

Re-emergence of the Nation in the Antiglobalization Discourse

Dr. Neha

Extention Lecturer, Department of English, PT. N.R.S Govt. College,
Rohtak.

Abstract

This paper examines the re-emergence of the nation within antiglobalization discourse, exploring how national identity, sovereignty, and political mobilization have resurfaced as critical responses to globalization. While globalization proponents predicted the gradual erosion of nation-state primacy in favor of transnational governance and economic integration, recent decades have witnessed a resurgent nationalism that frames globalization as a threat to cultural identity, economic security, and political autonomy. Drawing on theoretical insights from political sociology, international relations, and cultural studies, this study analyzes the underlying forces driving the nationalist resurgence and situates antiglobalization as both a critique of neoliberal global order and a reassertion of nation-centered political imaginations. Through illustrative case studies, including Brexit, the rise of right-wing populism in Europe and the United States, and alternative antiglobalization movements in the Global South—this paper elucidates how the nation has re-entered global discourse as an organizing principle of resistance.

Keywords - Nation, nationalism, globalization, antiglobalization, political sociology, international relations.

Introduction

The concept of globalization has generated one of the most sustained and polarized debates in contemporary humanities and social sciences. Early celebratory accounts, particularly from the late twentieth century, framed globalization as the progressive integration of markets, cultures, and technologies into a single interconnected world. Thinkers such as Anthony Giddens described globalization as the intensification of worldwide social relations that link distant localities, while Manuel Castells emphasized the rise of a “network society” in which flows of information and capital transcend territorial boundaries. From this perspective, globalization appeared as a historical acceleration of exchange, mobility, and cosmopolitan contact that would erode insular identities and foster new transnational solidarities. Yet, alongside these optimistic accounts emerged a robust critical tradition that questioned the material and cultural costs of global integration. David Harvey’s analysis of “time–space compression” revealed how global capitalism reorganizes lived experience through speed, displacement, and dislocation, often intensifying inequalities rather than alleviating them. Saskia Sassen’s work on global cities demonstrated that globalization concentrates power and wealth in specific nodes while marginalizing vast populations outside these circuits. Similarly, Arjun Appadurai’s framework of ethnoscaples, mediascaples, and finanscaples suggested that global flows are disjunctive rather than harmonizing, producing frictions, anxieties and uneven cultural encounters.

For scholars in English literature and cultural studies, these tensions became particularly visible in narrative, memory, and representation. Literary texts increasingly registered the lived consequences of global restructuring: migration, precarity, cultural hybridity, and the erosion of stable social worlds. Postcolonial critics such as Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak interrogated the rhetoric of globalization as a continuation of imperial logics under neoliberal forms, where economic integration masked asymmetrical power relations between the Global North and South. Joseph Stiglitz's critique of global financial institutions and Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems analysis further demonstrated how globalization often reproduces dependency and structural inequality. This body of critique gave rise to what came to be called the "discontents" of globalization—a phrase popularized by Stiglitz but widely adopted across disciplines. In literary scholarship, globalization's discontents manifest as thematic concerns with displacement, fractured belonging, and resistance to homogenizing cultural forces. The global novel, diasporic writing, and border narratives reflect both the possibilities and the pressures of living in a world where mobility is celebrated but unevenly distributed. Thus, globalization is not simply a material process but a cultural and imaginative condition that literature seeks to interpret, question, and contest.

Nation-State and Identity in Global Theory

Classical theories of nationalism have long emphasized the constructed nature of national identity. Benedict Anderson's influential formulation of the nation as an "imagined community" highlights how shared narratives, print culture, and symbolic histories create a sense of belonging among strangers. Ernest Gellner's modernization theory links nationalism to industrial society's need for cultural standardization, while Eric Hobsbawm underscores the "invented traditions" that sustain national myths. During the height of globalization theory in the 1990s, many scholars predicted that such national imaginaries would weaken under the pressure of transnational networks and cosmopolitan affiliations. Ulrich Beck's notion of a "cosmopolitan world risk society" and Jürgen Habermas's idea of post-national constellations suggested that political and cultural identities would increasingly transcend territorial boundaries. However, these expectations underestimated the affective power of national belonging. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that globalization does not dissolve national identity but often intensifies it. Rogers Brubaker argues that nationalism persists not as a static ideology but as a category of practice mobilized in response to social change. Similarly, Craig Calhoun notes that national frameworks continue to provide the most accessible language for political solidarity and collective memory. In times of rapid global transformation, the nation functions as a repository of historical continuity and cultural stability. In literary terms, this resurgence is visible in the renewed attention to place, memory, and historical narrative in contemporary fiction. Writers frequently return to national histories and local landscapes as a means of negotiating global uncertainty. The nation becomes not merely a political entity but a narrative space where identity is anchored against the fluidity of global modernity.

Antiglobalization as Nationalist Discourse

Antiglobalization movements, emerging visibly in the late twentieth century through protests against the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and multinational

corporations, articulate their critiques in ways that often foreground national sovereignty. While some strands of antiglobalization are transnational and solidaristic, many deploy rhetoric that defends the autonomy of the nation against external economic and political pressures. Scholars such as Dani Rodrik have argued that there is an inherent tension between hyper-globalization, democratic governance, and national sovereignty—a “trilemma” in which all three cannot be fully realized simultaneously. This theoretical insight helps explain why antiglobalization discourse frequently centers on reclaiming decision-making power at the national level. The nation is portrayed as the legitimate site of democratic accountability in contrast to distant global institutions perceived as technocratic and unrepresentative.

Political sociologists have further observed that antiglobalization sentiment is often intertwined with populist nationalism. Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser show how populist movements frame globalization as a project imposed by cosmopolitan elites at the expense of “the people,” who are implicitly imagined as a national community. In such discourse, the nation becomes both a moral community and a defensive boundary against cultural dilution, economic exploitation, and political marginalization. For literary and cultural studies, this intersection is significant because it reveals how narratives of belonging, exclusion, and resistance are constructed. Novels, essays, and cultural texts frequently dramatize the tension between global mobility and national rootedness, between cosmopolitan aspiration and local loyalty. Antiglobalization, therefore, is not merely a political stance but a narrative re-centering of the nation as a meaningful horizon of identity and resistance in a world perceived as destabilized by global forces. In this way, the re-emergence of the nation within antiglobalization discourse reflects a broader cultural negotiation: literature and theory alike grapple with how individuals and communities seek coherence and belonging amid the disorienting transformations of globalization.

Mechanisms of National Resurgence

The resurgence of national sentiment within antiglobalization discourse is not merely ideological but emerges from identifiable material, cultural, and political mechanisms that have been widely theorized across sociology, political economy, and cultural studies. For scholars of English literature, these mechanisms are particularly significant because they shape the imaginative and narrative terrains within which contemporary texts negotiate belonging, loss, resistance, and memory. Literature does not simply reflect these transformations; it registers the experiential textures of globalization’s pressures and the renewed appeal of the nation as a site of coherence. One of the most widely documented consequences of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century globalization is the restructuring of labor through outsourcing, automation, and the relocation of industries to regions with cheaper labor markets. David Harvey’s account of neoliberalism as a regime of “accumulation by dispossession” explains how global capital reorganizes production in ways that undermine local economic stability. Similarly, Saskia Sassen’s work on expulsions demonstrates how global economic integration systematically marginalizes certain populations, pushing them out of secure employment and social protection systems.

Dani Rodrik's economic analyses further argue that hyper-globalization constrains national governments' ability to protect domestic labor markets, producing what he terms a tension between global economic integration and national democratic responsiveness. Regions affected by deindustrialization—such as the American Rust Belt or post-industrial areas in the United Kingdom—have become emblematic sites where economic dislocation translates into political nationalism. The experience of job loss and declining welfare infrastructures fosters a perception that global markets operate at the expense of national well-being. For literary scholars, this economic dimension is visible in contemporary fiction that dwells on precarity, decline, and the erosion of working-class communities. Novels by writers such as Jonathan Franzen, Ali Smith, and Mohsin Hamid register how economic restructuring alters everyday life, memory, and aspiration. The return to national frameworks in such narratives often signals a search for lost economic security and collective dignity, where the nation appears as a symbolic container for economic justice. Globalization has intensified cultural exchange through migration, media circulation, and digital communication. Arjun Appadurai's concept of global "scapes" underscores how images, ideas, and people move across borders in unprecedented ways. While this circulation enables hybrid identities and cosmopolitan encounters, it also generates what Appadurai calls "anxiety of incompleteness," where communities fear the erosion of cultural coherence.

Zygmunt Bauman's notion of "liquid modernity" provides further insight into this condition. In a world characterized by constant mobility and instability, individuals seek fixed points of reference. National identity, with its narratives of history, language, and shared tradition, becomes an anchor in a fluid cultural landscape. Rogers Brubaker similarly argues that nationalism reappears as a category of practice when social change disrupts familiar cultural patterns. In English literature, this cultural anxiety often surfaces through narratives that foreground memory, heritage, and the preservation of local traditions. Writers explore how global cultural homogenization threatens linguistic diversity, regional practices, and historical continuity. The emphasis on rootedness, landscape, and collective past becomes a counterpoint to the perceived placelessness of global culture. Such literary representations resonate with broader antiglobalization narratives that frame the nation as a guardian of cultural distinctiveness. Another crucial mechanism driving national resurgence is the perception that global governance structures operate beyond the reach of democratic accountability. Jürgen Habermas's discussions of the "postnational constellation" recognize the shift of decision-making power toward supranational institutions, but critics argue that this shift creates a democratic deficit. Decisions affecting everyday life—trade agreements, financial regulations, migration policies—are often made in arenas perceived as distant from public participation.

Colin Crouch's concept of "post-democracy" describes how formal democratic institutions persist while substantive political power moves to technocratic and corporate spheres. This condition fuels frustration among citizens who feel excluded from meaningful political influence. Antiglobalization discourse frequently channels this frustration into demands for restoring national sovereignty as the legitimate site of democratic agency. Political theorists such as Chantal Mouffe contend that the erosion of democratic choice under neoliberal globalization creates fertile ground for populist mobilization. In such contexts, the nation is

reimagined as the space where political voice can be reclaimed from unaccountable global elites. Brexit, for instance, was frequently articulated as a struggle to “take back control,” exemplifying how democratic frustration translates into nationalist rhetoric. Literary and cultural texts engage deeply with this political dimension by depicting characters who experience alienation from distant political systems and who seek renewed forms of belonging within national or local communities. The narrative emphasis on voice, participation, and collective memory mirrors broader political calls for re-embedding democracy within the nation. Across these mechanisms—economic insecurity, cultural anxiety, and political frustration—the nation re-emerges as a powerful symbolic and practical framework through which individuals interpret and resist the pressures of globalization. For English literary studies, this resurgence provides a crucial lens for reading contemporary texts that grapple with displacement, belonging, and the search for stability in a rapidly transforming world.

Case Studies of Brexit and Populist Right Movements

Brexit: The United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the European Union stands as one of the most visible contemporary expressions of the reassertion of the nation within antiglobalization discourse. Brexit was not simply a policy decision regarding trade or regulation; it was articulated through a language saturated with questions of sovereignty, belonging, historical memory, and democratic self-determination. The slogan “Take Back Control,” central to the Leave campaign, condensed complex constitutional and economic debates into an affective appeal to national autonomy, suggesting that political agency had been ceded to distant, unaccountable institutions in Brussels. This rhetoric can be understood through Benedict Anderson’s conception of the nation as an imagined political community. The Brexit debate reactivated narratives of British exceptionalism, parliamentary sovereignty, and insular identity that have long structured British national mythology. Scholars such as Michael Billig, in his concept of “banal nationalism,” remind us that national consciousness is continually reproduced through everyday symbols and discourses. During the Brexit campaign, such symbols—maps, borders, historical references to wartime resilience, and the language of independence—were mobilized with renewed intensity, transforming latent national sentiment into explicit political argument.

Political theorists have also interpreted Brexit through the lens of democratic deficit. Jürgen Habermas’s idea of the postnational constellation suggested that sovereignty in Europe was increasingly shared across supranational institutions. Yet many Brexit supporters perceived this shared sovereignty as a loss rather than a gain. Colin Crouch’s notion of post-democracy, where decision-making shifts toward technocratic and corporate spheres, helps explain why the European Union was represented as an elite project detached from popular will. The Leave campaign translated this perception into a nationalist demand to restore decision-making to the British parliament and electorate. From the perspective of English literature and cultural studies, Brexit resonates with long-standing narrative investments in place, memory and insularity. Contemporary British fiction by writers such as Ali Smith, Jonathan Coe, and Sarah Moss reflects a society grappling with fragmentation, nostalgia, and contested belonging. These works often depict characters caught between cosmopolitan openness and a desire for rootedness, mirroring the cultural ambivalence that Brexit exposed. The literary return to local

landscapes, historical memory, and questions of identity underscores how the nation becomes a narrative resource in moments of perceived global disorientation.

Populist Right Movements in Europe and the US: Parallel to Brexit, the rise of right-wing populist movements across Europe and the United States demonstrates how nationalism resurfaces as a central framework for critiquing globalization. Parties such as the National Rally in France, Alternative for Germany, the League in Italy, and political developments surrounding Donald Trump's presidency in the United States share a common narrative structure: globalization is portrayed as a project benefiting cosmopolitan elites while undermining the economic security, cultural integrity, and political voice of "the people," implicitly defined as a national community. Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser's theorization of populism as a "thin-centered ideology" that pits the pure people against corrupt elites illuminates this phenomenon. In the context of globalization, elites are often identified with international institutions, multinational corporations, and liberal cosmopolitan values. The "people," by contrast, are imagined through national and cultural homogeneity. Rogers Brubaker argues that contemporary nationalism often takes the form of "civilizationism," where national identity is defended against perceived external cultural threats, particularly migration and multiculturalism. Economic analyses, such as those by Dani Rodrik and Thomas Piketty, show how rising inequality and labor market disruptions contribute to the appeal of nationalist populism. Regions affected by deindustrialization and declining welfare protections become fertile ground for narratives that blame global trade, immigration, and supranational governance for domestic hardships. These narratives do not simply express economic grievances; they convert them into cultural and national terms.

In the United States, the slogan "America First" revived an older nationalist tradition, positioning the nation as economically exploited and culturally diluted by global commitments. Similarly, European populist movements frequently call for border control, withdrawal from international agreements, and prioritization of national industries. These demands reflect what political theorist Chantal Mouffe describes as a crisis of liberal democracy under neoliberal globalization, where citizens seek more immediate and effective forms of political identification. For English literary studies, these developments are significant because they shape the thematic concerns of contemporary writing. Fiction and essays increasingly explore the tension between cosmopolitan ideals and nationalist retrenchment, depicting characters negotiating fear of cultural loss, economic decline, and political alienation. Works by authors such as Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie, and Dave Eggers engage with how borders, migration, and national belonging are reimagined in an age of populist resurgence. These movements illustrate that antiglobalization discourse is not merely an economic critique but a narrative reconfiguration of political identity around the nation. The nation becomes both a moral community and a protective boundary, a symbolic refuge from the uncertainties of global integration. Literature, in turn, registers and interrogates this resurgence, revealing how stories of nationhood continue to structure contemporary understandings of belonging and resistance.

Conclusion

Far from dissolving national identities, globalization has intensified the need for symbolic, cultural, and political anchors that provide continuity amid rapid economic restructuring, cultural mobility, and shifting governance structures. Theories of globalization that once predicted a post-national order underestimated the affective durability of national belonging and the capacity of the nation to be reimagined in response to global change. Through engagement with political economy, cultural theory, and nationalism studies, this paper has demonstrated that economic insecurity, cultural anxiety, and democratic frustration operate as interlinked mechanisms that propel the resurgence of national sentiment. The displacement of labor through neoliberal globalization, the perception of cultural dilution through global flows, and the experience of political alienation from supranational decision-making converge to make the nation appear as a site of protection, dignity, and voice. These processes are not merely structural but deeply experiential, shaping how individuals narrate their sense of belonging and loss. The case studies of Brexit and the rise of right-wing populist movements in Europe and the United States illustrate how antiglobalization rhetoric mobilizes national sovereignty as a response to perceived external domination by global markets, institutions, and cosmopolitan elites. These movements reveal that the nation remains a potent political and narrative resource capable of organizing collective sentiment in times of uncertainty. At the same time, alternative antiglobalization movements in the Global South demonstrate that appeals to national or local autonomy can also be framed in emancipatory and solidaristic terms, complicating simplistic associations between nationalism and exclusion. For research in English literature, these developments are particularly significant. Contemporary literary texts register the lived realities of globalization's discontents—precarity, displacement, nostalgia, and contested belonging—while frequently returning to national histories, landscapes, and memories as narrative spaces of coherence. Literature becomes a crucial site where the tensions between global mobility and national rootedness are imagined, contested, and reconfigured.

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