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### Title

Convening Remarks presented by Lawrence Rosenthal at the Inaugural Conference on Right-Wing Studies, UC Berkeley: The Nationalist Internation

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4db3z80k>

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### Publication Date

2019-04-25

Berkeley Center for Right-Wing Studies Working Paper Series

**Convening Remarks for the Inaugural Conference on  
Right-Wing Studies**

**by Lawrence Rosenthal**

**Presented at the Inaugural Conference on Right-Wing Studies  
April 25-27, 2019**



Institute for the  
Study of  
Societal Issues

# The Nationalist International

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Convening Remarks

The Inaugural Conference on Right-Wing Studies

The Berkeley Center for Right-Wing Studies

University of California

April 25, 2019

Writing in 1848, Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels began the Communist Manifesto with a famous observation: “A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of Communism.”

Today we might update their observation as follows: An oxymoron is haunting Europe. And the Americas. And points beyond.

That oxymoron is the Nationalist International.

It is an interesting fact that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, unlike Communism which developed a Communist International, and Socialism which developed a Socialist International, there was never a viable Fascist International.

There are several reasons for this, but one reason seems to stand out from the others.

Nationalism based purely on the nation-state breeds identities that necessarily come into conflict with similarly defined nationalisms. This is especially true when those nationalisms are bellicose and assert the superiority of one's own nation

It's hard, in short, to have comradely relations when one nation calls itself the master race and another the Mediterranean supermen.

But today's version of populist nationalism has overcome this problem.

How?

They share a common Other.

And in their othering, the Nationalist International has found a common identity.

British sociologist Yiannis Gabriel's definition of othering highlights the built-in connection between identity formation and othering:

Othering is the process of casting a group, or individual, or an object into the role of the other and **establishing one own identity** through opposition to and, frequently, vilification of this Other.<sup>1</sup>

This is the crucial difference in identity formation that distinguishes current populist nationalism from the nationalisms of the interwar years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

With a Common Other you get a Common Identity.

With a Common Identity you have the makings of a Nationalist International.

The shared Other of the Nationalist International are immigrants and refugees. Almost always dark skinned. Often of different religions. And largely hailing from places like the Middle East and Africa. The USA has an othering specialization in refugees & immigrants from Latin America.

The shared identity of the Nationalist International goes by many names. What do they see themselves standing for? How do they characterize their identities? A very brief list might include:

They are the defenders of Western civilization. Or Western culture. Or European civilization. One American alt-right group called itself Identity Europa. In Europe, as well as in the U.S, some simply call themselves Identitarians.

They call themselves the defenders of Christian civilization. Or the defenders of Traditional Values. (These are the movements that breed a special animus for gays and feminists.)

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<sup>1</sup> Yiannis Gabriel, *Organizing Words: A Critical Thesaurus for Social and Organizational Studies*, Oxford University Press, 2008, p213. Emphasis added.

And a final, and perhaps most virulent category of identity: Whiteness. They distinguish themselves as White. As the defenders of the [endangered] white race.

Today we have a cluster of political leaders in the West who represent this point of view and have arrived in positions of state power. They are joined on the world stage by leaders and movements outside the West who have come to power with comparable nationalist and populist appeals. You know the names:

Modi  
Putin  
Kaczynski  
Duterte  
Farage  
Salvini  
Ergoden  
Orban  
Bolsonaro  
Trump

And there are more. And there are near misses—in places like France and the Netherlands and others. .

And who do these nationalists see as their political opponents?

The opposition are the multiculturalists and the feminists—who the nationalists often call Cultural Marxists.

The opposition is sometimes characterized as the Global liberal elite—whose power and international organizations—like the European Union—are in the nationalists' crosshairs.

The sense of international solidarity among these movements is plain. They meet and appear to love being photographed together. Steve Bannon, whose grasp of contemporary nationalism was key in putting Donald Trump in the White House, has been traveling in Europe and Latin America acting as nothing short of an evangelist for the Nationalist International.

But above all, these groups are networked. The Nationalist International, like much of contemporary commerce of all kinds, is a creature of the age of the internet and social media.

The transmission of ideas back and forth across the Atlantic has been particularly keen. The chant in Charlottesville that so chillingly exposed the core of America's alt-right movement was "You will not replace us." Replacement theory is an import from right-wing thinkers in France, who began talking about *Le Grand Remplacement* decades ago. In Spain, the Vox party entered Parliament for the first time this April with the slogan "Make Spain Great Again." Meanwhile in countries like Italy, Poland and Ukraine, there are now activists marching in the name of whiteness, culturally inconceivable in years past, but now a particularly baleful import from the US.