

Centre for the Study of Nationalism



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Global Populism and the Dangerous Echo of European Nation-Building

Abstract

Many new European nation-states, beginning with Greece, came into existence in the nineteenth century. Their fundamental premise was that they gathered into a single territory the members of a human group defined by shared language, culture, identity, and – in many cases – religion. They also shared philosophical and popular ideas about blood as the substance through which these cultural phenomena were transmitted and inherited; this concept was consistent with a view of the nation as a kinship group, variably defined. Over the decades that followed, this ideology was transmuted into an increasingly dangerous and reprehensible dogma of racial superiority, especially in the form of Nazi theories of “Aryanism.” While the civilities of the post-World War II era initially seemed destined to eradicate (or at least contain) the spread of such ideas, those ideas metastasized surreptitiously as a pernicious form of cultural intimacy, resurfacing today on a global scale as a defensive, unapologetic, and bitterly revanchist populism. The speaker will trace this history and suggest a reconfiguration of the social sciences that could ultimately restore civility, not as a form of censorship (which is how it has become so widely resented), but as a call to explore the common humanity that has produced the populist anger of today as much as the liberal regimes against which it is directed.