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The persistence of nationalism. From imagined communities to urban encounters

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Moving beyond the opposition between national and postnational

Marco Antonsich

The title might be deceiving. This is not a book on the persistence of nationalism, but on the ways to overcome this persistence. The aim is to think how living together in/with/through diversity might be imagined and lived beyond a sense of national community. The Author's main concern is for a future which can be different from the present and to this purpose the book calls for a new political imagination which can coalesce around urban everyday encounters.

The book is organized around two main parts. Part one aims to unpack nationalist imaginaries and to this end it explores theories of nation and nationalism, from the time of the Enlightenment to the present day. The Author's main argument is that these imaginaries are closely tied with narratives about the necessity of the state, the disenchantment of modern life, and linear accounts of time. Part two contests these nationalist imaginaries by drawing on a series of very diverse case studies (public reactions to the 7 July 2005 bombings in London and to the events of 11 September 2001, and Jewish memorials in Berlin) to introduce the city as a cosmopolitan space of encounters and living together beyond the nationalistic imaginary.

The book opens with a critical discussion of two of the major approaches in nationalism studies – Gellner's view of the nation as a product of modernization and Smith's etho-symbolic understanding of the nation as culturally and historically embedded. Both approaches – argues the Author – end up portraying the nation as a historically

inescapable condition. Searching for the conceptual roots which underpin this inescapability, the book excavates the works of Max Weber and Jean Jacques Rousseau. Amidst feelings of disenchantment and a nihilistic rationalization brought about by modernity, Weber is said to herald the nation as a source of meaningful life; whereas Rousseau, despite the fact that he was writing before the nationalist idea was propagated by the French Revolution, is presented as having been instrumental in justifying political and cultural unity as a response to the loss of a sense of community in the passage from the natural to the modern world. These narratives are used by the Author to explain why nationalism remains so persistent in today's world. As a way to move away from a nationalist logic of unity, homogeneity, and linearity, both in space and in time, the book engages with sites of memory in post-Holocaust Berlin and with everyday urban encounters. Both are used to illustrate a politics of coexistence organized not around identity, agreement, commonality and shared meanings, but formed through crossings, exchanges, and disagreements, as best captured in Nancy's (2003) concept of the *mêlée*.

The book certainly offers an elegant account of the limits of national politics, yet the 'solution' it proposes seems neither very convincing nor to fully encompass Nancy's reasoning. The critique of nationalism itself also seems in need of further specification. Let me first start with this latter point.

The association of the nation(al) with a unified space, subject and time reads too simplistically. A reading certainly true when we look at the nationalistic rhetoric of 19th-20th centuries, but a reading which fails to capture how today the nation is increasingly

spatially dispersed (a diasporic nation which lives through transnational links), national subjects are becoming more and more diverse in ethno-cultural, religious and racial terms (and states, at least *de facto*, acknowledge and cater for this diversity in multiple ways – even in the age of ‘multiculturalism backlash’ – see Banting and Kymlicka, 2012; Modood, 2008), and the idea of a unified, linear time is under challenge by a deeply felt economic recession which makes the future look very fragmented. Thus, to treat the nation as a unified, singular *it* risks reproducing the myth of a stable, coherent, organic nation-state which historically has never been (Chernilo, 2007). Paradoxically, it reifies the very methodological nationalism that it tries to overcome.

There is also another dimension of the nation(al) which is strangely absent from the Author’s intellectual engagement with nationalism and yet unreflexively present in the book: its intimate, personal dimension. The nation(al) cannot solely be regarded as an ideology used by the elites to justify terror, conquest or oppression, but also as a language, a system of representations, and a form of solidarity (Calhoun, 2007), which inform the lives of ordinary people and which ordinary people contribute to incessantly re-shape. The incipit of the book and the acknowledgements carry a dedication in *Welsh* respectively to the Author’s grand-mother and her new born daughter. This is a very delicate gesture, but also one which implicitly conveys a sense of personal, intimate nationalism (Cohen, 1996). The nation(al) does not only live in institutions, but it also permeates the cognitive and affective sphere of an individual and the relations s/he entertains with (significant) others. It constructs a ‘we’ which is not necessarily set against ‘them’, but around meaningful relations, imbued with feelings of sharing and

caring. The critique of nationalism made in the book is exactly blind to the relevance of this mundane – yet not necessarily ‘banal’ in Billig’s (1995) terminology – sense of the nation(al). Leaving out this dimension risks producing a sort of caricature of the nation(al), which does not do justice to its sociological (Thompson, 2001) and anthropological (Herzfeld 1996) complexity. Far from a unified site, the nation(al) is a product of everyday contestation and disagreement, an extremely dynamic and ambiguous process made of multiple, conflicting ordinary voices (Edensor, 2002). Not listening to this polyphonic production equals to treat the nation(al) as something out of history, something which does not adjust to the changing of people and times.

As I said, I remain also unconvinced by the ‘solution’ to national politics (i.e. a *mêlée* of urban encounters) proposed by the Author. I have five main objections. First, although the Author duly acknowledges how daily encounters can also be fraught with conflict, the book passes under silence those material and structural conditions which inform these encounters and the uneven power relations which preside over them. Paying attention to this would reveal how nationalism might just be one of the various forms through which discrimination, oppression and violence manifest – not necessarily the cause. In other words, getting rid of nationalism would not efface discrimination, oppression or violence. Second, exactly because of this, a switch from national to postnational politics does not seem to be sufficiently justified. To echo Grosz (1999), it is indeed legitimate to ask why we should voluntarily move into a future political alternative when there is no guarantee that this future alternative will look better than the present. If the present were only rid with “terror and destruction” (p. 24), this would certainly be a gamble worth taking. Yet,

as I suggested above, the nation(al) is also ingrained in relations of personal affectivity, structures of solidarity and democratic politics (Calhoun 2007). If we scratch the nation(al), how all these emotional needs and political functions would be answered in a post-national *mêlée*? Third, although suggestive, I do not think that a politics informed by disagreement (p. 117) would be very effective. While difference and disagreement can certainly be part of what the Author calls “the very stuff of politics” (p. 11), they should not be regarded as the *only* stuff. Politics is indeed the art of negotiation and compromise (Agnew, 2011). Agreement is what politics should aim at, although this can also be achieved in an agonistic way (Mouffe, 2005; Isin, 2002). Mouffe (2005: 2) goes even further and suggests that the aspiration to a world where the ‘we/they’ will be overcome relies “on flawed premises and those who share such a vision are bound to miss the real task facing democratic politics”. Fourth, the urban *mêlée* is said to allow for re-imagining community without having to share something in common (p. 58). Yet, any community by definition implies commonality (Painter 2012: 524). Talking of a community without any shared commonality, besides sounding like an enigmatic oxymoron, also provides no justification of why people should live together. The very idea of togetherness would lose any meaningful sense. Other attempts of thinking community beyond (national) identity have not gone that far. Amin (2012), for instance, builds his postnational living together on the idea of the commons. Ahmed and Fortier (2003) oscillate from rejecting completely the idea of community to re-thinking community as 'common ground'. Carrillo Rowe (2005) and Diprose (2008) also draw on Nancy, but they privilege his notion of *clinamen* (inclination towards others) rather than the *mêlée*. This human

inclination avoids producing a community of strangers, based on indifference towards difference (Tonkiss, 2005; Young, 1990) which seems indeed to characterize the everyday urban living espoused by the Author.

I think that the absence of any reference to the *clinamen* might be caused by the Author's excessive concern for envisioning communities beyond any shared identification. I say excessive in relation to Nancy's (2003: 203) invitation about not confusing 'distinction' and 'foundation'. Nancy in fact does not reject the very idea of a 'French culture' or 'French identity', but the need of founding this culture or identity on something which remains the same over time. If so, then the issue would not be so much about overcoming (national) identity/identification, but to fully acknowledge their processual character.

Finally, I believe that the 'solution' proposed in the book seems confined within a very either/or logic – either the nation(al) or the urban *mêlée*. The Author juxtaposes indeed the two, without noting how these dimensions are closely intertwined. For instance, the story of the reluctant fundamentalist recounted in the book (chapter 5) is not a mere example of urban belonging, since 'feeling at home' is indeed produced by a soundscape (Urdu) and a 'smell-scape' (samosa and channa) which call into presence the nation(al). The very possibility of urban belonging is dependent on a sense of national familiarity. Thus, it would maybe be more useful to explore the ways in which a *mêlée* also operates in/through the nation(al), rather than explicitly refusing any logic of scale (p. 10, 120) and implicitly adopting the urban as the only 'plane' (p. 121).

Nationalism and the modern project

Anne-Marie Fortier

Why does nationalism persist? This is the question that many social science researchers have asked, particularly when, in the late 1990s, social sciences shifted their attention from time (debates on modernity and postmodernity) to space (debates on globalisation). How and if nations would endure the forces of globalisation was, and continues to be, a key question in these debates.

In *The Persistence of Nationalism*, Angharad Closs Stephens seeks to shed a different light on this question in three ways: by re-placing time (and not only space) at the centre of the debate, by showing how the nationalist imaginary shapes social and political thought and how consequently it remains ‘caught up within the nationalist imaginary and thwarts attempts at resisting it.’ (p. 16), and by turning to the city as a site for non-nationalist forms of community. *The Persistence of Nationalism* is a welcome invitation to critics of nationalism to resist the nationalist imaginary by looking elsewhere – namely the city – for alternative ways of thinking politically.

Motivated by resisting nationalism, Closs Stephens takes us ‘from imagined communities to urban encounters’, as the book subtitle suggests. The first section of the book shows how ‘nationalism emerges against the backdrop of a particularly modern way of seeing and understanding the world around us.’ (p. 30) Closs Stephens traces a genealogy of nationalist thinking in the works of Max Weber and Jean-Jacques Rousseau and their respective response to their disenchantment with modern life. I was particularly interested

in the account of how Weber responded to what he conceived as the loss of meaning and firm foundations under modernity by insisting on the self-determining individual and the need for a sense of purpose which would be best met in the ‘eternal struggle to preserve and raise the quality of our national species’ (Weber cited on p. 35; my emphasis).

Weber’s wording takes me to Foucault and his genealogy of how the nation (or in Closs Stephens’ words, the nationalist imaginary) became a subject of history in 18th and 19th century Europe. In *Il faut défendre la société*, Foucault explains how the birth of biopolitics signalled the superimposition of two modes of power: one that operates through the individualisation and disciplining of the human body – what Foucault called ‘anatomy-politics’ (1997: 216) – and the other that operates through the collectivisation of the human as a species whose life ‘events’ such as death, birth and illness are the business of the ‘population’. Bio-political strategies of governance rely not only on a conception of population as a mass body of human beings with particular patterns and rates of marriage, fecundity, health, disease, death, and so on, but also, on a conception of ‘a “people” with national[-cultural], gendered, classed and even “raced” specificities’ (Lewis, 2000: 24). Indeed Foucault’s account of how race codifies the nation also explains what is at stake in the drive to preserve it. As Engin Isin (2012: 462) puts it, ‘for Foucault the highly developed political communities in the late-18th and 19th centuries are driven toward eliminating threats to their existence.’

My point in rehearsing Foucault’s argument is that it is not only that Weber (or Rousseau) found in the nation a panacea to their sense of loss (or purpose, of meaning, of unity), but that, first, race and nation became intertwined within the emergence of

biopolitical power, and second, that the rise of nationalism gave way to the identification of the state with the nation in what Hannah Arendt called the ‘conquest of the state through the nation’ (in Isin, 2012: 456). Isin (2012) offers very useful insights into the linking of state and nation in his genealogy of citizenship as membership that binds an individual to the community of birth. In doing so, he addresses an important piece of the puzzle that Closs Stephens (p.5) is trying to put together, namely how the nationalist imaginary ‘relies on the assumption of state sovereignty and involves a particular way of seeing the world’. With regards to assumptions of state sovereignty, what Isin’s close readings of Arendt and Foucault reminds us of is how ‘the identification of the state with the nation . . . transformed the very idea of sovereignty. Sovereignty used to be the God-given authority of the prince, but now it was located in the fictitious entity “people”.’ (2012: 548). In addition, above and beyond a very modern ‘way of seeing the world’ characterised by homogeneity, linearity, progress, and order, which Closs Stephens identifies as constitutive of the nationalist imaginary, it is important to consider what might distinguish the latter from the broader modern project. The nationalist imaginary is supported by ideas of the nation as a ‘people’ whose purity and life must be preserved; in other words, the nation offers a promise of immortality (c.f. Stevens 2010), which the state is responsible for preserving. This has crucial consequences not only for the role of the state in enhancing and preserving life, but also in allowing death; whose lives are worth protecting and whose are not (c.f. Butler, 2004)? This is not to say that there is something more powerful about national identities than other communities of identification. Rather, it is to suggest that there is more to the nationalist imaginary than

an experience of time as progressive and linear (p. 114).

How, then, can the nationalist imaginary be avoided? How can we imagine the community otherwise? The second section of the book gestures towards the city as a site that affords different ways of living together. Avoiding the cosmopolitanism versus nationalism opposition – Closs Stephens shows how ideas of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism can be mobilised in nationalist narratives of unity – the book ultimately finds critiques of nationalism in different Holocaust memorials in Berlin: Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews designed by Peter Eisenman, the Missing House designed by Christian Boltanski, as well as two art installations by Gustav Metzger. What intrigues me in these choices is how the city itself, rather than these particular architectural and artistic designs, affords the anti-nationalist critique that Closs Stephens is looking for. Is there something inherent or essential to 'the city' that counters the nationalist imaginary? Is there something in the city per se that offers 'an effective critique of nationalism' (p. 86)? The chosen sites of memory in Berlin undoubtedly offer different experiments with time, and consequently, challenge ideas of linear time, history, progress, and of who can be grieved and remembered. But I found it difficult to see these as examples of city life itself, rather than as competing understandings of how the past and history could be told differently. How, for example, do the zigzag window panes of the Jewish Museum 'capture the idea of the "time of the city"' (p.99) rather than simply express fragmented time? How is fragmented time the prerogative of the city?

The book begins with several interesting questions, such as ‘what would it mean to take movement, transitoriness, and unpredictability seriously as conditions for thinking what it means to be political?’ (pp. 9-10) But I remain uncertain about why the city is the privileged site for finding movement, transitoriness, and unpredictability. We could think of critical theories of diaspora that posit it as an emblem of multi-locality, ‘post-nationality’, and non-linearity of both movement and time. As a decidedly anti-nationalist concept (Gilroy, 2004), diaspora constitutes a rich heuristic device to think about questions of belonging, continuity, and community in the context of dispersal and transnational networks of connection. Similarly, relatively writings on rurality offer a nuanced account of the contemporary countryside as a place of change and connection to urban environments (e.g. Askins, 2009) or as a place of conviviality that is resonant with how urban conviviality has been theorised (Neal and Walters 2008), consequently forcing us to revisit what distinguishes the urban from non-urban spaces. This is not to romanticise diasporas as terrains of belonging is if they do not at times draw on nationalist imaginaries, nor is it to ignore how ‘the rural’ figures in nationalist imaginaries. However, it is to draw attention to the dangers of reifying the city as a unique site of anti-nationalist politics and alternative forms of community formation.

Going home: national imaginaries and political possibilities

Jonathan Darling

I read *The Persistence of Nationalism* through the summer of 2013, at a time when many headlines in the UK were devoted to the Home Office’s attempts to ‘manage migration’

through a series of high profile measures. Whilst workplace raids, immigration spot checks and the publication of arrest statistics on Twitter all received publicity, it was the decision to use two mobile billboards to tour London's most diverse wards and project the message that irregular migrants should "go home" or "face arrest" that gained most attention. This measure was condemned as a publicity stunt in some quarters, a brazen attempt to win votes and appear 'tough' on an electorally sensitive issue. Yet it might also be understood as part of a dominant perceptual framing of migration and mobility, that of the *need* for control and the ability to categorise, locate and expel those deemed unworthy of a place within the nation-state. Perhaps the ire which the Home Office's "go home" message received was, in some quarters, less about its political posturing and more about the manner in which it exposed to scrutiny, the underlying messages of selection and exclusion that dominate contemporary imaginations of immigration. It is this question of exposure that runs throughout *The Persistence of Nationalism*, as Closs Stephens sets out to unpack the political, temporal and spatial assumptions that underpin nationalism as an enduring force in contemporary politics. Yet this is also a book about the need to go beyond the practice of critique. For in arguing that many critical discussions of nationalism are placed too comfortably on the terrain of a nationalist imaginary, Closs Stephens asserts that attempts to destabilise nationalist categories of identity and belonging are undermined. In the wake of such limitations, the book argues for the need to examine insights drawn from urban theory and the 'discontinuous, ephemeral experience of life in the city' (Closs Stephens, 2013: p. 93), as a means to imagine a 'politics of coexistence beyond what is already familiar to us' (2013: p. 110).

Reading *The Persistence of Nationalism* in the context of this “go home” campaign highlighted the need for the kinds of imaginative political openings envisaged across the book.

The Persistence of Nationalism is an ambitious book, at once a critical exploration of nationalist thought and its enduring ability to shape the grounds of political debate, and an attempt to explore openings which contest such a frame of reference. Closs Stephens locates nationalism as part of a broader imaginary of state sovereignty, centred upon a linear temporality and a concern with order, identification and communal attachment. It is these values of commonality, security, unity and attachment that Closs Stephens shows are intrinsic to the nationalist imaginary, both as values apparently under threat and as the normative horizons of a national future. The danger of such horizons, the book argues, is that they obscure other avenues of political thought.

Two central arguments from *The Persistence of Nationalism* came to the fore for me whilst reading this text alongside news coverage of the symbolic touring of this “go home” message. The first of these is in the book’s concern to place the demand for collective unity and the maintenance of distinctions between “us” and “them” at the heart of both nationalism *and* cosmopolitanism. Throughout the book, Closs Stephens carefully documents how narratives of collective unity were brought to the fore through the ‘war on terror’ and associated discourses of securitisation, from the militarised state to the vigilant ‘petty sovereign’ (Butler, 2006). Whilst also demonstrating how claims to the

cosmopolitan city and the celebration of difference serve to reinstate nationalist visions of distinction and collective identification. This mixture of security, identity and distinction finds expression in the contemporary practices of border management that I opened this commentary with. For the message to “go home” is directed not to those differences celebrated as part of the cosmopolitan city, but to those not accommodated within this celebratory rhetoric, those who are unwanted precisely because they exceed the limits of ‘acceptable’ difference.

The second argument is located in the book’s concern with the importance of temporality to nationalism, both in its ties to felt attachments of collective unity and common purpose, and in its reliance upon narratives of loss, nostalgia and mourning for a more coherent, ordered and cohesive past. Such a past is of course a myth, but no less pervasive and politically significant. The threat which immigrants pose is to an already constituted imagination of the ‘homely’ future, of opportunities, aspirations and ideals bound to the *promise* of the nation. It is the defence of this promise, of the unity, coherence and order of nationalism, which *The Persistence of Nationalism* exposes to critical examination.

The strength of *The Persistence of Nationalism* lies not simply in its exploration of how nationalist thought has framed political discourse, but also in critically exploring alternative possibilities for thinking coexistence and community. This is therefore a book about the politics of imagination. About the horizons of possibility and how such

horizons come to be demarcated, enclosed and defined by a myriad of different actors and forces, from political theorists and novelists to events of global terror and the socio-material entanglements of urban life.

Closs Stephens turns to the city for the opening of different modes of political imagination and it is here that I would pose a number of questions of this text. Firstly, in seeking to destabilise the persistence of nationalism, Closs Stephens moves to a focus on the encounters of urban life as offering alternative accounts of coexistence. Here encounters are neither valorised as ‘good’ or ‘laden with a sense of *meaning*’ (2013: p. 71), but rather are acknowledged as part of the constitution of everyday urbanism (Amin, 2012). Urban encounters are thus ambivalent and ambiguous points of contact ‘between urban strangers’ (2013: p. 71) which should not be viewed as progressive moments to be staged or employed (Wilson, 2011). Rather, urban encounters in this book assume a politically constitutive status – they are essential to coexistence as a matter of ‘crossings, entanglement and circulation’ (2013: p. 119). This opens a series of questions, for whilst encounters are central to the form of community without commonality that Closs Stephens gestures towards, the book itself says little about the specific nature and form of the encounter itself. Encounters are seen to express the disorderly, complex and irregular facets of the city. But it is not clear how encounters themselves differ from other forms of interaction, meeting and communication (Wilson, under review). What are the spatial and temporal horizons and limits of the encounter? For if encounters are productive of

political identities (2013: p. 120), then how do such identities form, through what processes of subjectification, and with what antecedents and conditions?

Linked to this concern with encounters is the question of solidarities. At the heart of this book is a demand to begin to think through questions of coexistence beyond the already familiar. It is for this reason that Closs Stephens attends so closely to the nature of imagination. Imagination here is taken to reflect a creative opening of political horizons beyond the limits of nationalist distinctions and is therefore about making space for that which will always exceed the political limits of the present. This is an attractive proposition, yet it also leaves open the question of those limits of the present. For whilst the encounters of urban life may destabilise nationalism, what room is left for projects of political solidarity and collective attachment beyond the (ambiguous) constitution of the encounter? Whilst it is clear that a desire for unity or commonality can be enrolled into a nationalist imaginary of “us” and “them”, this leads us to consider on what basis, if any, solidarities may be formed? Are we left with a series of transitory and strategic political alliances that do not cohere to a model of common affiliation or attachment, and if so what are the limits of this political imaginary?

The discussion of museum and memorial spaces, art installations and sculptures in contemporary Berlin that orientates chapter 6 might offer some insight here. For these examples are used to consider how artistic practice provides expression to urban rhythms of discontinuity, indifference and irrationality, questioning political projects of affiliation

and identity. Yet within this consideration of the creative incongruence of the city, discussion of the politics of aesthetics itself and of artistic practice as a tool for the enactment of political subjectivities was surprisingly absent. Do such architectural forms and artistic practices serve to ‘repartition experience’ as Shapiro (2010: p. 11) suggests, reframing subjectivities and enabling the emergence of political subjects in ways that exceed nationalism? Might such forms offer reference points for the emergence of new frames of solidarity? Or are these artistic forms representational metaphors for the kinds of political imaginaries and practices that are not yet known, imaginaries that are irregular, unexpected and plural?

In exploring these questions of political imagination, the book brings together political thought on nationalism and writing around the culture and politics of the city and it is to be commended for staging such a conversation from, in the main, an urban perspective. Political thought is all too often seen to be imposed upon, rather than emergent from, the complexities of urban life. This book offers a useful corrective to such a tendency, in opening the question of how political thought might be imagined differently when viewed *from* the city (Magnusson, 2011). However, this raises a question of how ‘the city’ is understood. Closs Stephens is careful to reiterate that a concern with urban life should not be seen as ‘a new normative ideal’, but rather should be taken to name ‘the *stuff* of political life – contestation, disagreement, melee’ (2013: p. 121, original emphasis). Political life is thus framed as urban life, shaped by conditions of multiplicity, heterogeneity and constitutive encounter. The city though has always been a product of

multiple and competing temporal and spatial projects, not simply those of nationalism, but those of neoliberalism, consumption, security and discipline among others (Osborne & Rose, 1999). In what ways do these competing diagrams of the city shape the political imaginaries envisaged in this text? For, whilst the openings of imagination illuminated in these chapters emerge through the city, it is as much these other stylisations of the urban as a space of conduct, virtue, order and morality which serve to circumscribe alternative histories and political imaginaries (Darling, 2013). If the city is in part constituted through the entanglements of these different diagrams of urban authority and morality, might the contests and contradictions between these visions of urban life also offer openings for practices of imagination to flourish?

The Persistence of Nationalism marks a significant intervention into debates over identity, community and the possibilities of politics. In doing so, it takes seriously the demand to think differently about politics and to make space for alternative narratives. Whilst a successful counter-point to the exclusionary imaginaries that dominate the politics of contemporary migration may be some way off, this book offers orientation to all those who wish to think critically about how we might imagine a politics that is both unable and unwilling to utter the demand to “go home”.

The Role of Emotions in *The Persistence of Nationalism*?

Nichola Wood

The Persistence of Nationalism is an ambitious attempt to explore the ways in which nations and nationalism have come to dominate our understandings and experiences of identity, community, and political organisation. However, what might not be immediately obvious from the title is that it is also a book that explores the difficulties of escaping nationalism in order to imagine and create alternative political futures that go beyond the nation.

Whilst questions regarding the persistence of nationalism are not new, *per se*, this book is novel in offering such an in-depth exploration of the topic. What is also original about this work is the range of social theorists that Closs Stephens draws upon for thinking through the persistence of nationalism. Whilst the book covers familiar works by Rogers Brubaker, Ernest Gellner, Paul James, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Anthony D. Smith, it also introduces less common theorists to the nations and nationalism literature such as Walter Benjamin, Judith Butler and Jean-Luc Nancy. I found chapter two's discussion of Max Weber's account of modernity particularly interesting whereby the author makes a powerful case for how nationalism emerges alongside a particular account of subjectivity as mastery, and a story about modern life as disenchanted. The quest for order, mastery and meaning, it is argued, "appears both in the idea of the nation-state presented as the only proper account of political space and in the idea of an autonomous, rational individual" (Closs Stephens 2013, p. 43).

Whilst there is much to praise about this book, there are two nagging issues that emerge over the course of the text, that I want to outline here. The first is that there are a number

of areas of Closs Stephens' work where there are key literatures that are either absent from the discussion or are only superficially dealt with. Perhaps most obviously this occurs in chapter one, which explores the role of methodological nationalism (and even uses the term) without reference to the original literature from the 1970s (for example Martins 1974 and Smith 1979), which explores the nature and impact of methodological nationalism or more recent critiques (see Beck 2002a and Wimmer and Schiller 2002). In particular, the omission of Ulrich Beck's work is frustrating given that he is responsible for the recent resurgence of interest in methodological nationalism (see Beck 2002b, 2003 and 2004) and his (2002a) argument on the need for a *methodological cosmopolitanism* seems ideally suited to Closs Stephens' thesis regarding a desire to move beyond the constant reification of the nation-state in our understandings and doings of political life. Whilst what is presented is insightful and interesting I think that Closs Stephens' discussion of methodological nationalism (including Calhoun's 2008 critique of Beck, which is cited) really needs to be developed in the context of these well-established literatures in order for the reader to properly get a sense of the author's contribution to these debates.

The second nagging issue that emerges during this book is that for all of the different cuts that are taken on why nationalism persists, one which is alluded to in several places, but not explored in any real depth is people's *emotional experiences* of and attachments to nation and national identity. As I (and others) have argued elsewhere, the power and

tenacity of the nation comes, in part, from the stability, security and familiarity that they are felt/assumed to provide by individuals (see, for example, Connor 1993, Wood 2007 and 2012), however, this angle is not really explored in any great depth. The ideas are discussed in abstract, but there is no engagement with how people experience nationalism as a route to belonging, security.... Closs Stephens' work makes a significant contribution to the nations and nationalism literature by challenging some of the assumed givens that are reified through many Anglo-American works. For example, she challenges the idea that national identity is assumed to be more powerful than other identity categories and that the "comforts, security and guidance offered by the idea that we should organize ourselves by nations ultimately outweighs the risks offered by nationalist politics" (Closs Stephens 2013, p.29). In addition she also explores, through a discussion of Rousseau's work, how narratives of loss in the modern era (loss of identity, community, and unity) and a fear of difference and change lie at the heart of our understandings of nation as a constant and secure social refuge. However, these are not just ideas to be challenged, they are ways of living and doing undertaken by millions of people, that need to be overhauled if the persistence of nationalism is to be challenged. What is more nationalism is also perceived by many to be a route to social wellbeing, therefore challenging the persistence of nationalism is not just about challenging ideas and understandings, it is also about unsettling ties and institutions that people are emotionally invested in. This is a point that is underplayed by the author, and one that I shall return to in a moment.

What I find really attractive in Closs Stephens' work are the possibilities for thinking and doing things differently that emerge out of challenging 'traditional' understandings and forms of political organisation. These moments of creative potential can be found in the theoretical chapters, but also in the second part of the book that explores different ways of contesting nationalism through urban encounters. However, as Closs Stephens demonstrates through a discussion of political responses to the 7/7 London bombings, Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and sites of memory in Berlin, it is incredibly hard to escape nationalist framings of the political. Alternative ways of thinking about co-existence through, for example, exploring the notion of the global city, the cosmopolitan citizen or reworking ideas of subjectivity or the linearity of time all do little to undo nationalism. Therefore, ultimately, I find it hard to be convinced by Closs Stephens' main argument that "the notion of urban encounters gestures towards a way of thinking politics beyond nationalism" (p.120) partly because, as Closs Stephens demonstrates herself (and as we know from other examples, such as the current increasing support for far right nationalist political parties across Europe) encounters with difference often result in a retreat to familiar (nationalist) ways of knowing and doing. Whilst I sympathise with Closs Stephens' desire to search for a form of politics that goes beyond the nation, for me, achieving this goal is impossible without a greater understanding of the role that emotions play in the persistence of nationalism. What emotional need or desire is nationalism perceived to fulfil that these alternatives seemingly cannot provide? Whilst the empirical chapters of Closs Stephens' work are insightful in many ways, what is missing here is an exploration of people's *experiences*

of nationalism, cosmopolitanism and urban encounters. The argument that Closs Stephens puts forward is, in many ways, a good rational and logical case for how and why we might want to escape the persistence of nationalism but, as Connor (1993) powerfully argues nations and nationalism work precisely because of their *non-rational*, emotional power. Therefore, I think that there is a need to tap into people's emotional experiences of nation and nationalism, and their alternatives, in order to fully address the question of why nationalism persists. I like the author's focus on encounters, and the political potential that encounters may bring, but it would have been really interesting to see how people's emotional experiences of encounters and co-existence inform the persistence of nationalism. For me, this is crucial to understanding the 'black box' of the persistence of nationalism.

The Persistence of Nationalism is a welcome addition to the literature on nations and nationalism. It is a thoughtful and timely piece of work that raises important questions about the nature and potential of political organisation and the limits that exist in our ability to think and act beyond the nation during the era of the 'War on Terror'. However, whilst I think that this book makes some important steps forward in understanding the persistence of nationalism, and the possibility of an alternative way of doing politics, it perhaps raises more questions than it addresses.

National feelings and the question of alternatives

Angharad Closs Stephens

I am very grateful to the four critics for their generous, provocative and challenging responses to *The Persistence of Nationalism*. I am happy that all of them heard the questions I sought to pose, and shared a sense of their importance, even if we disagree on some of the ‘answers’. It has been interesting to reflect on the parts of the book I would continue to defend, and the parts that invite more questions and lines of work for the future. Since finishing the book, I’ve been trying to think more about how nationalism persists through its affective and emotional registers, and how nations become ‘objects of intimacy’ (Appadurai, 2013: 109). Wood’s contribution to this forum rightly prioritises the point that emotions, affects and feelings are central to how nationalism works. Although most of the standard literatures on nations and nationalism acknowledge this point, discussions about the circulation of passion, rage, love and fear - and the way such emotions work to secure nations - rarely take centre stage.¹ I’ll return to how I’m addressing these points in new work towards the end. What I want to begin with, however, is a point about the conditions under which questions about affects and emotions commonly appear in the most well-known literatures in the field.

The question that I would like to ask is: how, when and why are arguments about strength of *feelings* towards the nation typically put forward, and what does this work of ‘invoking affect’ generally achieve (Hemmings, 2005)? What, for example, is at stake in Antonsich’s contribution to this forum, when he says that the nation does not only organise ties ‘against ‘them’’ but also establishes ‘meaningful relations, imbued with

¹ There are of course some notable exceptions here, including the works of Ahmed, 2010; Appadurai, 2013; Fortier, 2008, 2010; Wood, 2012.

feelings of sharing and caring’ (p. X). What I highlight in the book is the way in which a similar point about the feelings of belonging secured by the nation is often invoked in direct response to a fear that the nation might be withering away. Take for example the work of Craig Calhoun, which two of the contributors reference: ‘Imagining a world without nations, a world in which ethnicity is simply a consumer taste...is like imagining the melting pot in which all ethnicities vanish into the formation of a new kind of individual.’ (2008: 437). What we find in works such as this one is that a claim about the affective force of *national* solidarity (as opposed to other forms of solidarity) often leads us toward an argument that nations and nationalism ‘continue to matter’ (Calhoun, 2007). Although Calhoun builds a convincing argument about how liberal theorists of cosmopolitanism often fail to offer a rich enough understanding of culture and identity, what is striking about the framing of his argument is the way in which it brings us to the conclusion that post-national forms of organizing politically cannot provide a commensurate *structure of feeling* to that which we get from the nation (2007, 2008). As a result, the nation appears as the ‘only’ way of properly preserving cultural attachments. It is this assumption that my book seeks to place under question.

My point is not to suggest that all feelings about nationality are bad. Of course they are not, although there can be a great deal at stake for those who feel out of sync with the ‘national mood’ (Hemmings, 2012; Ahmed, 2010; Fortier, 2008). My argument, rather, is that this work of invoking the nation’s affective qualities should be placed under question, because it occasionally risks working to reproduce the idea of a ‘thing’ (Zizek, 1993) that lies at the heart of the nation. In this sense, theorists often become complicit in

the reproduction of nationalism. What may begin as a claim about the importance of the nation for ensuring cultural attachments ends up as a claim about why the world must continue to be organized by nations and nationalism. This kind of point, about the risks of assuming and reifying nations, has been discussed at length under the banner of ‘methodological nationalism’, and Wood would have liked me to address those debates more fully. However, I feel that framing the issue as one of ‘methodological nationalism’ tames the issues at stake, which ultimately, are political. The point that I draw attention to in the book is that faced with the insistence on the nation’s affective qualities, it becomes difficult to enquire into any *alternatives* to a nationalist model of organizing the world. What I want to ask is how we might loosen the grip of this particular model of community to open up other political imaginaries.

As the contributions to this forum all state, *The Persistence of Nationalism* gradually moves towards the city to uncover other models of living with others. Both Fortier and Antonsich ask why the city should be privileged in this respect. It wasn’t my intention to introduce urban literatures as somehow having a more exclusive insight into non-national models of belonging. Fortier is right that critical theories of diaspora, for example, also offer valuable contributions. The site of the city caught my attention in part because of encounters with the world that forced their way into the project (i.e. the bombings in London on 7 July 2005). But they also remain for me a fruitful site for reflecting on questions about living with others in ways that reject a bounded understanding of space and a linear conception of time. Literatures on the experience of urban life therefore offer interesting, though by no means exclusive, insights into making transitoriness and

unpredictability the grounds for thinking what it means to be political, which is why I find the work of Walter Benjamin relevant for example. Such writings have the potential to offer refreshing ways of thinking about difference, in ways that reject a ‘groupist’ ontology. Paul Gilroy’s idea of a ‘convivial culture’ (2004), Fran Tonkiss’s notion of an ‘ethics of indifference’ (2005) and Angela McRobbie’s (2009) idea of a ‘contact zone’ all represent creative and stimulating interventions in this respect.

However, I make it clear that I don’t regard the nation and city as mutually distinct: global cities are often national capitals, and cities form key nodes in enabling the imaginary of a ‘nation-people’ as well as hubs for gathering resistance to national elites. The city is not posited as a ‘solution’ or as a preferred alternative to the nation: the argument is developed through a question about imagination – about what it means to found and organise a political community (Coward, 2009). This inevitably means engaging with the question of how we understand our relations to others in the world, and it is in this context that I introduce Jean-Luc Nancy’s concept of the ‘melee’ (2003). Nancy argues that it would be a mistake to assume a distinction between ‘purity’ (in the nation) and ‘mixture’ (in the city). As Nancy puts it, both the notion of ‘purity’ and ‘mixture’ rely on an originary assumption that there is such a thing as ‘pure substances’, which may *then* be mixed together. In contrast, with the idea of the ‘melee’, Nancy seeks another grammar for talking about identity/difference, which doesn’t so much ‘replace’ nationalism as encourage us to question the modes of thinking that make nationalist ways

of seeing the world possible. Community, in this sense, becomes understood as a site of constitutive heterogeneity, plurality, melee.

This brings me to questions about time, futures and alternatives. In response to Antonsich's point that the kinds of theorists I draw upon have not yet identified a convincing replacement to nationalism: perhaps so, but I don't agree that it's their task to offer blueprints that we can then choose to adopt or discard. Yes, a future that seems fragmented and uncertain can look frightening, but the idea of a 'future path' that we must take can also appear alarming, as European publics are currently finding with the politics of 'austerity'. Darling and Fortier's responses, as well as their works more generally point to more of the risks of conserving nationalism. And in this exchange, Fortier argues that I over-emphasise the question of the temporal in supporting nationalist imaginaries, over and above other important factors in the historical development of the nation, including 'how race and nation became intertwined within the emergence of biopolitical power' (p. X) and the spatial convergence between nation and state (Antonsich, 2009). These are fair points, although I feel the chapters on Max Weber and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's works in particular are ultimately concerned with the question of origins, and in particular the way in which other understandings of coexistence get cast aside in order to insist on the necessity of a modern, statist understanding of political community. But Fortier's critique may in fact point to how indebted I continue to be to some of the standard literatures on nations and nationalism, and where they start from. I will address the question of other starting points in the final paragraph.

Antonsich captures well what I try to argue, but we have different orientations to the nation. Darling suggests that he shares a great deal of the critique but is still troubled by questions about how for example people might come together to form political collectivities and solidarities. He's right that I don't develop the concept of 'encounters' in considerable depth, although I'm pleased that other people are doing so (Darling and Squire, 2012; Swanton, 2010; Wilson, 2011). For me, it formed a provocation that pulled together the different kinds of literatures about living with others that I've mentioned. My sense is that a more detailed discussion about the form and nature of 'encounters' would be best developed empirically. An interesting critique that I've faced in presenting this work is that the notion of encounters continues to assume a spatial 'gap' between us (Coward, 2012), and so doesn't necessarily fit with a Nancy-inspired understanding of being with others. I think this is an important critique, which those of us who have been drawn to the language of encounters will have to consider. But to return to Darling's original point, touched upon also by Antonsich: on what other bases might solidarities be formed? This is a big question, which could take us into several related debates about, for example, the demise of trade union power; about acting politically across borders; as well as about how we might organise in ways that don't reify particular subject positions. Overall, I feel that we must resist the risks of allowing a bleak mood to colour the question. Solidarities *are* formed - here, there and everywhere. They may not look like politics as we know it, but perhaps part of the challenge for political theorists is to better understand the modes of being political expressed in movements including No One is

Illegal, No Borders, UK UNCUT, Occupy, Anonymous, and the Anti-Fracking Movement, to name just a few examples. So rather than ask ‘are we left with a series of transitory and strategic political alliances’ (Darling, p. X), we might instead affirm the fact that we *are* seeing many transitory and strategic political alliances, and try and better understand them.

Picking up on another of Darling’s points, I feel there is much more to be said about the nation’s aesthetics – and to consider that question beyond well-rehearsed debates about images on flags or representational monuments. The burgeoning literatures on affects, emotions and feelings in critical geography as well as in feminist and cultural studies offer some routes forward here, and other starting points. In contrast to the familiar categories of good/bad, ethnic/civic, or old/new nations and nationalisms, these literatures offer a broader grammar, enabling us to talk about the tonalities and intensities of nationality, or as Wood puts it, how nationalism involves ‘ways of living and doing’ (p. X). In this context, I’m currently writing about what it might mean to think about nationalism as an ‘atmosphere’ – for example, how nationalism occasionally becomes heightened and then retreats, such as in the context of austerity protests. This is allowing me to think about nationalism in ways that begin neither with the individual nor the collective, but with the ‘the ebbs and swells of intensities that pass between bodies, enabling bindings and unbindings, jarring disorientations and rhythmic attunements’ (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010: 2). It also invites questions about how ideas about nationality appear contagious at particular times and in some contexts, and yet are not easily locatable. I’m sure that I haven’t managed to fully escape the clutches of

‘nationalist thought’ in this book, but I’m very grateful to these four critics for reminding me that I’m not alone in working through the issues, and that there is plenty more work to be done.

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