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## The spaces and politics of affective nationalism

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**Abstract:**

Over the last decade affect has emerged as one of the most prominent concepts within human geography. More recently, scholars engaging with the nation have also have also drawn on

insights from studies of affect to interrogate the ways in which relations between people and materially heterogeneous assemblages underpin national forms of identification, organisation and expression . This symposium aims to interrogate affective nationalism both as an analytical lens and a topic of investigation. More specifically it looks into the spaces and the politics of affective nationalism as a way to explore how the nation continues to operate as a salient register in people's everyday lives

## **1. Introduction** (Marco Antonsich and Michael Skey)

Over the last decade, affect has become an increasingly prominent concept within human geography as the discipline has sought to address critiques of representational and discursive approaches (Thrift, 2007). More recently, scholars researching nations and nationalism have also drawn on insights from studies of affect in order to foreground the significance of people's everyday practices and feelings in underpinning national forms of organisation, identification and expression (Merriman and Jones 2017, Closs Stephens 2016, Closs Stephens et al. 2017, Militz and Schurr 2016, Crang and Tolia-Kelly 2010, Sumartojo 2016, Wetherell et al. 2015, Anderson and Wilson 2017). The focus on affect is certainly welcomed in a field often dominated by representational approaches that often struggle to go beyond the idea of nations as imagined communities (Anderson, 1983). Yet, as much as affective nationalism opens the terrain for understanding further why nations matter, it also remains an open and, at times, poorly defined, field, characterised by different theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches and political agendas. The present symposium looks to address some of these weaknesses by addressing three key issues. First, it reflects on questions of definition, it then explores the contribution that affective approaches to the study of nations can offer and, finally, it attends more closely to the spaces and the politics of affective nationalism.

How to define affective nationalism? Before outlining our own, extremely tentative definition of the concept, we think it is useful to recall Blumler's (1954) distinction between sensitising and definitive concepts and to locate affective nationalism in the former category. Indeed, Blumler's concerns about the wider status of social theory might easily be applied to contemporary debates around affective nationalism. Observing that concepts in social theory rest on vague sense and

not on precise specification of attributes, Blumler distinguished between ‘sensitizing concepts’, which “merely suggest directions along which to look” and ‘definitive concepts’, which “provide prescriptions of what to see” (Blumler, 1954: 4-5). Sensitizing concepts “lack precise reference and have no bench marks which allow a clean-cut identification of a specific instance and of its content. Instead, they rest on a general sense of what is relevant” (Ibidem). This ‘sensitizing’ approach is also broadly shared in the present symposium, with individual contributions avoiding any fixed benchmarks, pointing instead to the ‘fluidity’, the ‘mobility’, the ‘circulation’ associated with affective nationalism. In our view, this concept matters because it asks us to attend to the feelings and emotions that pattern people’s everyday lives and have the potential to drive social and political engagement and activism. Thus, for us affective nationalism is about attending to the ways in which feelings and emotions emerge through practices, objects and materially heterogeneous assemblages which are imbricated with the nation. This would include events as extra-ordinary as watching a national air-show (Closs Stephens in this symposium) or as ordinary as strolling on the high street in an English town (Wilson and Anderson).

While this definition is far from perfect, what we are trying to emphasise, along with many of the contributions to the symposium, is the importance of thinking about the ongoing significance of nations and nationalism in relation to ‘their’ capacity to move people. It is worth recalling that one of the earlier insights of scholarship in nationalism studies, although not particularly developed by other practitioners in the field, is that there is an important relation between emotions and national belonging (Scheff, 1994; Connor, 2004). It is not only here a matter of discussing the distinction between affect and emotions, although we have suggested elsewhere (Antonsich and Skey, 2017) that it might be worth clarifying the differences, if any, between affect, emotion and feeling (see also Ahmed, 2013, Wetherell et al, 2017). Likewise, we would argue that there has not been enough discussion between geographers who study affect and psychologists who study collective emotions and that collaborations between the two may have the potential to build new frameworks for analysis. However, what really matters, here, is acknowledging that nations are first and foremost *felt* by people.

Affective nationalism not only has the merit of further highlighting ordinary people’s agency in their everyday reproduction of the nation, it also reveals the very instability of this socio-spatial register. Far from grounded, stable constructs with a clear directionality, nations and nationalism

are better conceptualised as in constant movement (although they may appear relatively stable to some). Affect is indeed first and foremost about movement. To this end Merriman in this symposium, drawing from Deleuze and Guattari (1988), uses the figures of the molar and the molecular to capture the continual foregrounding and backgrounding of feelings of nation-ness. In a related argument, Wilson and Anderson invite us to explore the incoherence and inconsistencies of 'nationalist affects'. Affect in fact is not always about strong feelings (rage, fear, pride) as they emerge in 'occasions of intensification', but also about a range of more ambivalent and contradictory feelings (disillusionment, disappointment, unease) which equally exist in relation to nations and nationalisms. It is by exploring the incoherent and ambiguous oscillations between attachment and detachment, affection and disaffection as they coexist in the same individual that scholars can offer a fuller understanding of nation and nationalism.

In viewing nations as a movement or process and national practices as messy and inconsistent, it is also important that we focus on two other key issues, the spaces where such feelings emerge and the varying meaningfulness of the nation to different social groups, what might be labelled as the politics of affective nationalism.

In the first case, the nation is often defined and mobilised in relation to the spaces of everyday life as particular national signs, symbols, people, practices and places inspire, anger, revolt and engage people, orienting them in specific ways towards others and the world at large (Merriman and Jones, 2017). Over the last decade or so, there has been a growing literature studying 'everyday nationhood' (Edensor, 2002; Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008; Skey, 2011; Antonsich, 2016), which has focused on the ways nations are reproduced through both mundane materialities and practices. A focus on affect has the merit of enriching this understanding, by attending not only to what people do, but also how they feel, so that a nation comes into existence not only as an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983) or a 'community of practice' (i.e. ways of doing), but also as a 'community of feelings', i.e. a community moved by national affects. For instance, think of the feelings of shame and anger that some groups experience as a result of not being recognised as a member of the nation in a given situation (Ahmed, 2013). Conversely, we can point to the range of everyday markers, institutional frameworks and relationships that make a place feel homely to certain groups within a given national space (Duyvendak, 2011).

Beyond the everyday, there are other liminal ‘spaces’ where more intense feelings and emotions are expressed and memorialised. Here we are thinking of those mass social rituals (holidays, sporting events, and ceremonial occasions) that are framed by national symbols and designed to celebrate or commemorate the nation (Closs Stephens, 2016; de Regt, 2018). These examples of ‘ecstatic nationalism’ (Skey, 2009) are usually saturated with more extreme feelings, whether they involve celebrating a sporting victory or commemorating a deceased national leader or high-profile disaster. They are also very much tied to specific locales (e.g., stadia, public squares, government or religious buildings) that often become part of the established socio-emotional landscape and hence meaningful to significant numbers of people.

This last point – the idea that some will be moved, while others may feel excluded or even just plain bored by a particular event or happening – encourages us to pay attention to the politics of affective nationalism. In fact, as much as affect might support feelings of a shared national space, which could bring diverse bodies together under one national banner, the intervention by Closs Stephens alerts about the risk intrinsic in this move. Affective nationalism has in fact the power to obliterate the forms of repression, coercion and domination which comes with the nation-state. In this sense, also an enjoyable event like an air show on the shores of Swansea Bay is not politically innocent, but it is entangled with the functioning of state power. More than an analytical lens, then, affective nationalism is something that has to be unpacked so to not only disclose how power and affect are closely imbricated, but also to resist and subvert the affective appeal associated with objects and manifestations of state violence.

Equally problematic is also the assumption that affect works evenly across the national space. In her intervention, Tolia-Kelly reminds us that nation and nationalisms are not and cannot be felt in the singular, as this would ignore how bodies are differentially positioned within discursive and affective registers. Thus, she makes the case for a pluralised account of both nation and nationalism and the feelings and sensations that they become associated with. Rebuffing nationalist narratives of blood and soil that have come to the fore in contemporary times, she invites us to attend to the differentials of affective nationalism in order to capture, beyond any rhetoric of authenticity and tradition, the continuous making and remaking of nation.

Altogether, the symposium shows how, at least in the European context, where the majority of the present interventions are located, a focus on affect contributes to the research agenda of

everyday nationhood, defies essentialized understandings of nations as accomplished, closed and bounded constructs, and illuminates the contradictory politics of nations and nationalisms as they operate in the spaces of everyday, as well as in more heightened spatial encounters.

## **2. National potential: affect, possibility and the nation-in-progress (Shanti Sumartojo)**

This contribution is anchored in a sense of possibility, of potential. It rests on my own and others empirical research that has invited participants to nominate their own terms for understanding and engaging with the nation, terms that are often affective. It attends to how the national *feels* to people (Closs Stephens 2016), and the excessive and ongoingly changing qualities of these feelings. Branching out from this sense of possibility, I will argue that affect offers a frame for understanding the nation that locates it in the everyday, foregrounds its complexity and dynamism, and shows how it is animated by this contingency. This in turn orients us towards the future and a sense of the nation-in-progress. In what follows, ‘affective nationalism’ is understood as a mode of configuring one’s relationship to the nation – and to other people understood as co-national, or not – in terms of feelings. It also means how things come to be understood as national, and how these understandings course along and are energised by affect; in other words, how an object, symbol, event or story becomes affecting *because* it is understood in a national frame. Moreover, and as Closs Stephens points out in her insightful contribution below, things that are differentially understood as ‘national’ also connote varying affective associations; so the term ‘affective nationalism’ carries a sense of instability, unpredictability and possibility.

Indeed, this sense of possibility - including that something might understood as more or less national, or perhaps not national at all - chimes with Massumi’s (2015: 57-58) treatment of potential, a feeling that always shimmers in our unfolding experiences of the world:

Even in the most controlled political situation, there’s a surplus on unacted-out potential that is collectively felt...No situation simply translates ideological inculcations into action.



There's always an event and the event always includes dimensions that aren't completely actualised, so it's always open to a degree, it's always dynamic and in re-formation.

Along similar lines, Anderson (2014: 15) advocates for 'a particular style of engagement with the world: one that aims to sense and perhaps extend the potential for new ways of being and doing that events may open up', an approach that is made possible by attending to 'the link between affect, politics and contingency'. The way this work highlights affect as *potential* points to productive ways to reconsider national identity and its politics, three of which I sketch out here.

The first is that it allows us to consider the nation as ongoingly constituted through our own and others' activities, as continually made via the accreted and accumulated actions of many people in relation to others (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Edensor 2002). This is not to suggest, however, that the nation is somehow separate or outside what people do, feel and think, that it is an entity that acts in its own right. Indeed, Edensor (2002: 20) asserts that 'national belonging' is comprised and reinforced by shared cultural resources 'grounded in spatial, material, performative and representation dimensions of everyday life'. Thus, the nation is made by not only what we *do*, but also by how we *feel*. An affective framing of the nation treats it as emergent via our own ongoing experiences, akin to what Skey and Antonsich (2017) term 'everyday nationhood'.

Returning to Massumi's (2015: 13) terms, this means the nation is implied when we recognise that we are always 'immersed in an experience that is already underway', when we apprehend that our worlds are in movement, never finished or even stable. Thinking through affect helps reveal our worlds as always in formation, shifting in the ongoing flow of sensory perceptions, encounters with people and places and unexpected thoughts or reflections that are commonplace in our everyday experiences. Indeed, building on Massey (2005), the nation emerges from a 'throwntogetherness' that coalesces temporarily and continuously. Moreover, the nation is not so much held or delimited by particular 'bodies', but emerges from relations between them, and is subject to the 'feelings that circulate between and take hold of bodies' that have differential affective capacities (Merriman and Jones 2017: 601). It is this difference in how we might affect

or be affected, that offers the potential I am concerned with here. It is also where politics obtains, because these capacities are not neutral or somehow free-floating, but are shaped by and through bodies and things that are differentially empowered and positioned. This is what Skey and Antonsich (2016) mean by the ‘importance of power and its uneven relations’ that shape affective encounters with the nation.

Tim Ingold’s (2011) notion of ‘wayfaring’ is also valuable in thinking about how affect and nation identity intersect and are ongoingly co-constitutive. Ingold conceptualises a process of making our way through the world that creates traces, paths or trails that emerge and unfurl in the changing everyday conditions of our surroundings. The trace enables us to visualise the perpetually unfinished nature of our everyday worlds, and to consider how we engage with our surroundings as we go, and what subsequent experiences and relationalities these engagements afford. This is the second move I suggest – that the environments we move through, affect and are affected by, and that we use to make sense of ourselves in the world, are replete with things that we understand as national. Thus how we ongoingly relate to these is how our sense of nationhood is expressed, understood and felt, with potential always inherent in our experiences. Indeed ‘we come to know and understand the nation by means of the trace and the contingency and dynamism it implies. Thus, the nation is not outside or beyond us somehow, but knotted into experience’ (Sumartojo 2017: 206). The knot (Ingold 2011) also points towards affect’s potential – that the nation is entangled with everything else we might be doing, thinking or feeling. The nation does not somehow stand apart from other aspects of our everyday lives, but rather is always entangled in our experiential worlds, and as a result is as messy and contingent as any other aspect of those worlds.

In a 2018 study of Australian multiculturalism, for example, research participants were easily able to reflect on everyday nationhood because it was an active element of how they understood themselves and the other people and places in their worlds, even if it was not always what they were consciously noticing or thinking about. In part this was because of how they *felt* their worlds, emotionally and sensorially, and how in turn these feelings were readily attached to more abstract aspects of their lives, such as national identity. Multiculturalism was a highly valued aspect of people’s everyday surroundings and encounters, and even when these experiences were

puzzling or unfamiliar. Coming into contact with cultural difference was itself viewed positively and the affective frisson of difference was interesting, valued *and* couched in national terms (Edensor and Sumartojo 2018).

The final implication of thinking affectively about the nation is that can help us face towards the future. This is precisely because thinking through affect treats the nation as an ongoing and emergent aspect of our lives that ebbs and flows along with everything else, as I say above. This implicitly uncertain movement can prompt feelings of anxiety, dread, optimism, hope or ambivalence, all of which relate to the future and can never be fully resolved because we never know exactly what will come next (see also Anderson 2014). These ambiguous feelings are unstable and draw different people together at different times, rather than settling into fixed positions, and can co-exist with other seemingly contradictory moods. Closs Stephens extends on this below, via the idea of storytelling, a narrative form that can convey ambivalence or present multiple versions of experience.

Affect allows us to formulate the nation as unfolding, and to adopt a future-orientation towards what it might yet become. Moreover, this forward motion can generate speculation that necessarily requires the future to be envisioned and imagined. If affect is always dynamic and emerging, and thereby invites speculation, then intervention becomes possible in new ways because these interventions are able to be imagined in new ways. Whether this points us to inclusivity and generosity, for example, or suspicion and aggression, the point is that these are versions of national future that are made possible by affective modes of speculation as much as by political ones. However, if we stick with affect's sense of potential and becoming, then the future is never foreclosed; put differently, if we treat affect as potential then we are able to orient towards a nation-in-progress, and more powerfully, able to imagine and thereby intervene in national futures in new ways.

This is one of the most powerful things that approaching the nation through affect can offer – a sense of futurity, emerging and entangled with our everyday lives – that moves us far beyond static or closely-bounded imagined national communities. Instead, affect offers us a politics that is open and uncertain, that is always in formation, imbued with a sense of 'political and ethical

promise' (Anderson 2014: 15). It suggests that we can always potentially make the nation into something else, whether this is the grounds for optimism or despair.

### 3. National Movements (Peter Merriman)

National movements or nationalist movements are frequently approached as collective groups of thinking-feeling-acting bodies whose social and political struggle is marked by a clear directionality and a simultaneously inclusionary and exclusionary politics gathering around markers of sameness and difference. These movements may appear as extraordinary, 'hot' and dramatic events, *or* as ordinary and banal occurrences enacted by bodies of different kinds (Billig, 1995; Jones and Merriman, 2009; Merriman and Jones, 2009). This focus on active, embodied agents or subjects has served studies of nations and national identities fairly well, but a number of scholars have begun to ask whether there are aspects of national movements, communities, nations, and national identities which are missed with such an approach. How do nations 'matter' beyond the differentiated bodies of national citizen-subjects and symbolic material objects? What kinds of affects, atmospheres, performances and materials are apprehended by bodies of different kinds?

In this intervention my focus is not on *some thing* named 'affective nationalism' but on the molecular movements and affective relations holding particular bodies in tension, which may or may not be registered as national feelings, passions or revulsions. In particular, I want to ask a series of conceptual questions around movement and nations. What if, after Massumi (2017: 101), we were to take the principles of movement, activity and unrest as incessant and central to the unfolding of all actions and events?<sup>i</sup> Could movements, affects and bodies be *all* there is to nations, nationalist politics, and feelings of national identity?<sup>ii</sup> What if – drawing upon the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari (1988) – we were to approach national movements, groupings and identities as perceptible 'molar' representations or identifications which are always in a state of becoming 'molecular' and imperceptible?<sup>iii</sup> If we refocus our attention on the processes, affects and sensations which underpin national formations, then we might choose to depart from the idea that it is perceptible, 'aggregated' molar movements which form or transform more-or-less stable nations and national identities. Rather, our attention could turn to the ongoing processes and micropolitical actions through which a multitude of affective ties hold a large number of

incessantly moving, variegated material bodies in tension. Molecular movements and affective circulations are incessant and imperceptible, until they gain consistency, become perceptible, and are registered or territorialised as the *molar* aggregations we label ‘nations’, ‘national identities’ and ‘national movements’.

In an earlier paper, I argued that the relational and partial emergence of national feelings, moods and atmospheres which are apprehended or sensed by some bodies – but not others – could be approached using the concept of the ‘refrain’ (see Merriman and Jones, 2017), as well as through Law and Mol’s (2001: 615) idea of a ‘fire topology’ or spatiality, characterised by a ‘flickering relation between presence and absence’. While ‘fire’ may serve as a colourful or shapely analogy for simultaneously hot and banal nationalist sensibilities, Deleuze and Guattari’s writings on affect, territorialisation and molecular politics could also be mobilised to understand this continual foregrounding and backgrounding of feelings of nation-ness; *not* as an absence or presence, *but rather* as feelings, sensations or ‘structures of feeling’ that are always in the process of becoming perceptible or imperceptible to bodies held (or not) in relational tension (Merriman, 2019).<sup>iv</sup> This strand of processual thinking forces us to rethink conventional approaches to pre-formed, bounded subjects, as well as work on ‘the political’ which attends solely to macro-political actions and forces. Indeed, I want to argue that scholars writing on nations, nationalism and national identity can learn a lot from post-structuralist writings on the relationship between affect and micro-, minor- and molecular politics (Guattari, 1984; Guattari and Rolnik, 2008; Jellis and Gerlach, 2017; Merriman, 2019).

It has become rather commonplace for critics of affect and non-representational theories to ask whether such approaches are capable of supporting ‘new models of progressive politics’ (Barnett, 2008: 198). Brian Massumi has stressed that affect is ‘proto-political’, being concerned with ‘the first stirrings of the political, flush with the felt intensities of life’ (2015: ix), and the trick here is to expand conceptions of ‘the political’ to take account of transversal ‘molecular’ and ‘micro’ political movements, actions and events, as well as perceptible ‘molar’ or ‘macro’ political relations established around material and social markers of difference such as race and gender (Bissell, 2016; Jellis and Gerlach, 2017). In attending to the partial, relational flagging of nations – and the welling-up of feelings, atmospheres and collective affiliations aligned with the nation – I would emphasise that molecular and micro political forces, movements and affects can

bring about more fundamental molar shifts in atmospheres, moods, materialities and habits (see Ahmed 2004; Closs Stephens, 2016; Closs Stephens et al., 2017). In contrast to many early works on the politics of affect which focussed largely on the engineering of affects by powerful (state) actors and agencies for manipulative ends (Barnett, 2008), it is also important to acknowledge the ways in which affects are engineered with the intention of creating more hopeful, joyful and ‘happy atmospheres’ (Closs Stephens, 2016: 181). Progressive futures and inclusive atmospheres can emerge from molecular or micro-political actions, events and movements associated with a range of bodies held in tension, but it is not just the molar or macro-political potential of affect theories which is questioned by some critics. References to ‘the body’ in Spinozan and Deleuzian affect theory have, of course, been criticised for tracing a rather abstract, blank, universal, unmarked and ‘pre-figured’ body (see Tolia-Kelly, 2006, and five here). This is, of course, the point, for although these (more-than-human) bodies are inevitably and incessantly figured, fleshed out, essentialised and differentiated in and through innumerable practices, many affect theorists do not want to mark or figure such bodies *a priori* using essential pre-established categories of difference. Speaking of pre-figured bodies in the abstract does not universalise a *particular* body, subject or experience (however marked), rather it insists that such markings are inscribed and differences formed in the unfolding of (national) events, emerging from specific affective ties and tensions between bodies, even if that unfolding generates familiar refrains and repetitious exclusionary practices which must be highlighted and ultimately challenged and undermined.

With the de-coupling of national communities from an essential or fixed relationship with territories in many theories of nations and nationalism – including those focussing on the performance of national identity, the social and psychological relations underpinning national communities, etc. – the question of ‘where’ nations are constructed, performed, located or sited continues to arise, although I do not see significant differences between social constructionist approaches, theories of performance, or theories of affect in this regard. If we take movement to be primary, and if bodies of all kinds – including non-human material bodies, architectural environments, landscapes etc. – are caught in affective tension and possess differential capacities to affect and be affected when entangled in particular relations, then these incessant movements, interactions, tensions and happenings are what produce spaces and perform national spatialities,

with meaningful sensations gathering around *particular* differentiated bodies, sites and materials held in tension, whether physically or virtually.

#### **4. A Hot Afternoon** (Angharad Closs Stephens)

On a hot summer's day in July 2016, two weeks after the UK voted to leave the European Union, I sat on top of the garden shed with my children watching the Wales National Airshow, organised by Swansea City Council. The then UK Prime Minister, David Cameron, had recently announced he would be resigning; the British Conservative party were yet to choose a new leader; no politician seemed able to capture the national mood. Outside our home in South West Wales, we sat on several blankets as the tarmac roof was too hot to touch. The children wavered between being awestruck and terrified and looked to me for reassurance. I in turn made the appropriate noises of admiration as the Red Arrows—the Royal Air Force's Aerobatic Team—gathered speed by flying the Hawk T1's into the countryside before sweeping back across the sea-shore to mark the sky with the colours of the Union Jack. My children were too young to know the significance of the colours. And anyway, we were too busy trying to name them. The Spitfire, the Hurricane and Lancaster Bomber—cultural icons from the Battle of Britain (1940) and the RAF's role in the Second World War—flew alongside Eurofighter Typhoons (Built by BAE systems) and Chinook helicopters (used in the Falklands, the 1991 and 2003 Gulf wars, the Balkans and Afghanistan). These killing machines drew beautiful circular patterns on the clear blue sky. Around 200,000 people watched the show for free on Swansea beach front. Later, I learned that a handful of adults and children were admitted to the Burns Centre at Morriston Hospital: flying planes can be dangerous (Weber, 2002), and sitting in the blazing sun can cause injuries too.

What might this story tell us about the theme of this forum, 'Affective Nationalism?' This moment took place in 2016 but I could be describing a scene from several other decades in the Twentieth Century. This was a 'national' event, deemed to be the largest such show in Wales, assembled around icons of Britishness charged with memories of empire. Yet 'the people' did not necessarily interpret the event according to these narratives. Whilst we can read the event

through the registers of identity, difference and coloniality, doing so exclusively would miss ‘the affective field of potential’ through which the event took place (McCormack, 2013: 132). For the three of us, the event was felt in the waves of clapping and cheer that erupted from the beach, the thundering noise of the planes rattling the roof we were sitting on and the resonances that travelled between our skins, the tarmac and each other. Whilst the show was a visual spectacle, it also involved twisted stomachs and tensed limbs. It operated through a combination of wonder, boredom, anxiety and surprise. Engaging the politics of affect invites us to consider how this event was felt, alongside the lively unfolding of the event itself. It suggests that we pay attention to the intricate entanglements of war and tourism (Lisle, 2016), power and boredom. And furthermore, thinking about affect and politics together encourages us to loosen a symbolic reading of an event such as this one, as already heavy with meaning. Instead, we might consider through ‘descriptive detours’ (Stewart, 2011: 445) the multiplicity, contingency and tenacity of various landscapes of power.

In the run up to this airshow, I only encountered murmurs of resistance—such as among the networks that welcome populations described as refugees and asylum seekers to the city. As the first ‘City of Sanctuary’ in Wales, Swansea is home to many people that have arrived to escape the sounds of low-flying planes. There was also some resistance to the symbols of Britishness among Welsh language activist movements. However, these are both marginal constituencies in the city, and anyone who hid indoors disgusted by the whole charade risked being called a ‘killjoy’ (Ahmed, 2010). This points to the difficulties of identifying ways of opposing the state without reproducing the identities and differences that are themselves creations of the state. But in reading this airshow through a multiple and mobile frame (Lisle, 2016), we can see the different elements drawn in and put to work in it. For example, reflecting on the airshow staged by the Nazis at Tempelhof airfield, Berlin, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 1933, Adey argues that its aim was not only to direct the gaze towards the aircraft but towards the airfield and activities of the personnel who maintain it (2010: 60). In his study of British airshows, Rech argues that the ‘gaze of an attentive public’ (Rech, 2015: 538) is as central to the event as aerodynamic skill. Any study of ‘affective nationalism’ at this national airshow would need to consider these aspects, as well as the heteronormative cultures at work in a branded ‘family day out’, the political economies of cities and their branding exercises, and the ways ‘political atmospheres are



inherently and always racialised’ (Legg, 2019; see also Tolia-Kelly in this symposium). But perhaps here we also encounter some of the difficulties with the concept of ‘affective nationalism’ in that it may be too totalising in explaining this event. It risks inviting us to project identities, differences, positions and groups onto a gathering that was also happenstance: a scene that was heavily orchestrated, but which also folded into other rhythms, histories, habits and journeys.

In her book *Touching Feeling*, Sedgwick argues that affect theory is propelled by Michel Foucault’s promise of a form of critical theory that can go beyond the ‘repressive hypothesis’ (2003: 9), which understands power as something operated over us by a single sovereign authority. Returning to his arguments in *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, Sedgwick argues that Foucault’s promise remains a challenge. Similarly, in considering the everyday ways we enjoy spectacles of violence, Debbie Lisle argues that power must be understood as something that is *embraced by us* as well as exercised over us (2016: 20). For Lisle, ‘architectures of enmity’ operate in ways that ‘do not simply enroll and exclude particular bodies and populations, [but] also make themselves felt—and indeed, achieve their power—by enrolling and excluding objects, landscapes, infrastructures, atmospheres and materials’ (2016: 22, drawing on Shapiro, 1997). At this airshow, affect was evidently a ‘mechanism for power’ (Foucault quoted in Sedgwick, 2002: 110), in the sense that the event was staged in ways that required skill, practice, organisation, and relied also on mobilising emotion. But affect further names how this event cannot be explained through accounts of power as repression, coercion or prohibition. For this was also a spectacle that was enjoyed and animated through cheers, clapping, Facebook selfies, bodies gathering together on the sandy beach and children running for ice cream. How do we distinguish between ‘participants’ in fields of power and ordinary people going about their day? How do we intervene politically when spectacles that celebrate the everydayness of military weapons, Britain’s superiority as a victorious nation, and ideas about a united identity also emerge as just something to pass the time?

As Sumartojo argues in this symposium, the provocation of affect bids us to pay attention to questions of feeling *and* to the particular styles of our engagement. This enables us to ask: how does critique do something other than *reveal* ‘oppressive historical forces’ (Sedgwick, 2003:

11)? Affect theory has been critiqued for its concern with capturing ‘something supposedly ephemeral, beyond words and beyond representation’ (Wetherell, 2014: 149). Studying phenomena that can’t be measured, counted or verified tends to be viewed with suspicion, and leads to familiar calls to make the study of affect ‘practical’ again (ibid). However, the search for knowledge often begins from a sense that we still do not fully understand how power works and how power might be interrupted. How do objects of state violence maintain their affective appeal? How are geopolitical structures reproduced in everyday ways and through embodied ideas about gender, white privilege, and colonial power? How do such ideas attach themselves to new constituencies? Perhaps telling stories offers another route in to these questions, one that allows us to do more than identify these practices at work, by acknowledging also our own part in them.

This story about the airshow suggests that national attachments are felt, sensed and embodied as well as structured, organised and performed. Whilst resistance is often conceptualised as refusal or as an alliance of oppositional forces, approaching nationhood through an affective register indicates it is difficult to position ourselves outside of power structures looking in. Sometimes we cannot resist according to defiant terms because we are involved in the everyday work of caring, feeding and playing whilst living with discomfort, compromise and rage. Yet as Dempsey and Pratt (2019: 278) argue, resistance often takes place ‘in the intimate and the interpersonal’. Through our relations with friends, parents, colleagues, family and neighbours, we can support and stay alongside efforts to make spaces for other collective affects and an alternative aesthetics. But this is about more than questions of personal situation, because often it is difficult to resist in strong terms precisely because of a sense of the ordinariness and everywhere-ness of power and domination. Enveloped by stuff we find unpleasant, troubling and harmful, there is often no straightforward place to stand outside or against such structures, objects and atmospheres. The everyday, imaginative geographies of ‘us’ and ‘them’ are diffuse, multiple and contradictory; they are composed through strong and weak attachments. But they are also ambivalent, full of ‘fissures and gaps’ (Lisle, 2016: 23) through which they might be noticed and interrupted. Perhaps when we accept our own involvement, we may find we are able to grasp those fleeting moments when other ways of relating, organising and enduring might be pressed— as both joyful and ugly feelings continue to emerge and dissolve across the urban landscape.

## 5. Affective Nationalisms and Race (Divya P. Tolia-Kelly)

### Affective Nationalisms

Affective nationalisms are made through affective economies of fear and love (Ahmed 2004) and emotions in-between. My definition would be to posit affective circulations in relation to ‘nation’ and membership of such, as the political-economic driver of social relations. The affective charges that circulate define the very essence of ‘mobility’, ‘freedoms’ and ‘self-determination’. Contrary to Merriman (in this symposium), a philosophical account at molecular level is profoundly interesting, but remains a possibility for only some over others. The structural inequalities of society and their violences, impact and are compounded in repeated patterns of gender, race, class, ethnicity, and culture; they cannot be addressed politically at the molecular scale. The scale of ‘nation’ and ‘national identity’ are figured through the economies of multicultural intimacies and racial politics (Fortier, 2008) at street level. Banal nationalism (Billig, 1995) cannot be understood at the molecular scale, and more importantly, cannot be resisted at that scale. As Matless (1998: 17) has argued, “national identity is regarded as a relative concept always constituted through definitions of Self and Other and always subject to internal differentiations.” In this commentary, there is a contestation of the bounded concept of a singular affective nationalism, through the investigation of the striations of the economies of race (and resulting senses of belonging). These internal striations are materially figured through dominant planes of connection, affirmation and national sensibility. Here, the proposed inclusion of race as a striation of affective nationalism considers seriously the contingent and plural affective charges that materialise circulations of nationalistic sentiment that is assumed as singular and embodied homogeneously in banal cultural processes (see Closs-Stephens, 2016; Merriman and Jones, 2017). As Antonsich (2018a: 450) argues, the very account of nationalism is “understood as a state-centric construct operating uniformly across space and society”. By pluralising our accounts of both nation and nationalism, we can acknowledge the very different sets of rights and responsibilities various citizens can inhabit, inspire and celebrate. For Brubaker (2006:206), nation is conceived as a contingent and contextual discursive resource, not a continuous phenomenon. However, without being reductive about the agency of individual bodies or indeed collectives of communities, the ‘discursive’ positioning is not one available to

all, at all times. There is a visual economy of recognition and misrecognition (Antonsich, 2018a) that encounter 'others' as outside of the sensibilities or indeed moral geographies of nation and nationalism when evoked. Black bodies are violently erased every day (Erfani-Gettani, 2015) through structures of policing<sup>v</sup> the judiciary, mental health agencies<sup>vi</sup> and racial violence. Racialized figures are dehumanised and targeted as erasable<sup>vii</sup>. There is a persistence within the logics of signification that is reproduced, in formats of cultural expression in the public sphere.

### **The persistence of 'race'**

Hall (2017) posits *The Fateful Triangle as the nexus of race, ethnicity and nation* where ultimately the hegemonic regimes of truth that define race and cultures of racism are produced and reproduced. The resilience of 'race' as scientific fact, despite having been debunked since its inception, is located at the core problem of seeing aesthetic differences in skin, bone and features, and their having *meaning* with respect to their place in the *Great Chain of Being* marked by intellectual potential, spiritual capacities and affective palates. Du Bois (quoted in Hall, 2017: 40) articulates "the grosser physical differences of colour, hair and bone transcend scientific definition", the discursive, sociological or indeed philosophical interventions to describe, debunk or de-inscribe race with meaning simply buries the biological conception and does not transcend it. The matters of race are 'clearly defined to the eye' and as such retain a rootedness in cultural values as *evidence* of difference. This work of *seeing* difference is visceral and thus associates with ideas within a chain of equivalences (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) which are felt and lived. The embodied experience of seeing difference is thus part of the affective circulation of fear, hope and repulsion that feature in nationalisms both banal and violent. The retention of the logics of our fields of vision undermines the evidence of there being no biological differences that constitute races.

Race as a signifier, indicates implicitly human worth; the regimes of truth are played out in economies of employment, housing, policing, and governance (Hall, 1999; Hall *et al.* 2013; McPherson, 1999; McKitterick, 2011). The oppressive structures that are institutionally racist, compound the effects of the prejudice against religious and ethnic groups. Within state calls for a singular, loyal citizenry, what is evoked are calls for a recognition of 'the enemy within'; the threats of 'radicalised' Britons and indeed those with legal rights to remain, but who are easily

discounted, betrayed and excluded from British territory and rights to state care (Whitfield, 2006). These rhetorical calls for a return to a golden age (Williams, 1977), depend upon a moral geography of nation and national identity (Matless, 1998; Darby, 2000). The evocation of a singular national sensibility, is what has been critiqued and undermined (Kinsman, 1995; Pollard, 1989; Matless, 1998; Gilroy, 1991; 1993). These enemies within return periodically (Gilroy, 1991), including more recently, the figure of the *radicalized Muslim* (see Heath-Kelly, 2013).

### **Striations of nationalism**

This account of ‘others’ permeates sociological and cultural studies’ own repertoire (Mahmood, 1996). “Symptomatic analyses that explain the success of ethnic and politico-religious movements as signs of socio-cultural disorder, cultural backwardness and/or lack of appropriate modernization, fail to take these movements seriously” (1996: 1). Two problems are identified by Mahmood (1996: 2), firstly that ‘nationalist movements’ are defined in-relation to the West, and often relegated to the realm of ‘backward cultural others’. The second issue is of the blanket characterization of ‘others’, without investigating the historical, political and economic particularity of each case. Instead there is a misrecognition of these movements as fundamentalist, and dependent on notions of cultural and ethnic absolutism. As such, these movements are positioned as other to the disposition of ‘patriotism’; which is an indication of a developed European citizens’ sensibility. The misrecognition positions ‘nationalism’ based on ethnicity or religion as reactionary, in comparison with movements in developing nations in the era of decolonization, which are sanctioned as rightful counter-discourses to colonialism and colonization (Hall, 1993). The argument effectively discerns between ‘other’ nationalisms based on ‘intolerance and difference’, which lead to ethnic cleansing and genocidal violences and those situated in Europe. However in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century it is those very European secular states where there has been violences against religious and/or ethnic groupings (Mahmood, 1996: 6) and in the case of refugees, a total negation of the value of Muslim migrant lives.

Modern European nations could be posited as contact zones (Pratt, 1991) as spaces for continual transculturation. Here, diasporized identities are disassembled and reassembled to form a ‘weave of differences’, that refuse ‘authenticity’, ‘tradition’ and as such narratives of ‘origin’ connected

to blood and soil. The 21<sup>st</sup> century resurgence of nationalism is a response to an imagined threat of syncretic creolization. Although, rather than being experienced at the territory of the colony, the conditions are experienced at the centre of imperial thought and cultural dominance, Europe. Thus, any analysis of the visceral, affective flows between bodies and within nations, requires an understanding of the space of cultural identities as they are *made* and *remade*. There are “complex relations of asymmetrical exchange... such change never takes place on equal terms... relations of cultural difference are also simultaneously relations of power, articulated in structures of hierarchization and subordination” (Hall, 2017: 165). When thinking through the striations of affective nationalism, these striations are inevitably bound to the pain of oppression present in the everyday, and embedded with the histories of transculturation. Nation and nationalisms are fissured with the politics of power, rights and inauthenticity.

## **6. Detachment, disaffection, and other ambivalent affects (Helen F. Wilson and Ben Anderson)**

*I remember... a couple of days after the leave vote there was the European championship that was on... was it the Euro's in France?<sup>viii</sup> And I walked down the Highstreet, like, pushing me son down in the pram, and everyone had their St George flags<sup>ix</sup> in the window. I was looking at them. I was so ashamed of that flag; I don't want to be any part of that and that's how I felt. And you shouldn't be ashamed, you should be proud of where you're from<sup>x</sup>.*

*Aaron, North East England. Autumn 2016*

In the wake of the UK's referendum on EU membership, Aaron recalled a desire to be free from national attachment: ‘I don't want to be any part of that’. Aaron's description of his felt shame reveals the grip of nationalism even while apparently throwing it into question. Despite his statement about his desire to be separate, his shame reveals an ongoing interest.

Shame has long been a concern for work on nationalism, which has asked what the enactment, feeling, and expression of shame does to proximity, the performance of innocence, and our relations to others (c.f. Ahmed, 2004; Higgins, 2018; Povinelli 1998; Probyn, 2005). In this intervention, we start with Aaron's desire for detachment because it raises a series of challenges

for emerging research on the affective spaces and politics of nationalisms. We agree that atmospheres and other collective affects are central to how people perform, attach to, invest in, and are otherwise touched by, varying forms of nationalism. Nationalisms are, have always been, and always will be, affective formations. But in starting with Aaron's desire for detachment we call for greater attention to modes of (non)relating that might be considered compromised in some way. As we suggest, attention to such modes foregrounds the attachments *and* detachments that are central to how people sense forms of nationalism that are ambivalent, politically ambiguous, and not always coherent.<sup>xi</sup>

Attention to affect/s is necessary if we are to understand what it feels like to participate in the performance of nationalisms and apprehend their harms and damages as well as the lure and grip of their promises. Nationalisms are felt as more or less intense affective presences that are occasionally foregrounded, but often part of the background of daily life as they blur with a host of other affects. They are always lived and felt differentially, mediated, as they are, by other affects and structures (Ahmed, 2014). In Aaron's account, the affective presence of nationalism registers as shame in an ordinary scene that summons two national events: an international football tournament and Brexit. His interrupted pride and feelings of shame are occasioned by the sight of St George flags, but are also shaped by a variety of other things, including: normative modes of social belonging that allow him easy access to political forms of (national) identification; shock at the referendum result; conversations with colleagues and tabloid stories; worry for his wife (who was in the process of applying for UK citizenship); and concern for his son's future.

For us, in bringing research on the practices and forms of 'banal nationalism' (Billig, 1995) together with recent interdisciplinary interest in atmospheres, structures of feeling, and other 'unformed objects' (Stewart 2013; cf. Closs-Stephens 2016; Merriman & Jones 2016), the key insight of recent geographical scholarship has been that the material and affective are inseparable. This recent work has sought to stay with the specific relations that exist between the divergent objects, practices, and events of nationalism, as well as the becoming-palpable of what we hesitantly call 'nationalist affects' (hesitant since affects can never be simply identified with a single social-spatial formation).<sup>xii</sup> Such a concern places emphasis on forms of intensification:

how the material and symbolic infrastructures that *are* nationalisms both condition and catalyse specific affects that are folded into lived belonging and forms of identification. An example in the UK might be the annual scenes of commemoration and remembrance – that mark those who served in the two World Wars and later conflicts – through which pasts are enacted as part of a national story of heroism, sacrifice, and stoicism. Through such examples, this approach emphasizes the often-intermittent rhythms of nationalist affects. Yet, we suggest that the emphasis on occasions of intensification – and the scenes and sites of *strong feeling* – risks leaving out a range of more ambivalent and less coherent relations with nationalist formations. It risks overlooking how Aaron’s shame (felt as an unwanted, but intense, attachment or interest) and his desire to not “be any part of that” can coexist with a continued belief that “you should be proud of where you’re from”. The recognition that he should be proud and yet isn’t becomes an occasion for sadness that might be read as a feeling of ‘alienation from the nation by virtue of not being affected in the right way’ (Ahmed 2014, p.26). Yet, his continued interest makes alienation an unsatisfactory narrative as it interrupts the process of detachment and prevents its completion.

In this instance, Aaron’s desire for withdrawal is not quite a refusal; his felt attachment through shame does not challenge the legitimacy of nationalism. Indeed, it demonstrates how hard it can be “to detach from normative forms of the political world” (Berlant 2011, p229). Whilst expressing a desire for detachment, the sadness that tinged the feeling of alienation – the failure to experience pride in something that should elicit it – evidences an inability, perhaps even an unwillingness, to withdraw entirely. Aaron’s memory of how he felt thus depicts a way of relating to the nation that in many ways defies categorization, as it becomes caught up in the noise of a compromised attachment, or an oscillation between attachment and detachment that challenges any clean duality. Understanding the visceral nature of attachment and detachment, and other forms of incoherent, perhaps contradictory, affective relations and practices, may require that work on affective nationalism supplements the vocabulary of emergence and becoming that it has inherited from interdisciplinary work on affect (which takes its leave from Deleuze and Guattari via Massumi). It requires a *differentiated* vocabulary of relations and non-relations. Here we find inspiration from Lauren Berlant’s (2011) mode of inquiry as she tracks and listens to how people drift in and out of attachments to structuring fantasies that are, at once, fraying and difficult to invest in, and sustaining, as they offer a coherent world to hold onto and



be held by (whether it be love and intimacy, the promises of normalcy offered by consumer culture, or secure employment). Much like Aaron's suggestion that nationalism *should* be an occasion for pride, such structuring fantasies reveal normative visions of how things ought to be.

The kinds of mixed feelings Aaron describes and expresses don't quite fit with various stories of a contemporary condition marked by strong affects (despite recalling how he felt 'so ashamed'). Whether an age of anger (Mishra 2017), or the emergence of a culture of fear, new forms of virulent nationalisms powered by strong emotions have been the focus for a range of explanatory accounts that have endeavored to make sense of the turbulent present. In starting from ambivalence and incoherence, work on nationalism is pushed to describe all manner of ways in which people encounter and engage with nationalisms outside of enthusiastic endorsement, outright rejection, or even alienation (c.f. Laketa, 2017 on stickiness and ethno-nationalism in Mostar). This is partly a matter of widening the range of affects that are attuned to in work on nationalisms so as to include politically ambiguous and less spectacular 'minor affects' (Ngai 2005): irritation, unease, disappointment, confidence. But it is also a matter of staying with occasions when nationalist affects fall apart, fail to happen or dwindle. How, for example, do we understand occasions when people are 'left cold' by nationalism or some performative element of it; when they are *released* from a grip?

Of course, there are different registers of (dis)affection – the felt absence of being affected – that connect to, but are not equivalent to, the forms of dissatisfaction that are commonly invoked to make sense of the contemporary condition (cf. Gilbert (2015) on 'disaffected consent' in relation to support for neoliberal policies and programmes in the wake of the financial crisis). In focusing on disaffection, we ask how work can better attend to the oscillation between forms of attachment and detachment that characterize, and sometimes coexist within, people's ordinary relations with nationalism(s). Such a question considers how registers of disaffection might relate to ongoing participation in particular nationalist projects and fantasies, and opens up the possibility for approaching disaffections (such as boredom or indifference) as collective (national) affects that envelope and condition, rather than reducing disaffection to a matter of different individual attunements.

Aaron's recollection of a moment of shame was just one small part of an interview on 'everyday Brexits' that contained a variety of contradictions. In this intervention, we have sought to foreground how such ambivalences pose challenges for how we research affective nationalisms and how we attend to the incoherence and inconsistencies of 'nationalist affects'. In our concern for tracing how nationalist affects surface, fade, and persist in ordinary spaces and situations – whether as shock, resonance, habit, or something far less coherent – we want to push for alternative ways of telling stories about nationalism and the contemporary condition.

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<sup>i</sup> Massumi (2017: 101) draws the concept of the ‘principle of unrest’ from the work of Alfred North Whitehead, who in turn takes it from philosopher Samuel Alexander.

<sup>ii</sup> To fully appreciate this point, it is important to follow Spinoza and Deleuze and to see ‘bodies’ not simply as human or animate bodies. Rather, as Deleuze (1988: 123) explains: ‘In the first place, a body, however small it may be, is composed of an infinite number of particles; it is the relations of motion and rest, of speeds and slownesses between particles, that define a body, the individuality of a body. Secondly, a body affects other bodies, or is affected by other bodies; it is this capacity for affecting and being affected that also defines a body in its individuality’.

<sup>iii</sup> The ‘molar’ and ‘molecular’ should not be thought as binary concepts or as indicators of scale or size, rather they are characterised by their perceptibility, legibility, consistency and ‘segmentarity’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 215, 217, 219). Molar masses are perceptible as representable, identifiable, bounded aggregates or wholes, while molecular forces or segmentations are vital, incessant and imperceptible, traversing and undermining molar imaginations. Both of these tendencies or forces are continually at play in the world, with nations continually being ‘molarised’ and ‘molecularised’ through socio-political actions and forces in the unfolding of events.

<sup>iv</sup> The relationship between Raymond Williams’ concept of ‘structures of feeling’ and writings on ‘affect’ has been explored by Ben Anderson, amongst others (Anderson, 2014).

<sup>v</sup> Lizzie Dearden 1<sup>st</sup> August 2017 “Metropolitan Police use force disproportionately against black people in London, new statistics reveal”. *The Independent* (last accessed July 17<sup>th</sup> 2018).

<sup>vi</sup> <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmhaff/494/494we06.htm> (accessed July 17<sup>th</sup> 2018: Mental health service users also account for 61% of all deaths of those detained by the state, but currently there is no independent body established for investigating these fatalities)

<sup>vii</sup> Black Mental Health UK report submitted to Home Affairs Committee, January 2013 outlines case studies of black patient deaths in mental health custody.

<sup>viii</sup> The UEFA European Championship, international men’s football

<sup>ix</sup> The flag of England

<sup>x</sup> This interview extract is taken from a project on ‘Everyday Brexits’ (Anderson and Wilson 2018; Anderson et al 2019), which examined how Brexit is encountered and related to by people in the North East of England during the impasse between the referendum result and the UK’s exit from the EU. By considering the scenes, signs, figures, and stories that *became* Brexit for different people, the project traces how multiple versions of Brexit coexist. The North East region voted to leave with 58% of the vote. It contains some of the most deprived local authorities in the

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country and was named in a leaked government document as likely to be hardest hit by the government's Brexit strategy. Aaron lives in a former coalmining village.

<sup>xi</sup> We use 'attachment' after Ahmed (2014) and particularly Berlant (2011) to describe a connection that involves a quality of feeling that organises and sustains senses of self and world. Attachments take form in scenes and encounters, and it is through them that we are affected by institutions, forms, and norms. Detachment involves, then, a break or interruption in felt connections, and an opening to other affections (see Edelman & Berlant, 2014).

<sup>xii</sup> By 'nationalist affects' we mean those affects through which the nation becomes present as an imagined-material resource to which people might attach and through which senses of belonging may be enacted.