going process of change – not as something to be revered, but not as something to be completely dismissed either. Following Miller’s cookbook simile, we might call this ‘the cookbook approach’. Civic patriotism, in contrast to both conservative and liberal nationalism, however, does not require any kind of experience of historical continuity at all.

For the third dimension – shared activity – it also seems that the three ideal types give us different answers as to which activity it is that the national identity relies upon. Conservative nationalism sees the national identity as sustained by how we act in everything from our public to our private lives. Liberal nationalism, by contrast, limits it to the public realm. Civic patriotism, finally, limits it even further, to the political realm alone (I realize this needs more elaboration).

Fourthly, regarding the relation we must have to our geographical homeland, this seems to be where the different psychological attitudes we must cultivate come into play. Conservative nationalism, we have seen, demands piety or even reverence against the homeland. Liberal nationalism, by contrast, disavows piety, and instead demands something different: loyalty. The main difference between piety and loyalty seems to be that the latter allows us to question and criticize, although it still demands that we side with the object of our critique – that our goal is to be constructive, in a way. Civic patriotism, finally, demands no attitude whatsoever to any geographical entity, but only respect for the political principles of the state at hand.

The fifth dimension focuses on the kind of common public culture that the nation requires. The main difference here between conservative and liberal national identities is not that either of them thinks such a culture unimportant, but that the former sees it as per definition immutable, while the latter rather sees it as something that may change over time. Liberal nationalism also differs from civic patriotism on this dimension as well, however, since in contrast to the latter, it sees the common public culture as something that can legitimately be enforced politically.
Finally, we can also add a number of policy implications for each of the national identities (still unfinished in this version of the paper, sorry!).

**Table I. A multidimensional definition of three ideal types of national identity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions of national identity</th>
<th>Conservative nationalism</th>
<th>Liberal nationalism</th>
<th>Civic patriotism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief in belonging based on…</td>
<td>Vertical ties (authority)</td>
<td>Horizontal ties (our fellow-nationals)</td>
<td>No such belief, just the wish to continue together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relation to the shared historical experience</td>
<td>To be revered and followed</td>
<td>‘The cookbook approach’: not to be revered but a starting point for innovation</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared activity by which national identity is sustained</td>
<td>Both private and public</td>
<td>Public only</td>
<td>Political only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical homeland, type of connection</td>
<td>Piety</td>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared public culture</td>
<td>Unchangeable</td>
<td>Changeable but enforceable</td>
<td>Changeable and unenforceable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Policy implications**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Liberal rights</th>
<th>Liberal rights can be overridden</th>
<th>Liberal rights cannot be overridden</th>
<th>Liberal rights cannot be overridden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>Always a threat to national identity</td>
<td>Not a threat to national identity, as long as a new common identity is forged</td>
<td>Not a threat, as long as immigrants also pay allegiance to the constitutional essentials</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VI. (A tentative) concluding discussion

This paper agrees with the critique that has been leveled against the civic-ethnic typology for national identity, as well as the related assumption of liberalism and nationalism being two opposed and incompatible labels. In contrast to previous research, however, it has suggested a different remedy than leaving the content dimension of national identity altogether. By bringing in the concepts and implicit frameworks in the discussion on liberal nationalism among political theorists, I have tried to reconstruct an alternative and more nuanced typology of national identity, which allows us to separate between conservative nationalism, liberal nationalism and civic patriotism along a number of dimensions, some of which deal more with the content of the national identity, and others with what we might call its boundaries.

The first contribution of the preceding analysis is the insight that, contrary to what previous research that has grappled with the nationalization of liberal values tends to assume (Laegaard, 2007; Mouritsen & Olsen, 2013), a liberal national identity is something more specific than simply any national identity that defines its core content in liberal terms. At least in Miller’s view, a liberal national identity consists of a specific combination of stances on several dimensions. These positions, we have seen, clearly go beyond allegiance to mere political values, and instead invoke history, geography and loyalty – albeit differently, however, than does a conservative national identity.

The second contribution of this paper speaks rather to the normative literature on liberal nationalism. The preceding discussion has brought out more precisely in which ways – i.e. on what dimensions – a liberal nationalism is thinner than a conservative one, yet thicker than a civic one. This is something that the normative literature on this topic has only implicitly assumed, but never explicitly spelled out before.

Nor has this literature previously been put in relation to the most recent empirical trends in national identity discourse in Europe. Lib nationalism was namely last thoroughly discussed by political theorists in the first half of the 1990’s, when nationalism conjured up images of the struggle for autonomy of the post-communist countries in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ethnic cleansings in Bosnia and Rwanda, and potential secessions actualized by for example the Quebec referendum. Now, two decades later, the political examples that perhaps first come to mind are rather French veil bans, Danish cartoon crises, and the astounding popularity of populist, anti-EU and anti-immigrant movements across Europe, such as Ukip, Front National, Pegida and the Sweden Democrats.

Although this paper has not been able to address these specific empirical problems, but has only taken a first step, by spelling out the analytical framework that we might use to analyze them, my hope is that future research can use this typology for approaching, and ultimately normatively assessing these empirical phenomena – in a more nuanced and fruitful way than I believe that the recently proposed voluntarist-determinist typology allows for.

11 Except for in brief discussions, such as (Miller, 2008).
Bibliography


