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Contextualising nationalism

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Abstract
This paper seeks to relate the scholarly analysis of nationalism – and of the ways in which nation-states relate to minorities and migrants – with the actual socio-political context within which such analysis takes place. Looking back into the theories of nationalism as they have developed since World War II, the focus of nationalism theorists has shifted from the effort to explain why nations emerged and when they emerged, looking at the wider processes of industrialisation and print capitalism; to the effort to analyse nationalism from the ground up through the lived experiences of citizens; to, more recently, the effort to explain why and how nationalism persists and whether and how it evolves in more plural or more exclusionary ways. I am arguing in this paper that it is important to adopt a self-reflexive approach so as not only to link our understanding of nations and nationalism in their contemporary socio-economic and political context, but that we also need to adopt such self-reflexivity in relation to our own work and ask: why do we focus on a particular perspective or evolution? How does this relate to our wider context and positionality as scholars? In this paper, I am proposing a periodisation of nationalism studies from the post-WW II period to this day, arguing that the focus of nationalism theories was guided interactively by the wider socio-economic developments of each period. I conclude with a critical reflection on nationalism in a (post-)pandemic world.

Introduction

This paper seeks to relate the scholarly analysis of nationalism – and of the ways in which nation-states relate to minorities and migrants – with the actual socio-political context within which such analysis takes place. Looking back into the theories of nationalism as

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they have developed since World War II, the focus of nationalism theorists has shifted from the effort to explain why nations emerged and when they emerged (connecting those with the wider processes of industrialisation and print capitalism), to the effort to analyse nationalism from the ground up through the lived experiences of citizens (notably the so-called banal or everyday nationalism), to, more recently, the effort to explain why and how nationalism persists and whether and how it evolves in more plural or more exclusionary ways (multicultural, transnational or plural nationalism). One might wonder whether these theories emerged out of the intellectual curiosity of the scholars or their preoccupation with a particular case study or whether they relate in a more self-reflexive way to the positionality of the scholars and their situatedness in a given period with its specific social, economic and geopolitical features. While one may argue that this is the nature of the scholarly inquiry, it is important and necessary to ask ourselves not only why and how we select our research topics, but also our development of specific theoretical concepts and methodologies are indirectly guided by the socio-political transformations that happen around us. The interactive link between nationalism studies and the broader socio-political context is taken for granted or simply rendered invisible but our future research can benefit from a critical account of how nationalism studies have evolved.

My critical perspective here is not only scholarly and theoretical – bringing different strands of literature in dialogue with one another – but also sociological and political in the wider sense: it seeks to help us understand better ourselves and our societies and a certain level of polarisation that we are witnessing in Europe today between, on the one hand, the re-emergence of ethno-cultural nationalism currents and exclusionary discourses (particularly against Muslims and significantly vocal in the immediate post-2015 period) and, on the other hand, a notable mobilisation against racism and discrimination such as that we have witnessed in 2020–2021 through the Black Lives Matter movement not only in North America but also in Europe.

It is in this effort to relate the scholarly work to its socio-political context that I discuss some of the most important works on nationalism and their distinctive analytical contributions to understanding this phenomenon. For this reason, I have opted for organising this chapter not in relation to clusters of theories (e.g. modernists vs perennialists, constructivists vs ethno-symbolists and multiculturalists vs nativists) nor in relation to themes (e.g. nationalism and the state, nations and ethnic groups and national heritage) but rather into chronological periods marked by relevant socio-economic and political changes that have influenced not only nations and nationalism but also the analytical perspectives and methodological choices of scholars studying nationalism.

Imperfect though my periodisation may be, I propose to divide the last 40 years, notably the period running from 1980s to today (2021) in four periods which are marked by important social and political transformations. I chose to start with the 1980s with a view to including the period prior to 1989 and the dramatic changes that 1989 brought to Europe (and the world) but also with a view to emancipating my review from the post-World War II considerations and placing it more firmly in a context of turn of the century, start of 21st century. While I am going to discuss in more detail in the following sections the context of each of these periods, I would like to briefly justify here my periodisation and how it is linked to important developments in nationalism research.

The first period starts in the early 1980s until the early 1990s notably in the last period of the Cold War when nation-states still dominated international politics while European integration remained still rather weak and also predominantly economic in its outlook. During this period, nationalism research concentrated on explaining when and how nations have developed and why and how they have turned into the primary and dominant form of political community in the modern period. Thus, theoretical debates between the so-called modernists that argue that the nation is an outcome of the modern period (Anderson, 1981; Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1990), responding to the new forms of production and socio-political organisation that emerge after the industrial revolution, and the perennialists (Armstrong 1982; Hastings 1997) who search for the origins of nations in earlier ethnic identities and communities, remained dominant in this period. It is in this period that John (Breuilly, 1994) discussed the links – or rather the tensions – between nationalism and the state in the modern period while Walker (Connor, 1994) critically investigated ethnonationalism and its political implications. The common thread that can be seen as running through these important scholarly works on nationalism is the desire for an explanation: where do nations come from, and how can we explain that they have become the most important form of political organisation in the contemporary world.

The second period that I identify starts in the early/mid-1990s and lasts till the mid-2000s. This period reflects the aftermath of the sweeping geopolitical changes that took place in 1989 and the following years as Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe imploded. This political and economic reconnection of Europe has been accompanied by the re-emergence of the 'national question' in Central Eastern Europe and the revival of both national majorities and national or ethnic minority identities. At the same time, this period saw important challenges in terms of diversity and Europe's Muslims. Last but not least this period was marked by important steps in European integration – not least the creation of a European citizenship and the big bang Eastern Enlargement of 2004 (and 2007).

Thus this period raised important questions as to what is the role of individuals and groups in nations, how much nations should be taken for granted or can be superseded by alternative forms of political organisation, how can we understand nationalism in a changing world order and does nationalism need to end up in war. It is no coincidence that there is a new interest in this period in understanding nationalism from a social psychological perspective, looking at the common elements within nationalism dynamics beyond (to the extent possible) historical specificities. It is in this period that Michael Billig wrote his by now-famous *Banal Nationalism* (1995) looking at how our everyday lives are imbued by tacit understandings of us and them, here and there and how such understandings are reinforced by everyday routines. (Reicher and Hopkins, 2001) also wrote their more systematic analysis of nationhood, national identification and nationalist mobilisation from a social psychological perspective. There was an increasing interest as to the role of minority/majority groups in Central Eastern Europe and the analytical use of the term 'identity' (Brubakers and Cooper, 2000 but also Brubaker, 2006; Brubaker et al., 2007, Brubaker et al. 2007).

While the early 2000s are of course marked by 9/11 and also the Madrid and London bombings of 2004 and 2005, these events do not directly bear on the study of nationalism

or at least not in the immediately subsequent years. While the rise of international jihadist terrorism triggers both a political and scholarly interest in questions of socio-economic and cultural integration of migrants and second generations, the relative success or failure of different integration models, and of course the roots of violent radicalisation and terrorism, they are not immediately reflected in the focus of nationalism studies. Indeed, the reflections on what international terrorism and violent radicalisation means for nations come into the study of nationalism only in the 2010s, after a new wave of international terrorism and the related rise of Islamophobia. The question of diversity and integration develops separately as an issue of social cohesion and migration, while the role of diversity within nationalism is only addressed most recently in the new currents also of multicultural nationalism as discussed by the 'Bristol school of multiculturalism' (Levey, 2019; Modood, 2019), transnational nationalism (Kastoryano 2018) and my own work on plural or neo-tribal nationalism (Triandafyllidou 2013; 2022). Indeed, this third period expands from the second half of the 2000s through until the late 2010s. This period is dominated by two concerns: whether nations will survive and whether they are fit for purpose in an increasingly globalised and transnationalised world where major challenges (including climate change, security or indeed trade and work and the economy) transcend state boundaries (see for instance Calhoun 2007).

At the time of writing we are going through an unprecedented global pandemic that has initiated a complex discussion between the so-called 'vaccine nationalism' and the wish of national states to close their borders so as to protect their populations from the spreading of the virus. While most states have restricted international travel to extents that we would have never imagined, it became clear that sealing the borders was not feasible, that the virus travelled nonetheless and that, at the end of the day, we are very interdependent for a number of reasons (exchange of goods and services, mobility of people for work or leisure). The question that emerges is how this new situation and the new challenges and reflections that it brings will affect notions of the nation – the ingroup, national membership and the role of borders. The paper concludes with a reflection on what we have learnt from the pandemic and how nationalism studies are likely to evolve in the coming years.

This paper discusses the three main periods identified notably the 1980s till the mid-1990s, the late 1990s till mid-2000s, the late 2000s till late 2010s and the tentative new period opening up in their chronological sequence. Unavoidably my analysis is selective; I do not cover the entire bibliography but I do discuss the important and influential works and currents of thought in nationalism studies as they have developed in the scholarly literature. Providing a full annotated bibliography is certainly not the aim of this paper. Rather I am seeking to highlight how living and studying nationalism and diversity are inextricably intertwined and that we need more self-reflexive perspectives in our work.

Nationalism studies in the pre- and post-1989 period: preoccupied with grand theoretical explanations

Looking back, the 1980s were a pivotal decade. While there were important socio-political mobilisations in Europe, notably in Poland with *Solidarnosz* and the quest for

democratisation, and the rise of socialist governments across several European countries like France, Germany or Spain, there was no clear sign that the Cold War was about to end and that the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact were about to implode. However, during the 1980s one might argue that while the new was about to be born, the old had not yet died in Europe and none seemed to imagine the dramatic socio-political changes that were forthcoming. It may thus come as no surprise that during this period, nationalism studies were still dominated by the classical theoretical questions of whether nations are a product of modernity or have always existed in some form.

It is in those years that Ernest Gellner (1983), Benedict Anderson, 1981, Anthony D. Smith (1986, 1991) and Eric (Hobsbawm, 1990) wrote their foundational works on nations and national identity linking up the rise of nations and nationalism with wider processes of socio-economic transformation in modern times. These thinkers were preoccupied with explaining why and how the nation had become a dominant form of political organisation in the last two centuries, commanding the primary loyalty of the citizens. Primordialists like Clifford Geertz (1963) emphasised the importance of ethnic bonds as the 'givens' of social existence (Geertz 1963: 109) and as the main boundary markers (Barth 1969) that organise society as well as economic exchange. John Armstrong (1982) in his influential book on *Nations before Nationalism* pointed to the fact that ethnic bonds have important political consequences as they form the basis of structures of power and legitimise them. Armstrong was rather radical in his view to the extent that he saw the modern post-eighteenth century nations as a novel type of ethnic groups that conformed to the new socio-economic conditions, rather than as a significantly different social formation. Adrien Hastings (1997) argued that ethnic polities in history provided the building blocks of modern nations, but agreed that these last were qualitatively different from ethnic groups because of the processes that were set in motion in Europe in the 18th century notably industrialisation, Englightenment and bureaucratisation.

Modernist thinkers like Benedict Anderson (1981) and Nairn (1997), but also Ernest Gellner (1983) and Eric (Hobsbawm, 1990), disagreed with both primordialists and perennialists and argued that the emergence of modern nations and of nationalism as a modern social movement have much more to do with the process of print capitalism (as Anderson put it) and industrialisation than with the cultural fabric of pre-existing ethnic groups. Anderson (1981) explained this process of modernisation and emergence of modern nations in relation to the spread of print capitalism. Of course print capitalism spreads along with significant changes in the system of production, industrialisation, improvement in transport and communication, the emergence of urban middle-classes and the spread of literacy. Thus, printed vernacular languages emerge and spread connecting people who spoke different, local dialects. This whole process made it possible for people to imagine a (national) community beyond their locality and to connect with it. In this perspective, ethnic cultures and bonds form a malleable ground material on which capitalism and industrialisation build the modern nation. For modernists, the malleability of ethnic cultures and the fact that some survived and transformed into modern nations while others did not, is a proof of their limited importance in the formation of modern nations. Modernists paid also special attention to the role of the state which emerges as a

powerful political actor through industrialisation and bureaucratisation reaching out to the simple people. Indeed the nation functions as the key vehicle for the legitimisation of the nation and its control over the peasants converted into nationals and citizens.

The 1980s and early 1990s are also marked by the writings of Anthony Smith (1986, 1991, refined in 2009) who argued for a middle ground – an ethnosymbolist approach that brings together some of the insights of the perennialists while it also acknowledges the qualitatively different features of modern nations. Thus, Smith (2009) accepted the importance of the scientific and economic developments that took place in the 17th and 18th century making the nation functional to this historical period, but disagreed with modernists as to the relative importance of those developments in the longue duree. He pointed to the fact that while nations cannot always be predicted on the basis of the existence of an ethnic group, there can be no nation that is totally socially and culturally engineered, without a pre-existing ethno-cultural fabric.

The scholarly inquiry onto the circumstances and factors driving the emergence of modern nations and nationalism in Europe in the post 18th century has shaped the classification of nations into ethnic versus civic. Ethnic nations are those whose definition is mainly based on ethno-cultural elements such as a belief in common descent, shared historical memories, a link with historical territory that is seen as the homeland of the nation and which may not coincide with its current territory, a common language and sometimes also a common religion. Ethnic nations are ascriptive. Civic nations are those whose definition privileges territorial and civic elements, notably a mass public culture, a territory and a single economy, a set of common rights and duties among its members. Naturally language is often a pre-requisite – if anything a functional one – for civic nations too. Civic nations are voluntaristic in their nature: a person who lives in the national territory, abides by its laws, contributes to society and the economy for a given period of time, can become a national. Civic nationalism is not devoid of emotive power as it is not a mere civic association but rather involves ethical obligations to fellow nationals (Greenfeld 1992). Naturally these are ideal types and most nations fall somewhere in between. In other words the ethnic versus civic definition of nations ought better be understood as a continuum rather than as a black and white distinction.

However, the ethnic versus civic distinction in analysing the emergence of nations and nationalism in Europe has not simply been a theoretical or analytical one; it also emerged out of the necessity to make sense of two distinct paths to nation state formation in Europe. Thus, ethnic nationalism largely has been considered to correspond to the historical experience of Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe, where national identities were forged in the absence of corresponding state structures and generally in opposition to Empires. Civic nationalism, by contrast, has been identified with western European pathways to nation state formation, in countries where state structures had formed before the potent onset of modern nationalism. The distinction between a good civic and a bad ethnic nationalism can be found in the work of Guibernau (1996) and Nairn (1997), while Miller (1995) tends to warn against such a false dichotomy. Yael Tamir (1993) has also argued that the dividing line between ethnic and civic nationalism is not so hard, as even in an exclusive ethnic type of nationalism, there are several inroads to assimilation and

belonging including adopting fully the new culture and language, marrying in, abandoning one's former culture and where appropriate also converting.

This political and scholarly question of distinct types of nations and nationalism has marked also the work of important political theorists seeking to make sense of nationalism from a normative perspective. This led to the emergence of two schools of thought notably the so-called liberal nationalists – like Tamir (1993), Miller (1995) and (Kymlicka, 1995) – and the so-called conservative nationalists like Scruton (1990), and also theorists like Bhikhu (Parekh, 1994, 1995); see also Uberoi 2018) that took issue with the relationship between cultural and religious diversity and national identity, advocating for a broadening and deepening of national identity that would allow for diversity to be incorporated within it. While starting off from political theory, these scholars were preoccupied with justifying why the individual could give its primary loyalty to the nation and what forms of nationalism were morally appropriate, or what kind of accommodation should be provided to minorities – whether considered as groups or as individuals.

The historical sociological perspective and the quest for making sense of the distinct paths to nationhood in Europe, and their implications for contemporary, post-war nations dominated nationalism studies till the late 1980s but did not survive much further. While the disagreement between the perennialists and the modernists has never been settled, it is clear that this discussion and the analytical distinction between ethnic and civic nationalism has lost its steam after the early 1990s. Smith (2009) refined his work and answered to critics of his work. In the meantime, though, the question of which nation is civic or ethnic and whether nations are a product of modernity or have always existed, has ceased to preoccupy sociologists and political scientists or cultural anthropologists. By contrast the question of how minorities and individual minority members relate to the nation, how nationalism can be combined with liberalism and how it can reconcile diversity within the nation, remained and is re-emerging today with renewed urgency.

It is my contention that the sweeping geopolitical and socio-economic changes that followed 1989 in Europe made those questions rather redundant or insignificant. The reconnection of Europe and the revival of nationalism and religiosity in the former Communist countries with the parallel development of the European Union as a transnational political formation with a transnational citizenship (as of 1992) and the quest for a European identity (or identities in the plural, Triandafyllidou and Gropas 2015), shifted the focus to explaining how people and institutions navigate these turbulent times.

The discursive turn in the late 1990s and the reconnection of Europe

The mid-1990s in Europe were characterised by opposed developments. On one hand, Central Eastern European countries were rediscovering their national and religious identities and so did the minorities that lived within them, and, on the other hand, the European Communities transformed into the European Union opted for a big-bang enlargement to the East, incorporating these countries into a united Europe (Spohn and Triandafyllidou 2003). There was significant celebration about the reconnection of Europe and the belief that the national was no longer important. The sociologists of

globalisation (e.g. Beck and Willms 2003) celebrated the arrival of 'banal cosmopoli-
tanism' even though scholars like Calhoun (2007) argue for caution as the cosmopolitan
imaginary still needed a form of belonging to be meaningful and provide anchoring.

Despite the important economic and political challenges posed by the implosion of the
Communist regimes in Central Eastern Europe, the 1990s were characterised by a certain
ideological enthusiasm that the reconnection of the continent ended a past of wars and
division, and that the European Union would offer a platform for both economic and
geopolitical integration while European identity would become intertwined with national
identities enriching and not replacing them. Not only were the 1990s a decade of Eu-
ropean enthusiasm and drive for unification, they were also characterised by increased
attention to cultural and religious diversity in Europe. Multiculturalism was celebrated in
many countries (e.g. the UK, the Netherlands and Sweden) as the most appropriate way
for accommodating cultural and religious diversity and building an inclusive citizenship.
This pro-diversity policy extended also to the then newly independent states in Central
and Eastern Europe which were strongly encouraged to recognise their national minorities
and provide appropriate guarantees for their rights as foreseen in relevant European and
international legal instruments (Triandafyllidou and Ulasiuk 2014). Indeed, the end of the
Cold War and the implosion of the Communist Other were celebrated in the 1990s as a
liberation from Europe's past tragedies as well as the start of a new era globally.

During this period, nationalism studies shifted their focus to the everyday experiences
of nationalism. Rather than seeking broader explanations of why nations emerge or how
they form and evolve, faced with significant geopolitical and socio-economic changes and
with related massive migration from eastern to western and southern Europe, the focus
turned to exploring what people 'do' with the nation, how they speak about it and how
they seek also to redefine it (Fox and Miller Idriss 2008). (Billig, 1995) along with
Calhoun (1997) were the precursors of the discursive turn, pointing to the ways in which
people experience nationalism and actually arguing that nationalism while pervasive and
persisting is largely invisible because banal and embedded in the everyday routines
(Billig, 1995). Indeed Calhoun was writing in 1997 that 'nations are constituted [...] by the
way of talking and thinking and acting that relies on these sorts of claims to produce
collective identity, to mobilize people for collective projects, and to evaluate peoples and
practices' (1997: 5).

Billig's work was particularly influential but also was subjected to several criticisms
including the fact that Billig assumed a uniform national audience and disregarded the fact
that western nations become increasingly diverse as a result of international migration
(Skey, 2009a, 2009b). During the same period indeed, Basch et al. (1996) were arguing
that the increasing pace and intensity of global flows impact group and national identities,
while Appadurai (2003) argued that people's inter-connectivity offered them new ways of
imagining the world. Most importantly the critiques of Billig like Edensor (2002) pointed
to the fact that globalisation and national identity should not be conceived as a zero sum
game as Beck and Willms may seem to have argued, but rather as interacting phenomena
that can lead to the reinforcement or transformation of national identities or to their
diminished importance.

Focussing on the specific realities of Central Eastern Europe, for instance, Brubaker (2006) emphasised that the importance of the nation is contextual and becomes visible under specific circumstances. Indeed as Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008) have further illustrated that people may respond to, engage with or overlook particular symbols of the nation in specific moments and situations. Indeed the work of scholars like Edensor, 2002; Skey, 2009a, 2009b, 2011 have explored the agency of lay people, simple citizens, in forming and transforming the nation in their everyday encounters or in specific circumstances. The work of these scholars pointed to the ways in which ordinary people may ignore the rhetoric of politicians and instead may construct their national identity in their own terms (Brubaker 2006; Fox and Idriss 2008).

It was 9/11 and the international terrorism events that took place in Madrid in 2004 and in London in 2005 that shifted the compass again, pointing to the presumed failures of national states to integrate their immigrant populations and ethnic minorities. From the mid-2000s onwards we note a significant shift in nationalism studies towards making sense of how the nation and migration interact.

Nationalism and the other: mid-2000s and beyond

The new millennium started with a profound geopolitical, cultural and existential crisis for Europe and the West. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 signalled the end of the post-1989 euphoria. While the US government was proclaiming the War on Terror and attacking Afghanistan and later again Iraq, Europe was facing important internal and external challenges. Urban violence erupted in northern English cities in the summer of 2001, while the French cities followed suit in 2005. National grievances of second generation children that were failing both in school and the labour market were then coupled by global cultural crises like that surrounding the Danish cartoons of Prophet Mohammad in 2006. While jihadist, extremist forms of Islam were emerging as a global terrorist threat, more moderate versions of Islam and European Muslims started being portrayed by conservative parties as unfit for European liberal and secular societies. The Madrid (2004) and London (2005) bombings did nothing but reinforce this view. Far-right and even simply conservative politicians argued that there is something 'fundamentally wrong' with Islam as a religion that makes it inappropriate for European democratic societies and impossible to accommodate in a secular system.

Islam emerged forcefully as an important dividing 'civilizational' line within Europe during the same period in which the post-1989 European re-unification enthusiasm started declining. Indeed, the magnitude of the economic and political challenges of the transition of Central Eastern European countries from Communism to free market Capitalism and liberal democracy became increasingly felt in Europe in the late 1990s when several of the former Communist countries experienced a second round of economic and political decline. Discussions about their integration into the European Union seemed to come to a dead end when the Helsinki summit of 1999 reaffirmed the political will of the EU15 to integrate the new countries possibly in one big enlargement wave by 2004. Thus, economic objectives were subsumed to the overarching political goal of re-uniting Europe, provided the new member states would be full-fledged democracies and

would subscribe to the European values which included the accommodation of national minorities and the abandonment of irredentist claims or border disputes.

In a way it was the very success of Eastern Enlargement, alongside with the emergence of international jihadist terrorism, urban tensions among post-migration minorities and native majorities that paved the way for Islam to become the necessary European Other. Not only had Communism collapsed and with it the overall Cold War geopolitical and symbolic framework, but the Central Eastern European countries were fully subscribing to the by then hegemonic western European model. The Communists had been successfully 'reformed' – there was a need for a new Other at the European and global level against whom a united Europe and the Western/European values would be reaffirmed. Migrants and particularly Muslims emerged as a convenient Other, both internally and externally – they were accused of creating 'parallel societies' within European countries, while they also posed a threat to European security through terrorism. Indeed, a number of thinkers and politicians were advancing the claim that Muslims were impossible to accommodate in European countries because their cultural traditions and religious faith were incompatible with secular democratic governance, while others distinguished between those who were 'good' and 'bad' and 'compatible' and 'incompatible'. In a similar vein, the refugee emergency of 2015 has been represented as an 'invasion' of Muslims that put under strain the already scarce welfare resources while also threatening the European secular way of life (see Wodak, 2016).

Turning to how nationalism studies have developed during this period since the mid-2000s to the late 2010s, there is a new focus on the role of the Other in defining the nation. I have argued in my own work (2013, 2020) for the need to put the Other centre-stage when seeking to understand the evolution of nationalism today, whether in open and pluralistic trajectories (plural nationalism) or in nativist and exclusionary ways (neo-tribal nationalism). My preoccupation with the Other is shared also by a number of scholars working in the wider field of nationalism and citizenship and particularly by scholars in the 'Bristol school of multiculturalism'.

Tariq Modood (2019) has recently argued for a multicultural understanding of nationalism. Modood's notion builds on his earlier writings, arguing that British national identity should accommodate post-migration ethnic minorities who ask for recognition and inclusion within the national self-concept (Modood 2003). Within his more refined and more recent concept, however, Modood gives more space to the national majority. He avoids the pitfall of Quebec-style interculturalism or liberal nationalism which argue for the primacy of the national majority culture, and rather specifies that multicultural nationalism implies that 'the predominance that the cultural majority enjoys in shaping the national culture, symbols and institutions should not be exercised in a non-minority accommodating way' (Modood 2019: 235). Thus, argues Modood (2019: 236–237), the majority and the minorities should stand in a dialogical relationship which should recognise that both identities are ever evolving, that neither side has the right to impose itself on the others, in ways that do not allow these others to coexist.

Tahseen Shams (2020) has situated the migrant's national identity formation in a triangular relational framework of the here, there and the elsewhere (country of origin, new homeland, and other significant 'places'). Shams (2020) is looking at US citizens

who are Muslims of different origins and who are obliged to make sense of their identity through reference not only of their own country of origin or the country of destination but by reference to Muslim majority countries or an imagined Islam to which they are associated in media or political discourses or even in their everyday encounters with fellow citizens.

Concerned with the rising tendency of exclusionary and nativist disourses not only the part of majorities but also by minorities, Riva Kastoryano (2018) speaks of transnational nationalism. Kastoryano reflects on the phenomenon of nationalist exclusion through transnational exposure and openness. She notes that in a world of increased migration and inter-dependence, we witness the re-territorialisation of global identities through the backdoor. Communities and states, argues Kastoryano (2018: 7), strive to create new configurations of nations and nationalism that are relevant in a globalised context. One strategy for achieving this is to argue for transnational solidarity. Such transnational solidarity can be that of a global 'nation' –a global diaspora, such as, argues Kastoryano, a transnational European Muslim community. Recent work on nationalism has also turned to old concepts like nativism. Nativism emerged as a political movement in the early 19th century in the United States in response to mass immigration from Europe (Betz 2017). Literature on nativism is scant for a good part of the 20th century until the concept resurfaced to express anti-immigrant sentiment, during the last 20 years (Guia, 2016). Such work has put centre-stage the role of immigrants as both socio-economic and moral threats to the nation, giving rise to exclusionary discourses in Europe and North America (ibid).

While concerns with exclusionary nationalism and with the overall interaction between the national majority and ethnic or religious minorities rightly occupied the centre-stage of nationalism studies, we have experienced in 2020 a new challenge, a global pandemic, that has further put to the test both our feelings of community, belonging and exclusion as well as our scholarly efforts to understand these phenomena.

Concluding remarks

I have argued in this paper that not only nationalism and the ways in which we define and negotiate our minority and majority identities needs to be seen in its specific socio-political context, but that also nationalism studies require the same contextual reading. Reviewing some of the main theories of nationalism I have tried to make sense of why nationalism theorists have focused on specific theoretical and empirical questions or have adopted methodologies of broader political sociology or more of cultural anthropology and qualitative sociology in understanding the evolution of nations and nationalism. I have defined three periods in the last 40 years within which I identify the main research questions that dominate nationalism studies. In the first period that extends from the early 1980s till the mid-1990s, nationalism studies are dominated by a focus on grand theoretical questions and the methods of political sociology. The most important nationalism theorists seek to explain whether nations are perennial or modern and whether nation-states and nationalism as a political movement is mainly ethnic or civic in its orientation. Political theorists during the same period also seek to define the contours of 'good' liberal

nationalism investigating the tensions between liberalism and nationalism. The main nationalism theorists of this period disagree on their explanations but agree on the focus of their research questions. This focus persists though until shortly after 1989 and the landslide changes that happened in Europe and the world after that date.

Looking at the contrasting developments of the 1990s – the focus on national minority and religious identities and their revival in Central Eastern Europe on one hand, and the process of European integration and reconnection of Europe under a common Union – it comes as no surprise that nationalism theorists focus on what people 'do' with their identities and how they re-elaborate political and media discourses in their everyday encounters. Even though perspectives in this period too may differ between those that see in the new socio-economic and political realities the emergence of a cosmopolitan and post-national world and those that emphasise the persistence of the nation, the focus in both perspectives is on the everyday nationhood. The methodology is constructivist and discursive rather than focussing on institutions.

A new turn is registered though in the mid-2000s and the emergence of international terrorism and increased tensions between national majorities and ethnic minorities, particularly Muslims. The discursive and constructivist turn persists as a methodology, but the focus now is on the interaction between the nation and the Other and the ways in which diversity and even transnational influences may shape nations and nationalism. This preoccupation with the interaction between the nation and the Other reflects also the relevant politics in Europe where several far-Right and generally conservative political parties seek to capitalise on anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment.

Taking note of how our research questions are interactively and perhaps at times inadvertently shaped by the socio-political developments in the context in which we work suggests the need for more self-reflexive work in nationalism studies. It is important to acknowledge that our perspective, research questions and even methodologies are in-directly guided by the important socio-political developments of the society in which we live, rather than simply by our intellectual curiosity. This invites for a more self-reflexive approach to our own work which resonates particularly with the current pandemic context and the renewed anti-racism mobilisations of the last 2 years (2020–2021). Looking at the challenges that emerge today for the coming decades, three issues arise: the pandemic and the upheaval as well as the innovation that it has brought; the persistent rise of populist tendencies that are closely intertwined with nationalism; and the powerful emergence of anti-racism and decolonisation as a potential new political narrative.

Scholars in nationalism studies need to consider what the pandemic re-bordering and 'vaccine nationalism' tell us about hierarchies of membership and transnational inter-dependence. During the pandemic lockdowns we have witnessed innovative approaches to membership that have valued 'effective residence' over legal status of a migrant (as temporary or permanent) (Triandafyllidou 2022). We have seen a reconsideration of temporary migrants or asylum seekers as 'essential workers' that should be given a preferential path to permanent residency or citizenship on the basis of their contribution to the community (by ensuring the food supply chain or the care services do not break down). Fundamental rights such as the right to health and life took also precedence over status considerations during the pandemic leading thus to universal access to public health

services in several European countries and in Canada, and for instance to provisional automatic 'regularisations' for people with precarious status to avoid them being exposed to further challenges during the pandemic (Triandafyllidou 2022). At the same time the pandemic has also given rise to calls for less transnational dependency and more self-sufficiency for some goods that could be crucial for the safety of the nation (e.g. in relation to the production of protective equipment or of vaccines). These remain open questions and we are still to see whether the pro-immigrant and pro-solidarity dimensions of the pandemic emergency will persist or whether vaccine nationalism will win the day.

A second set of phenomena that has arisen in the second part of the 2010s and persists to this day is the rise of populism and the powerful combination of populism and nationalism among Far Right parties and movements but also among those on the left side of the political spectrum (obvious examples being Podemos in Spain and SYRIZA in Greece). The most strident forms of populist and exclusionary nationalism have arisen in countries that were considered to be the cradles of civic nationalism notably the US (Trump) and the UK (Brexit). What is interesting in these developments is the combination of political ideologies with national pride. Thus in Trump and in Brexit discourses we find an exclusionary statist nationalism (Joppke 2021) which builds walls to protect the nation (and particularly those 'left behind') and compensate for the threats of globalisation and the neoliberal order while at the same time it argues that citizens are responsible for looking after themselves and should not burden the welfare state. In a symmetrical but radically different dynamic, left wing forces like the Greek party SYRIZA or the Spanish Podemos (Custodi 2021) developed a populist discourse where national identity became a vehicle for constructing a moral, political community arguing for an inclusive welfare state, an egalitarian society and a nation that is open to cultural and religious diversity. Such discourses are counter-hegemonic both from a nationalist and a political ideological perspective but can also become divisive as they are based on an anti-elite rhetoric.

A third and very important phenomenon that we have witnessed during the last few years is the calls for decolonisation (Tuck and Yang 2012) and for more effective anti-black racism policies that have crystallised in the black and indigenous lives matter movements (Habtom and Scribe 2020) and for a renewed call for decolonisation not just in settler colonial states like the US, Canada or Australia but also as a broader concept and a policy pertinent to Europe and North America alike. What remains though unclear is the extent to which these calls align with those fighting Islamophobia and whether these counter-hegemonic discourses can develop into a new form of nationalism or within each country as a new national narrative.

Scholars preoccupied with nationalism need to remain vigilant and self-reflexive as to what are the research questions we should be asking in the coming years. The pandemic may actually be seen as catalyst that has both raised new questions about membership, catalysed ongoing trends of populist nationalism (both affirming the importance of science but also fuelling the ranks of anti-elite movements among the anti-vaxxers) and made room for anti-racism currents to emerge with a stronger voice.

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