Chapter 13 Migration and the Nation



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During the last decade, we have witnessed two opposed social and political trends. On the one hand, there has been a comeback of *nationalism*. Examples abound from Trump's "make America great again", to Modi's Hindu nationalism, to Bolsonaro's Brazilian populist nationalism, to Orbán's Hungary, and Le Pen's or Salvini's 'patriotic' overtones, only to name a few. These parties promote aggressive, nativist, and populist nationalism discourses which see the relations between nations and nation-states as a zero-sum game. They privilege erecting borders, both territorial and symbolic, against minorities, migrants or refugees, other nation-states and supranational political formations like, in Europe, the European Union.¹

On the other hand, we have also witnessed the emergence of powerful movements of transnational solidarity and connectedness. Through the power of information and communication technology people feel more related and are becoming better informed about what is happening in other regions of the world and on how this affects their own lives (whether through a refugee surge, a decrease in oil prices, the acceleration of climate change, or a global pandemic). During the last decade, we have witnessed various Indignados and Occupy movements across Europe and North America; youth mobilisation in support of the Arab Spring movements; transnational commemorations of the victims of terrorist attacks in Paris, France or in Christchurch, New Zealand; Extinction Rebellion in London and other European cities; as well as the transnational youth Fridays for Future rallies in the last couple of years. At the time of writing (June 2020) we are also in the middle of a rising transnational mobilisation against racial inequality that has spread from the USA across North America and into Europe.

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¹This chapter draws particularly from my earlier works: Triandafyllidou (1998, 2001, 2013).

P. Scholten (ed.), *Introduction to Migration Studies*, IMISCOE Research Series, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92377-8_13

It might be argued that such transnational mobilisations are more in tune with actual socio-economic and political realities on the ground, where global value chains, digital offshoring of work, and international political institutions appear to be more important than national policies or legislation. Multiple international flows not only of capitals, goods, and services, but also of people, play an important part in national societies and economies. National borders become more permeable despite the *efforts* of many national governments to erect fences and barriers. Despite the rise in a nationalist sentiment and discourses in politics, nation-states effectively see their sovereign powers eroding. As Zorn (1999, pp. 27–28) argues, they are transformed into post-national states as the political space they govern is no longer congruent with the socio-economic space which transcends the national borders; they thus have to increasingly seek to achieve their governance goals of "security, legal certainty, legitimacy and social welfare" through transnational forums and institutions rather than through the exercise of their sovereign power. The global COVID-19 pandemic in fact acts as a magnifying glass towards these opposed trends of, at times, strident nationalism and effective global interdependence. In this context, international migration becomes the epitome of this tension as it defies the economic and symbolic borders of nation-states.

Taking into account these contrasted trends, this chapter examines the relationship between nations and migration. The chapter starts with defining these terms and discusses the relationship between nations and 'Others', focusing more specifically on migrants as a special type of 'Significant Other(s)' for nations. Section four outlines the special challenges that globalisation and intensified migration bring to the nation in the twenty-first century and offers the notion of plural vs neo-tribal nationalism as a new analytical framework for making sense of the opposed trends of chauvinist, populist nationalism, and transnational solidarity movements. In conclusion, I offer some reflections for the future of nations in a world where the global pandemic has made our interconnectedness and mutual vulnerability more palpable than ever before.

13.1 Nations and Nationalism

Nationalism and national identity have a double-edged character: they define not only who is a member of the national community but also, and perhaps more importantly, who is not, who is an Other; a foreigner. The existence of the nation presupposes the existence of other nations. This basic assumption compels one to ask to what extent national identity is a form of inward-looking self-consciousness of a given political community? Or, to what extent is the self-conception of the unified, autonomous, and unique nation conditioned from the outside by defining who is *not* a national and by differentiating the in-group from Others? This double-edged nature does not only characterise national identity; any kind of social identity is constituted in social interaction. The outside (the Other) is constitutive of the inside (the in-group). The former contrasts with and limits the identity of the latter, but it is also a prerequisite for the latter's development into a group. The notion of the Other is inherent in the doctrine of nationalism which argues that the world is divided into different national communities.

Most of the nations in existence today had to fight for their independence and for the formation of their own nation-state in line with the doctrine of nationalism that nations must be politically autonomous and sovereign. Most national communities have had, and probably still have, Significant Others; that is, other nations and/or states from which the community has tried to liberate and/or differentiate itself. Understanding national identity includes not only analysing its distinctive cultural or political features, but also studying the role that Others have played in the definition, development, consolidation, and also transformation of national identity (Triandafyllidou, 1998, 2001). Ernest Gellner—one of the most famous theorists of nationalism-notes that nationalism is a theory of political organisation that requires that ethnic and cultural boundaries coincide with political ones (Gellner, 1983, p. 1). Boundaries between political units are thus supposed to define the borders between different ethnic communities. However, the term 'nation-state' is, in the vast majority of cases, a misnomer. It usually refers to a multi-ethnic (or multinational) state in which a given national group is politically, culturally, and numerically dominant and thus tends to think of the state as a political extension of itself. This situation involves potential for conflict involving minority groups or migrant communities in this state which may seek for their recognition and inclusion in the definition of the nation. Ethnic and cultural diversity may exist in a nation-state from the historical time of its formation (and then we tend to use the term 'national *minorities*' or historical minorities to refer to these groups that were part of the nation-state from the beginning) or such diversity and related ethnic minorities are a result of international migration. Migrant-receiving countries are faced with the necessity of dealing with international migrants as 'Others within' whose presence challenges the political and cultural order of the nation. According to the nationalist doctrine, "nations must be free and secure if peace and justice are to prevail in the world" (Smith, 1991, p. 74). But reality requires a great deal of compromise and accommodation. Both from a social-psychological and a sociological perspective, the co-existence of different nations or ethnic groups within the same territory requires the identity of each group to be constantly reproduced and re-affirmed if the sense of belonging to the group is to survive. It requires the constant re-definition of the 'We' that must be distinguished from a 'They' that is geographically, and perhaps also culturally, close (Triandafyllidou, 1998, 2001).

Nationalism, and indeed the nation itself, appear in an ever greater diversity of forms and configurations, changing and constantly reinventing a phenomenon that scholars have meticulously tried to fit into neat analytical categories. A working definition is indeed necessary for constructing a theoretical framework, even though no definition appears completely satisfactory given the complexity and multidimensionality of national identity. There exist different theoretical schools that have sought to explain the origin of nations and define national identity, nations, and nationalism in the modern period. While a full discussion of these theoretical schools goes beyond the scope of this chapter (see Smith, 2009, 1998 for a fuller

analysis), I am proposing here an eclectic synthesis of elements from different theoretical approaches to analyse the relationship between migration and the nation, and more specifically with a view to analysing the relationship between the nation and its ethnic or immigrant communities, and the ways in which the nation can deal with cultural diversity within – where cultural diversity is understood in its wider sense as comprising ethnic, linguistic, religious, or racial diversity.

The *classical definition of the nation* proposed by Smith (1991, p. 14; 2009, p. 29)—"a named and self-defining human community whose members cultivate shared memories, symbols, myths, traditions and values, inhabit and are attached to historic territories or "homelands", create and disseminate a distinctive public culture, and observe shared customs and standardised laws"—provides a useful starting point in our discussion. A nation presupposes the notion of 'national identity' of a 'feeling of belonging' to the nation. Indeed, here it is necessary to point to Walker Connor's early studies (1978, 1993) and emphasis on the essentially irrational, psychological bond that binds fellow nationals together and that constitutes the essence of national identity. This psychological bond is usually termed "a sense of belonging" (Connor, 1978) or "a fellow feeling" (Geertz, 1963). Such expressions point to the close link established between the individual and the nation.

To analyse national identity as a concept and/or as a social phenomenon, it is often necessary to study the movement that is linked to the 'birth' or 're-awakening' (the term one prefers depends on a choice between a modernist or perennialist point of view) of nations. That is 'nationalism' and is defined as the "ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential nation" (Smith, 1991, p. 73).

In discussing further below the relationship between the nation and diversity or between the nation and Others, it is important to provide a definition of the nationalist doctrine (Smith, 1991, p. 74). This contains three fundamental propositions. (1) That the world is divided into nations in which each has its own culture, history and destiny that make it unique among other national communities. (2) Each individual belongs to a nation. Allegiance to the nation overrides all other loyalties. An individual who is nationless cannot fully realise her/himself and, in a world of nations, s/he is a social and political outcast. (3) Nations must be united, autonomous, and free to pursue their goals. The doctrine implies that the nation is the only legitimate source of social and political power.

The nationalist doctrine celebrates the universalism of the particular. Not only does each nation deem itself to be unique but the doctrine also asserts that the world is made up of nations; all of equal worth and value because they are all unique. Moreover, all nations have the inalienable right to self-determination. Of course, it often happens that the autonomy of one nation is put into question or indeed denied by another nation(-state). Hence, conflict may arise between two national communities with regard to the 'ownership' of territory, cultural traditions, myths, or heroes. However, the theoretical and political tenets of the nationalism doctrine are clear: the world is naturally divided into nations and each of them enjoys the same rights to autonomy and self-determination. This feature of the doctrine is important for the

discussion here because it highlights the fact that the existence of Others is an inherent component of national identity and, indeed, of nationalism itself. Nationalism does not only assert the existence of the specific national community. It also assigns it a position in a world of other separate and unique nations from which the in-group must be distinguished.

13.2 The Nation and the Other

The Self-Other dynamic inherent in nationalism is crucial for understanding the formation and development or change of the nation, the national identity and the national heritage.² However, arguing that national identity leads to a generalised divided perception of the world is not sufficient to demonstrate fully the role that the Other plays in its (trans)formation. The functional role that the notion of the Other plays in defining the nation becomes apparent already in the early works of nationalism theorists like Karl Deutsch (1966). Deutsch argued that the nation can be defined in functional terms: membership of a national community consists of the ability to communicate more effectively with fellow nationals than with outsiders (Deutsch, 1966, p. 97): "peoples [in the sense of nations] are held together 'from within' by this communicative efficiency" (*ibid.*, p. 98). The more effective a system of social communication is, the more separate it becomes from those groups that it cannot incorporate: "unable to bear promiscuity, it must choose marriage or divorce" (*ibid.*, p. 175) argues Deutsch. He thus proposes a functional view of the nation: members of the national community are distinguished from non-members by their ability to communicate with one another *better than* they do with outsiders. From this functional perspective, nationality is not an absolute concept; it means that members share more with one another than they share with foreigners. This definition of the nation involves implicitly if not explicitly the concept of Otherness. The nation is not simply a group that is bound together by beliefs in a common genealogical descent, a common language, or shared cultural traditions. Neither is it merely a territorial community. It is a group of people that share more things in common with each other than they share with outsiders. Thus, for the nation to exist there must be some out-group against which the unity and homogeneity of the in-group is tested.

In political as well as scholarly debate, national identity is often construed as an absolute relationship; a clear set of features and beliefs that characterise a community and its members. Either a group of people share these specific features that make them a nation (regardless of whether these features are more civic or ethnic in character), or they do not. However, such a perspective for the study of national identity is misleading. National identity expresses a feeling of belonging that has a *relative* value; it makes sense only to the extent that it is contrasted with the feelings

²This section draws specifically on Triandafyllidou, 2013.

that members of the nation have towards foreigners. Fellow nationals are not necessarily *very close* or *close enough* to one another—there is no 'objective' scale in which to measure their degree of similarity with one another—they are simply *closer* to one another than they are to outsiders.

It is my contention that national identity must be understood and analysed as a double-edged relationship. On one hand, it is inward looking; it involves a certain degree of similarity within the group and is based on a set of common features that bind the members of the nation together. These features cannot be summarised in the belief of a common descent (Connor, 1978, 1993.). Nor is the national bond equivalent to effective communication as suggested by Deutsch. In fact, it includes a set of elements that range from (presumed) ethnic ties to a shared public culture, common historical memories and links to a homeland, and also a common legal and economic system (Smith, 2009, p. 29). On the other hand, national identity implies difference. Its existence presupposes the existence of Others - other nations or other individuals - who do not belong to the in-group and from which the in-group must be distinguished. National consciousness renders both commonality and difference meaningful. It involves self-awareness of the group but also awareness of Others from which the nation seeks to differentiate itself. This means that national identity has no meaning *per se*, in the absence of other nations. It becomes meaningful through contrast with those. This argument is implicit in the nationalist doctrine, which asserts that there is a plurality of nations. If the entire world belonged to the same nation, national identity would have little meaning.

The interaction between nations and their Others can best be analysed through the notion of the Significant Other (Triandafyllidou, 2001, 2002). The history of nations is marked by the presence of Significant Others; other groups that have influenced the development of a nation by means of their inspiring or threatening presence. The notion of a Significant Other refers to another nation or ethnic group that is usually territorially close to, or indeed within, the national community. Significant Others are characterised by their peculiar relationship to the in-group: *they represent what the in-group is not*. They condition the national in-group, either because they are a source of inspiration for it, an example to follow for achieving national independence and national grandeur, or because they threaten (or are perceived to threaten) its presumed ethnic or cultural purity and/or its independence. A nation may develop its own identity features in ways that differentiate it and distance it from a specific Significant Other or it may seek to adopt some characteristics of an inspiring Other that are highly valued by the in-group too.

Because of their close relationship with the nation, Significant Others *pose a challenge* to it. This challenge may be of a positive and peaceful nature, when the out-group is perceived as an object of admiration and esteem, an exemplary case to be imitated, a higher ground to be reached by the nation, in brief, an *inspiring* Significant Other. This challenge, however, may also take the character of a threat; the Significant Other may be seen as an enemy to fight against, an out-group to be destroyed, in short a *threatening* Significant Other.

We may also distinguish between *internal* (those who belong to the same political entity as the in-group) and *external* Significant Others (those who form a separate

political unit). In line with this distinction, a nation which is in possession of its own state or which forms the dominant national majority within a nation-state might perceive an ethnic minority or immigrant community as an internal Significant Other. Similarly, a nation that forms part of a larger multinational political unit might perceive the internal Significant Other to be either the national majority, some other small nation within the state, or an immigrant community. In this chapter I am particularly interested in immigrant communities as *internal* Significant Others whose *different language*, *religion*, *or mores* may be perceived to threaten the cultural and/or ethnic purity of the nation. The nation is likely then to engage in a process of re-organisation of its identity. It is likely to seek to re-define the features that make it distinct and that lie at the core of the national identity, so as to differentiate the in-group from the newcomers. There is virtually no record of an immigrant population that is perceived as an inspiring Significant Other by the host nation. The negative and threatening representation of the immigrant seems to be an intrinsic feature of the host-immigrant relationship, and this derives, in part, from the fact that the immigrant's presence defies the social and political order of the nation (Sayad, 1991).

Othering an ethnic minority or immigrant community can be seen as functional to the development of national identity and to achieving or enhancing national cohesion. The immigrant is a potential threatening Other because s/he crosses the national boundaries, thus challenging the in-group identification with a specific culture, territory, or ethnic origin as well as the overall categorisation of people into nationals and Others. In other words, the immigrant poses a challenge to the in-group's presumed unity and authenticity, which it threatens to 'contaminate'.

13.3 Globalisation, Migration, and Nationalism

The relationship between the nation and migrants has been both obscured and become increasingly important in the context of globalisation where the borders of the nation become increasingly permeable. While some authors have seen in globalisation (Mann, 1997) and regional integration (Milward, 1992) the rescue of the nation-state and the nation, others (Papastergiadis, 2000) have announced the death of nations and their fall into irrelevance as globalisation and international migration intensify, leading to the de-territorialisation of identities and governance. However, these early arguments and predictions did not fully materialise as nations remain important as communities that underpin political and social rights and democracy even if a certain dose of cosmopolitanism is necessary too (Calhoun, 2007). It is important, however, to pay special attention to how nations and nationalism evolve under increased pressures of international migration, economic globalisation, and the multiple levels of diversity that nations are faced with. *Globalisation processes* are usually drivers of increased international migration whether in relation to the liberalisation and acceleration of international trade or because the mobility of labour and capital are deeply intertwined albeit moving in opposite directions (Solimano,

2010). Globalisation processes intensify grievances and opportunities that lead people to seek better living and working opportunities in distant lands while also facilitating transport and communication. The IOM World Migration Report (2019, ch. 1) shows that, today, people migrate more than before and most importantly in hitherto unexplored trajectories. Postcolonial relations and previously existing migration systems are less influential in shaping people's mobility projects.

As Castles and Miller (2009, pp. 11–12) have evocatively titled their often-quoted book, we live in "*the age of migration*", characterised by globalisation, acceleration, differentiation, feminisation, politicisation, and a proliferation of migration trajectories. New countries of origin emerge, *mixed motivations* (both economic and humanitarian) have become pervasive, and migrant populations at destination countries are characterised by a formidable super diversity.

Evidence of Migration Pathways Multiplying and Intensifying

A new migrant-receiving country like Italy registers migrant groups from over 70 nationalities (Idos, 2019), while the super-diverse London already exceeded 170 nationality groups in the 2000s (Vertovec, 2006). As early as the 1990s, Bangladeshis had settled in Rome (Knights, 1996) while there were no previous historical or economic relations between the countries. The first Pakistani labour migrants arrived in Greece in the 1970s to work in shipyards (Tonchev, 2007) even though, again, the two countries were not in any way previously connected. Turkey has become the top refugee-hosting country in the early 2010s where it had no experience of hosting refugees before, and the 2015–2016 Mediterranean refugee emergency has transformed several south-eastern European countries like Serbia or North Macedonia into reluctant hosts of transit migrants or asylum seekers.

This landscape of increased and multi-directional mobility affects not only migrants themselves but also those who are sedentary, those at destination who receive the newcomers, and those at origin who are left behind. Mobility thus becomes part of the reality of all people, both mobile and sedentary, through what Abdelmalek Sayad (1991) thirty years ago called the paradox of alterity: migrants are missing from where they should be (their country of origin) and are present where they should not be (at destination). They thus defy the fundamental principle of the national order notably that territorial and ethnic/cultural boundaries should coincide.

An interactive approach to nations and nationalism that puts to the centre the relationship between the national in-group and the immigrant communities is essential for understanding the complex realities of the twenty-first century and for making sense of the different trends of nationalism that emerge as a result. New waves and discourses of chauvinist, populist nationalism or of transnational, universalist solidarity and of mixed belonging can best be understood along a continuum that ranges from *plural nationalism* (an open form of nationalism that

acknowledges diversity, interacts with it, and eventually embraces and synthesises a new national configuration) to *neo-tribal nationalism* (a reactive form of nationalism that is exclusionary, based on the construction of an authenticity and homogeneity that is organic and does not change) (Triandafyllidou, 2020). Neo-tribal and plural nationalism are of course ideal types, not black and white distinctions. They make more sense as the two extreme points of a continuum along which we can position the re-emerging nationalisms of today.

Plural nationalism acknowledges that the nation is based in some commonality. Such commonality may invariably be based on cultural, ethnic, religious, or territorial and civic elements. What is important is that the in-group perceives such commonality and identifies with it, organises around it. Within this plural nationalism there is certainly a majority group that to a large extent has given its imprint on the national identity, through the historical process of nation formation which may have been smooth and gradual or traumatic and conflictual. However, this majority national, cultural, ethnic, or civic imprint does not monopolise the national identity definition and the relevant dominant discourse. By contrast, plural nationalism acknowledges openly a degree of diversity in the nation that may stem from the period of nation formation and the existence of minorities within the nation, or may have evolved later through the experience of immigration. Plural nationalism acknowledges the changing demographic or political circumstances of the nation and the nation-state and through a process of tension, even conflict, and change, it creates a new synthesis.

In contrast to plural nationalism's interactive and dialogical relationship with diversity and Others, neo-tribal nationalism is predicated on a rejection of diversity (Triandafyllidou, 2020). I use the term tribal to emphasise that this type of nationalism, regardless of whether the in-group is defined in territorial-civic or blood-andbelonging terms, is predicated on an organic, homogenous conception of the nation (see also Chua, 2018). The nation is represented as a compact unit that does not allow for variation or change. The only way to deal with challenges of mobility and diversity is to resist and reject it. I call this nationalism tribal, not in the sense of an ethnic, genealogical commonality but to emphasise that such a nationalism advocates for an organic type of national identity that is somehow amorphous, non-selfreflexive, and develops also beyond or in contrast to political institutions. This type of nationalism is new, notably neo-tribal, because it flourishes in a world that is ever more characterised by information technology and new forms of communication, and most importantly by the social media. While social media may be seen as the epitome of the modern, technological evolution, they bring within them the seed of a return to a tribal, closed understanding of the world. Social media and internet algorithms allow for people who are transnationally connected to the world (through videogames, YouTube channels, social media influencers, on demand television shows) to be confined within their own little echo-chamber, within their digital bubble of like-minded people. They create a transnational digital community that is neo-tribal.

Neo-Tribal Nationalism: The Case of Hungary and Poland

Interesting examples of neo-tribal nationalism can be found in Europe today in both Hungary and Poland. Both countries share an ethno-religious concept of the nation, and a relatively recently acquired fully independent territorial statehood after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact in 1989. Both countries' governments in the last decade have been dominated by aggressively nationalist parties that have advanced a strong ethno-religious and racist discourse (Buchowski, 2016). Indeed, the new Hungarian and Polish nationalism is neo-tribal in that it denies any variation and diversity within the nation which is conceived as homogenous and amorphous. In both countries incumbent governments have eroded democratic institutions, sought to silence the media, and attacked the independence of the judiciary. Visible minorities like the Roma have been vilified and fully racialised and (Jewish) conspiracy theories actively promoted. This neo-tribal nationalist discourse has also been addressed towards Others outside the nation-state: European institutions have been represented in this neo-tribal nationalism as a threat to the national autonomy and authenticity, while specific European countries, like for instance Sweden, have been represented as what Poland (or Hungary) does not want to become (Krzyżanowski, 2018). The refugee flows of 2015-2016 have offered an opportunity for this neo-tribal nationalist discourse to take up also territorial and civic undertones: Hungary hurried to secure its territorial borders through building a fence, and both countries represented Muslim asylum seekers as an enemy from which to protect the nation's women and gender equality. In either case human rights principles or international obligations emanating from EU law and international conventions have been ignored in the name of a chauvinistic patriotism. Both ethnic and civic/territorial elements of Hungarianness and Polishness have been mobilised in this neo-tribal nationalist discourse even if both nations define themselves predominantly ethnically.

13.4 Conclusion

This chapter offers an analytical framework for (re-)thinking the relationship between migration and the nation, with a focus on the role of Others in defining the national community interactively. Pointing to the complex realities of mobility and difference today and the opposed trends of aggressive populist nationalism and of transnational solidarity movements, I suggest that we can better understand this relationship between nations and migration through the lens of plural vs. neo-tribal nationalism. Naturally neo-tribal and plural nationalism are analytical categories which seek to order the disorder and complexity of contemporary socio-political reality. However, reality always defies theoretical frameworks. During the last decade we have witnessed important events of political uprisings (like the Arab Spring in 2011), international terrorism (whether Jihadist or of the White Supremacist matrix across the world), refugee emergencies in the Mediterranean (driven by the Syrian conflict), in Central and North America (as a result of political insecurity and gang violence), and in Southeast Asia (as the outcome of ethnic cleansing as in the case of the Rohingya refugees fleeing from Myanmar to Bangladesh). However, it seems that none would have predicted a global pandemic like that of COVID-19, or a massive transnational uprising against police violence and racial injustice as those we witnessed in spring and summer 2020. Unsurprisingly, the relationship between migration and the nation lies at the centre of responses to the pandemic. Not only have borders closed, leaving migrants stranded at their origin or destination, but the extent to which we are all interconnected and interdependent has become more apparent than ever. Nations and migration also matter when we think about systemic racism and how to undo it. It is my hope that this framework can help shed some clarity on these trends and lead to a more just and solidary world.

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