

# **Immigration Societies and the Question of 'the National'**

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## **Introduction**

As globalization has brought about a re-scaling of governance of political and economic life in the form of increased localization and trans-nationalization (Jessop, 1993; Brenner, 2004; Swyngedouw, 2004), migration scholarship has undergone a similar shift, privileging local/urban (Glick Schiller and Çağlar, 2010; Smith, 2000; Ellis, 2006) and trans-national (Levitt, 2001; Basch et al., 1994) scales as their major objects of inquiry. This shift has undoubtedly advanced our understanding of the complex spatiality of both immigrant experiences and contemporary migration management practices. Yet, in this rescaling, 'the national' has become, at best, a sort of afterthought or, more often, simply by-passed. One of the reasons behind this circumvention has been, especially in critical scholarship, the palpable uneasiness with the national as a politically desirable site of investigation. This, in turn, might have to do with an analytical conflation of the national with the concept of the nation-state, which at times has been associated with oppressive elements of both state power and difference-eradicating nationalism.

In line with some recent critiques (Purcell, 2006; Cheah, 2006), we believe, however, that to privilege exclusively the local/urban and the trans-national, as if they inherently harboured more inclusionary potential, and to discard the national as a site of oppression is normatively problematic and analytically misleading. Normatively, the progressive and inclusive character of a space is not associated with any given scale, but it might be more dependent on the permeability of its borders (Massey, 1991; Kumsa, 2005). Analytically, there also exists ample empirical evidence pointing to the continuing relevance of the

national as a site producing conditions of possibility for people's lifeworld, sociality, and socio-cultural identifications (Brubaker, 2006; Calhoun, 2007).

The aim of this special issue is to bring the national back into the forefront of scholarly investigation of contemporary multicultural societies, in order to examine the ways in which it is mobilized as a spatial register and a discursive resource in the shaping of social meanings, encounters, and identities, as well as lived and enacted through mundane practices which might at times challenge a monoculturally-tinted and essentializing idea of nation. The articles gathered here were first presented in the international conference *Living Together in Diversity. National Societies in the Multicultural Age*, convened by the editors of this special issue at the Central European University (CEU), Budapest, in May 2012 (for an additional collection of selected conference papers, see Matejskova and Antonsich, forthcoming). By intentionally using 'in diversity' rather than the more common 'with diversity', we want to move away from reifying the dominant majority society's perspective, which assumes diversity as something 'carried' solely by immigrants and something that the 'native' society has to cope with. As demographic projections show (Lanzieri, 2010), contemporary societies in Europe and elsewhere are deemed to become more ethno-culturally diverse, also in relation to mixed background population. This will blur even more the boundary between majority and minority groups. 'We' and 'them' are no longer, if they have ever been, stable categories; they are undergoing profound transformations as for those elements (e.g., culture, ethnicity, and race) used to define them. In such a situation, 'living with diversity' seems to implicitly carry in itself the answer to the diversity 'problem'. Namely, tolerance of those 'causing' diversity emerges here as the politically dominant – as well as deeply problematic (Brown, 2009) – answer to a condition which, whether liked or not, cannot be changed. Our understanding of the contemporary conjuncture as that of living together *in diversity* aims

instead to open up the terrain for an all-encompassing analysis, stressing indeed the untenable character of the we/them analytical framework.

The articles selected for this special issue address the question of the relationship between the national and ethno-cultural, racial, and religious diversity in a variety of geographical and socio-spatial contexts and from different disciplinary perspectives. The first three contributions focus on contemporary re-constructions of the national as an identity marker, revealing its continued ability to remake itself as an important scale for the production of collective identities. Excavating the political thought of Bikhu Parekh and the report named after him, Uberoi offers a historically sensitive account of how British political elites have embraced and promoted a new form of nationalism, namely multicultural nationalism, that is distinct from both conservative and liberal traditions in its enhanced inclusiveness vis-à-vis ethnic, racial and religious difference. Mari and Shvanyukova similarly explore the re-making of the national, but from a literary studies' perspective which focuses on the voices of migrants rather than political elites. Re-reading texts of contemporary Italophone literature, they show how a sense of Italian-ness is both contested and re-written to make space for the (hi)stories of the so-called 'new Italians'. Chatterjee's article on Canada's labour market regulations moves the focus on more structural and material factors, showing how the national as a scalar register of socio-economic organization is imbricated in identity narratives which, in the case of Canada, produce a form of racialized nationalism. She argues that by tying labour-skill deficits to racial difference, Canada operates a form of migrant incorporation which closely resonates with the demands of neoliberal globalization and recurrent racialized nation-building.

The other two contributions, all informed by a geographical disciplinary perspective, turn their attention to the national as a lived and enacted presence in the everyday life, exploring at the same time how national and local/urban scales are intimately imbricated.

Valentine questions the assumption that contemporary processes of accelerated connectivity produce opportunities for cross-cultural exchange by attending to expressions of prejudice towards diversity among Polish and British interviewees. Although duly acknowledging the circulation of prejudice between places at a variety of scales, she also points to the relevance of the national context as a key mediator in shaping prejudice attitudes. Wilson addresses the complex inter-scalar relations in contemporary landscapes of citizenship and belonging by analysing both institutional and popular narratives that have come to position Birmingham as an urban laboratory for reconstituting a more inclusive idea of Britishness.

All together these five articles offer a fruitful intervention in bringing the national back to migration studies. They represent a number of lines of inquiry that we see as being amongst those fruitful for a renewed research agenda of migration studies that takes the national seriously. Our use of the term ‘national’ rather than the more substantive terms of ‘nation’, ‘nationhood’, or ‘nationness’ aims to avoid its exclusive conflation with an identity category. While a sense of collective identity is certainly a key feature of the national, this latter can also be thought of as a political, social or economic register which intervenes at various scales and in various contexts. In particular, as further discussed in the conclusion, we are interested in how the national can also assemble a series of practices, habits, or sensibilities which challenge the nationalist idea of a mono-cultural nation. In the following pages we first elaborate in greater detail on how the national has been intentionally overlooked by scholars interested in urban, transnational, or cosmopolitan narratives and point out why such an occlusion is problematic. Second, we review the arguments of those scholars who, either in civic, liberal or multicultural terms, have indeed focused on the national from a normative perspective. Third, we critically engage these perspectives, pointing to the missed points which characterize these views, seemingly blind to the plurality of meanings, actors and sites through which the national happens. Finally, we propose a

research agenda which builds on this plurality, stressing in particular the need for contextual attention to people's everyday making of the national.

### **Going beyond the national**

In the early 1990s, Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc (1994) were among the first to introduce the terms 'transnationalism' and 'transnational social field' to capture the multiple relationships linking migrants to both their societies of origin and settlement. The title of their book (*Nations Unbound*) was telling of a move which, in time, has gone from a mere descriptor of a condition (transnationality) to a normative project (transnationalism) aimed at overcoming the national both as a scalar dimension of the organization of socio-political life and as a symbolic reference of attachment and affiliation (see also Gupta and Ferguson, 1992; Appadurai, 1996). Hoping to liberate migration scholarship from methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller, 2002), this project argues against the monopoly of the national lenses in the study of society. Scholars – the transnationalist argument maintains – should move away from the idea that society is framed by and contained within national territories, thus escaping the so-called 'territorial trap' (Agnew, 1994; see also Taylor, 1995). As recently suggested by Amelina and Faist (2012), the aim of transnationalism in migration studies should be to de-naturalize the concept of the national and formulate a methodological programme for studying transnational mobilities and formations. Yet, a quick look at the majority of studies conducted within the transnationalist paradigm reveals that often times these continue to implicitly reify nationalist frames of thought. Most importantly, they do so without conceptually elaborating on the national in the transnational.

This move away from the national in the name of new transnational mobilities also closely resonates with cosmopolitanism, which has resurged anew in scholarly literature

around the same time. Cosmopolitanism has certainly come to connote a plethora of positions (Vertovec and Cohen, 2002: 9). It includes for example Nussbaum's (1994) moral cosmopolitanism that contrasts what is seen as the ethnocentric particularism of the nation with the universal values of justice and right. Addressing itself more directly to the political-institutional aspects, political cosmopolitanism calls for a form of global governance (Archibugi and Held, 1995; Falk, 1998) and thus challenges the national as a scalar articulation of political life. In its cultural variation, cosmopolitanism also seems to go beyond the national. Contrary to the idea of a homogenous national culture, somewhat attached to a given territory and rather stable over time, cultural cosmopolitanism celebrates hybridity, diversity, contamination, and creolization (Held, 2002; Cohen, 2007). The true cosmopolitan in the post-colonial age is not the enlightened Westerner, who praises the universalism of liberal values, but the displaced migrant. In this very condition – displacement – resides the universal character of being cosmopolitan, understood as a capacity to mediate or translate between a plurality of cultures, traditions and life styles (Pollock et al., 2000; Held, 2002). Cultural cosmopolitanism does not aim to transcend particularity, but to dispute the stability and essential character of any culture and identity (Hall, 2002; Bhabha, 1996). As Gupta and Ferguson (1992) have argued, a cosmopolitan experience is seen as questioning the unity of the 'us' and the otherness of the 'other', as well as the radical separation between the two (see also Gressgård, 2010). Otherness is no longer excluded in the construction of a national 'we', since it actually pervades it – the national 'monological imagination' is seen as superseded by a cosmopolitan 'dialogical imagination' (Beck, 2002). To sum up, different strands of cosmopolitan thought tend to present themselves as projects through which societies can and need to emancipate themselves from anything related to the nation, and by implication the national scale. Yet, as with

transnationalism, it can be argued that also theorists of cosmopolitanism continue to reproduce key aspects of a nationalist imaginary, as Closs Stephens (2013) recently argued.

Finally, the rejection of the national scale has also been promoted, often explicitly, by the growing body of urban-centred literature on migration and diversity, characterized by scholars positioning local/urban diversity as an alternative to the nationalist focus on unity and similarity, if not sameness. Nava (2006), for instance, talks of ‘domestic cosmopolitanism’ to signal the capacity of a city like London to generate more inclusive forms of social imaginaries and belonging (see also Fortier, 2008). Amin (2002, 2006) stresses the importance of the urban as the locus where racial and cultural differences are both encountered and negotiated, engendering a politics of connectivity or, in Gilroy’s (2004) terms, ‘conviviality’ – a dwelling in close proximity which makes racial and ethnic difference look ordinary, part of a cosmopolitan culture. More recently, Closs-Stephens (2013), implicitly answering Butler and Spivak’s (2007: 2-4) call for non-nationalist modes of belonging, goes beyond what she calls the nationalist logic of unity, homogeneity, and linearity and instead advocates a politics of coexistence formed through crossings, exchanges, and disagreements, as best captured in Nancy’s (2003) concept of the urban *mêlée* (Antonsich et al., 2014). This scholarship likewise contributes, sometimes inadvertently, to the contemporary dominance of anti-national direction of most research on migration and diversity by contrasting the national as the abstract, the fixed, and the singular with the urban as the dynamic, the lived, and the plural (Rossetto, forthcoming; Clayton, 2009). Such a picture has by now become so hegemonic that it has also become incorporated into policy documents, such as the Council of Europe’s (2013: 30) acknowledgement of the city rather than the nation-state as “the appropriate level” to foster intercultural encounters.

### **Re-making the nation and nationalism for the ‘age of diversity’**

While scholars adopting transnational or cosmopolitan perspectives have attempted to take anything related to the national out of the field of enquiry, the national scale has continued to be the focus of one significant body of migration- and diversity-related scholarship, namely political philosophy. This scholarship has been providing normative visions of how nationally-scaled societies can continue cohering as nations in face of their increasing ethnic, cultural, religious and racial diversity. In other words, they have attempted to theorize nationalism – largely a mono-culturalist political ideology – as more inclusive of subjects previously thought too foreign to belong to the nation.

Habermas's (1998) idea of constitutional patriotism has been amongst the most often invoked, as well as criticised among such attempts. His vision of civic nationalism maintains the separation between the cultural (nation) and the political (state) spheres. Despite the fact that this normative position is also labelled as post-national, it actually does not aim to go beyond the national as a scalar dimension of the organization of socio-political life. It instead operates a dissection of the nation-state into its constituent components. Benhabib (2002: 171), for instance, talks of moral (the universal condition of human beings), political (citizens of a given polity), and ethical (affiliation to a given cultural group) components and argues, much like Habermas, for the decoupling of the ethical from the political, further suggesting that the latter should be informed by the moral principle of everybody's right to political membership. In the model of civic nationalism what brings diverse people together is a common democratic culture, informed by liberal political principles. What matters is the deliberative opinion- and will-formation of citizens (Habermas, 1998: 137-8), not their ethnic or cultural similarity. This explains the importance that constitutional patriotism, like civic republicanism, attributes to citizenship as a form of political participation (Antonsich, 2014).

Liberal nationalism goes a step further in this re-envisioning of culturally diverse nations and tries to reconcile the political and the cultural, rather than keeping them apart.



From this perspective, the national is conceptualized not only as a scalar organization of political life, but also as a symbolic referent. In this latter aspect the national, however, is purified from any ‘thick’ ethno-cultural elements. Unlike the proponents of civic nationalism, these theorists argue that political principles alone cannot hold a society together (e.g. Kymlicka, 2002: 257). By implication, it is not possible to incorporate migrants into the so-called host or mainstream society in ways that are culturally neutral, as *any* form of civic-based nationalism retains the cultural traits of the ethnic dominant group (Hall, 2002: 28; Bader, 2005: 169). Liberal nationalism, therefore, constructs a sense of nationhood around what Kymlicka (2001: 25; 2002) calls a ‘societal culture’, a territorially-delimited culture, centred on a common language and history, public institutions and shared future, rather than common ethnicity, religion or ‘way of life’. Similarly, Miller (2000) defends the necessity of drawing upon the ethical resources of the nationally scaled community to foster a sense of solidarity among diverse citizens, which in turn is deemed essential to the functioning of democratic institutions. Yet, contrary to Kymlicka, Miller’s liberal nationalism oscillates, somewhat contradictorily, between a civic republican understanding of citizenship as the glue that can keep a plural society together (Miller, 2000: 61, 96) and a communitarian understanding of the nation as a pre-political entity, imbued with common traits (shared values, tastes or sensibilities) and ways of thinking (Miller, 1995: 142; 2000: 30). Thus, while for Kymlicka (2001: 22-23) ethno-cultural diversity can certainly be accommodated with the nation as long as it complies with liberal principles, for Miller (1995: 26, 122) it should instead be confined within the private sphere. In both cases, the nation remains closely associated with a given, dominant culture, that filters and regulates which difference is permitted, where and how.

A more pronounced incorporation of cultural elements in these normative attempts at liberating the concept of nation from its historical imperative of a single shared culture

characterizes instead multiculturalism. According to one of its most renowned exponents, Parekh (2000, 235-236) – also discussed in Uberoi’s contribution to this special issue – what binds a society together is a plural and inclusive national identity, based on a composite culture constituted through intercultural dialogue. This culture should not be seen as the lowest common denominator among all the different cultures present within a given society nor a mere collection of their arbitrarily selected beliefs and practices, but a more or less distinct culture in which beliefs and practices are all redefined, so to give shape to a newly reconstituted ‘we’ (Parekh, 2000: 204, 221). In the words of another distinguished multiculturalist, Modood (2011), the aim should be to create a new national ‘we’, which could include the historical trajectories of immigration communities – a plural and inclusive national identity in which all citizens can recognize themselves. Contra national liberalism *à la* Miller, the logic underpinning this project is not about ‘taking off’, but ‘adding’ ethno-cultural diversity (Modood and Meer, 2012: 52) – an overlapping and overarching shared identity built on diversity (Bauböck, 2002; Uberoi, 2008).

Yet, despite the important work of articulating new national visions for culturally diverse societies that this body of literature represents, its normative outlook remains at times confining. In fact, most of this work focuses on which values and principles *should* be promoted or how institutions *should* be in order to hold a nation together in the ‘age of diversity’. In this way, what is left rather unexamined is an analytical mapping of how these diversified societies are *actually* brought together as nationally scaled societies or how meanings, practices and sensibilities pertaining to societies organized politically through nation-states relate to cultural difference and diversity.

### **Missing pieces**

When the paradigm of transnationalism swept migration studies in the 1990s it certainly provided a refreshing analytical perspective in a field all too nation-state-centred in its dominant epistemological outlook. Within a decade, however, it became overused, without continuing to develop theoretically (Boccagni, 2012). Moreover, in their focus on ties and bonds that migrants maintain or recreate with their places of origin, the role of post-immigration settlements has received far less systematic or explicitly theorized attention. Especially nationally-scaled processes and sensibilities have been on the margin of this work. And yet, there is strong evidence showing that transnational processes are integral to many of the dynamics of national belonging (Dragojlovic, 2008; Butcher, 2009; Antonsich, 2011), as well as belonging in a nation-state. Likewise, conditions of possibility created at the national scale provide a structural background for much of migrant transnationalism. Finally, it has also recently been argued that the nationalist episteme remains implicated in cosmopolitan thought or sensibilities (Closs Stephens, 2013; Brett and Moran, 2011 respectively) and that in fact cosmopolitanism and nationalism can be complementary (Beck and Levy, 2013; Delanty, 2006).

While the desire to challenge the naturalization of the nation-state in this scholarship is understandable, it does not warrant an analytical omission of the continued and varied relevance of the national as a form of socio-political organization. The problem, in other words, is the naturalization, not the national, which we understand as a scalar effect of socio-political organization of life through the nation-state. As a matter of fact, nationally scaled processes continue to be a source of solidarity and emotional affiliation (Calhoun, 2007; Skey, 2011) and thus should await further empirical investigation rather than dismissal. This might be even truer in the Global South, where the national register can act as an essential terrain for empowering those subaltern populations who are either excluded from or do not have access to global flows (Yeğenoğlu, 2005). As observed by Chernilo (2007), to herald a

new post-modern cosmopolitan era against a modern national past implicitly contributes to the reification of the myth of a historically stable, coherent nation-state, which has never been. Far from a homogenous, singular, fixed, stable referent, the national as a symbolic register has always been continuously remade, adjusting to mutating socio-political and economic circumstances (Biswas, 2002). In this sense, transition and fluidity should not be regarded as a unique feature of local/urban conviviality, as they are also constantly at play in the making of the national, as demonstrated by a number of articles in this special issue, including Uberoi's account of the rise of multicultural nationalism in the UK, Chatterjee's discussion of changing immigration policies for highly skilled in Canada as well as Mari and Shvanyukova's analysis of migrant literature and its challenging engagements with contemporary Italianness.

Approaches and discourses which claim to go beyond the national often seem trapped in an either/or logic, which prevents them from seeing not only how national and transnational are imbricated, but also how the local, rather than being an alternative to, is actually permeated by the national in terms of practices, discourses, and materiality. This is one of the points made by Wilson's inquiry of the role of Birmingham as a laboratory for the remaking of the British nation. As Jones and Fowler (2007) remark, to think that the national scale is the only appropriate scale at which to study the nation, and indeed the sensibilities and practices related to the nation-statist organization of life, is highly problematic. It actually contributes, however inadvertently, to the reification of the national as an abstract dimension, distant from people's ordinary lives and concerns. As Billig (1995) has demonstrated, the national remains instead very much a banal presence in everyday life in terms of its identity markers. Building on this insight, Edensor (2002) has convincingly shown how the everyday is indeed populated by a myriad of inconspicuous material artefacts (e.g., traffic lights, street furniture, parks, petrol stations) which make the national organization of life a visible,

tangible presence in people's routine experience of space. This familiar landscape also orchestrates mundane choreographies related to shared ways of doing (e.g. queuing, shopping, commuting), which further contribute to instilling a sense of the national as a common temporal and spatial matrix, drawing things, places and people together in some form of a collective, irrespective of their diversities (Löfgren 1989; Linde-Laursen 1993).

Such shared ways of doing imply strong human agency, something that remains also rather disregarded by both scholars aiming to go 'beyond the national' and those who try to normatively re-make it. Although national collectives might primarily be 'top-down' *products*, they are continuously *re-produced* by ordinary people. Nations and national identities are not given categories which exist 'out there', they are not conferred to individuals like a certificate of birth, but they are acquired by them, they are 'made real' by the individuals in the course of their daily social interactions (Thompson, 2001; Brubaker, 2006). This is what Thompson (2001) calls the 'local' production of national identity and that Cohen (1996), adopting a more anthropological perspective, calls 'personal nationalism'. Overlooking this personal, intimate re-production of the national risks making this latter a purely abstract and remote dimension, trapped in the essentializing rhetoric of political elites.

### **Migrations societies and the national – a research perspective**

Reflecting critically on these missing pieces, we advocate an empirical research agenda bringing the national back into migration studies. A first step in this direction is to move away from an either/or logic (national/transnational; national/cosmopolitan; national/urban) and explore instead, in a logic of connectivity, how, when, and where the national intervenes in discourses and practices articulated at a plurality of registers. The aim should not be to wish the national away in the name of seemingly more progressive articulations. Empirically, this would fail to understand how the national keeps changing in the face of ongoing

processes of globalization, fragmentation and demographic transformation (Biswas, 2002). Normatively, this would also risk leaving the national at the mercy of those groups, which indeed claim it as an exclusive ethno-cultural space, thus implicitly contributing to a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy – one which calls for going beyond the national, as this is irredeemably associated with ethno-cultural particularism.

More fruitful, instead, would be to interrogate the ways in which the national gets reconfigured, in a process of constant negotiation which involves a plurality of institutional and lay actors. In operative terms this means that we should continue studying how various political, economic and social institutions, including governments, political parties, trade unions or entrepreneurial organisations, rework the national framework to respond to the changing composition of its population. Yet, to limit ourselves to this institutional analysis is to present the national as a top-down construct, as a given and yet distant entity from people's ordinary lives. Bringing these lives into the analytical limelight is instead crucial for three main reasons. First, it helps overcome a substantialist view of the nation, which too often characterises the normative arguments of those aiming to rethink nationalism in response to cultural diversity. As long as the nation remains conceptualized only around a series of features against which, for example, to measure national integration (e.g., Simon, 2012; <http://www.mipex.eu/>), the end result is to reproduce an essentialist idea of nation, which would then justify those projects aimed at its overcoming in name of supposedly less exclusivist socio-spatial registers. An attention to people's everyday lives would instead bring forward the contextual, contingent happening of the national as a discursive as well as emotional (Wood, 2012) resource activated in social interaction. This 'eventful account' (Brubaker, 2006) of 'the national in the everyday' should be an essential complement of more institutional renditions, as it would allow for the exploration of how rhetorical national imaginaries are negotiated in a plurality of ordinary contexts (Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008).

Second, and closely related to this point, is human agency. Focusing on people's everyday lives makes apparent how the national, far from an abstract and distant dimension, is actually co-produced by discourses and practices of lay people, who indeed play an active role in making sense of – and therefore constructing – the national. Each of us, however diverse we are, is implicated in this making of nationally scaled collectives by engaging in mundane talking and acting (Condor and Fenton, 2012). Attending to these mundane conversations and actions is bound to reveal a conviviality which would not only inform an urban living, but also speak of a national living together.

Third, moving from the institutional dimension to the everydayness of the national also moves the analysis away from a singular focus on identity discourses. Instead, it redirects the analytical gaze towards the importance of the very act of sharing a common national territory (Antonsich, 2009). This sharing produces habits and sensibilities which in turn (co)produce a nationally scaled collective and its distinctiveness (Antonsich 2009), as increasingly, if implicitly, acknowledged also in state-led reconceptualizations of national citizenship in countries like Germany away from *jus sanguinis* and towards *jus domicili* (Matejskova, 2013).

This continuously (re)produced national can be examined in a myriad of ways, including its inscription in the landscape as a material, mundane presence or its working as a common temporal matrix in the organization of people's everyday lives (Edensor, 2002). We suggest that this kind of research direction would do more justice to the national, treating it not simply as a register calling for a common identification, but rather as an organizational space that produces, or can produce, a diverse nationally scaled community of socio-spatial belonging that might go beyond national identity (Antonsich, 2010).

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