

Nationalism is not Racism: Balancing Compassion with National Interests

14 June 2024

Nationalism is not Racism: Balancing Compassion with National Interests

Introduction

Nationalism and racism are often conflated in contemporary discourse, leading to a misunderstanding of both concepts. While racism is a prejudiced belief in the superiority of one race over another, nationalism is a political ideology centered around the interests and culture of one's nation. This article aims to clarify that nationalism, when properly understood and applied, is not inherently racist. Furthermore, it will argue that controlled immigration policies can coexist with a nation's compassionate approach to refugees, ultimately serving the interests of both the nation and the global community.

Understanding Nationalism

Nationalism is rooted in the idea of a shared identity based on culture, language, history, and values. It promotes the interests and sovereignty of the nation-state, ensuring that the needs and aspirations of its citizens are prioritized. This political philosophy can foster unity and a sense of belonging among a country's populace. However, it does not inherently involve the denigration of other nations or ethnicities. At its core, nationalism is about self-determination and the right of a nation to govern itself without external interference.

Distinguishing Nationalism from Racism

Racism, on the other hand, is characterized by discrimination and prejudice based on race. It involves viewing certain races as inferior or superior, leading to systemic inequalities and social injustices. Unlike nationalism, which focuses on cultural and national identity, racism targets individuals based on their ethnicity

and seeks to marginalize or oppress them.

The confusion between nationalism and racism often arises from extreme nationalist movements that adopt xenophobic and exclusionary practices. However, these movements represent a distortion of nationalism, not its essence. True nationalism can exist without espousing racist ideologies, as it centres on the well-being of the nation without demeaning other races.

The Case for Controlled Immigration

Mass uncontrolled immigration poses significant challenges for any country, including strains on infrastructure, social services, and national security. Controlled immigration, in contrast, allows a nation to manage the flow of people entering its borders, ensuring that resources are allocated effectively and that immigrants can be integrated successfully into society. This approach benefits both the host country and the immigrants, fostering social cohesion and economic stability.

Compassionate Nationalism

It is entirely possible for a nation to be compassionate towards refugees while still prioritizing its own interests. Compassionate nationalism involves recognizing the plight of refugees and offering assistance through well-regulated programs. This might include providing humanitarian aid, supporting refugee camps in regions close to conflict zones, and accepting a manageable number of refugees who can be adequately supported and integrated.

For instance, countries can collaborate with international organizations to improve conditions in refugee camps, invest in development projects in regions affected by conflict, and establish robust asylum procedures that ensure those in genuine need receive protection. By doing so, nations demonstrate their commitment to global humanitarian principles without compromising their own stability and resources.

Conclusion

Nationalism, when properly understood, is not synonymous with racism. It is a political ideology focused on the well-being and sovereignty of a nation, which can coexist with a compassionate approach to global refugee crises. Controlled immigration policies allow nations to manage their resources effectively while

offering refuge to those in need. By balancing national interests with humanitarian concerns, countries can uphold their values and contribute positively to the global community. In this way, nationalism and compassion are not mutually exclusive but can be harmonized to benefit both the nation and the world.

The Opposite of Nationalism: The Internationalist

If someone were so against the concepts of nationalism presented here, to the extent that they talk down their own country at every opportunity and accuse those politicians with even the slightest nationalist views of being racist, how would we describe such a person?

Such a person could be described as an **anti-nationalist** or **cosmopolitan critic**. An anti-nationalist strongly opposes the principles of nationalism, often viewing it as inherently exclusionary or divisive.

A cosmopolitan critic, on the other hand, emphasizes global citizenship and may reject nationalistic sentiments, advocating instead for a more interconnected and borderless world. They might also be referred to as **internationalists**, promoting the idea that global cooperation and unity should take precedence over national interests. Their perspective can lead them to interpret any form of nationalism as potentially xenophobic or racist, even when it's not intended to be.

An internationalist who supports a borderless world and is comfortable with high levels of immigration might find their views leading to situations where the nation's resources are strained or taken advantage of. This perspective, while rooted in generosity and a desire for global cooperation, can sometimes overlook practical concerns such as the capacity of social services, infrastructure, and the integration of large numbers of immigrants. Without adequate controls and planning, this approach could potentially be exploited, leading to economic, social, and political challenges within the host country. Balancing humanitarian ideals with practical considerations is crucial to ensure that the well-being of both immigrants and the nation's citizens is maintained.

Read our longer mini-novel on [Security: The Case for Controlled Borders](#)

Further Reading....

For a scholarly perspective on the distinction between nationalism and racism, you can reference the works of Rogers Brubaker, a sociologist and professor at UCLA, who has extensively studied nationalism and ethnicity. In his book "Grounds for Difference," Brubaker explores how nationalism and racism, while often interconnected, are fundamentally distinct concepts. He emphasizes that nationalism focuses on the political and cultural sovereignty of a nation, whereas racism is centerer on the belief in the inherent superiority or inferiority of different racial groups. ([Cambridge University Press & Assessment](#)).

Another notable author is Liah Greenfeld, who in her book "Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity," argues that nationalism is a form of collective identity and pride in one's nation that does not necessarily entail the exclusion or denigration of others. Greenfeld's work highlights how nationalism can coexist with a pluralistic and inclusive society, distinguishing it clearly from racial ideologies. ([Oxford Academic](#)).

You can also explore the writings of Eric Hobsbawm, particularly "Nations and Nationalism since 1780," where he discusses the historical development of nationalism and its various manifestations. Hobsbawm's analysis provides insight into how nationalism has evolved and how it can be separated from xenophobic and racist ideologies s ([Oxford Academic](#)).

These authors provide a nuanced understanding of how nationalism, when properly conceptualized and applied, is not inherently racist, and how nations can manage immigration policies compassionately while prioritizing their own interests.