

GUEST EDITORIAL

Sticky Stories, Fluid Narratives, or Vanishing Tales: The Fate of 'Nations' in a Globalised World

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New foci within Political Geography: from nation states to nations

A main preoccupation within Political Geography has been conflict between nation states. Conflating the notions of 'nation' and 'state', research has tended to focus upon disputes between 'actually existing' sovereign states over territory, borders, ideologies, and resources. In the face of current world events such a focus is surely still of crucial importance. As I write (August 2002), Afghanistan continues to struggle to recover from the 'war on terror' waged by the United States and its allies. Meanwhile, the world holds its breath as George Bush promises to continue this war until there is a 'regime' change in Iraq. All of this is, of course, taking place against the backdrop of the ongoing and bloody feud between Israel and Palestinian resistance movements. Elsewhere, the face off between the India and Pakistan, both nuclear powers, simmers on; Russia and Chechnyan rebel groups continue to clash; the uneasy peace in Northern Ireland stumbles along on a knife edge; and Nepal and Tibet persist in promoting their claims to sovereignty in spite of dire threats from China. One could go on.

It is axiomatic then, that the traditional concerns of political geography continue to be fore-grounded. Nevertheless, in recent years, political geographical research on nations, nationalisms, and national identities, would appear to have charted a novel, if related, avenue of enquiry (Jackson & Penrose, 1993). At the centre of this new and emerging research field has been a relentless scrutiny of the genesis and evolution of the very *idea* of the nation itself. How did the concept of dividing the world into distinctive *nations* come into existence in the first place? If enlightenment reason, the shift from Feudalism to capitalism, and the growth of industrial technologies and associated labour market changes were all crucial, how have nations evolved in the light of the recent post-modern, post-industrial, and post-Fordist challenges? How did the substantive entities we now recognise as *nations* materialise? Challenging a tendency within Political Geography to reify nations – ascribing them some natural and matter of fact ontological existence – core to the new approach has been an exploration of the birth, growth, transformation, and in some cases decline of what Hommi Bhabba (1990, 1994) has referred to as *narratives* of the nation.

In *Imagined communities*, Benedict Anderson (1983) develops a perspective on the birth of the modern nation state which foregrounds the central importance of profound changes in consciousness stretching back some 200 hundred years;

both in terms of the erosion of 'ancient' cultural conceptions, and the formation of 'invented traditions' which furnished populations with a capacity to imagine themselves anew (Hobsbawn & Ranger, 1983). Central to invented traditions are selective forms of amnesia; witnessed in no clearer way than in official constructions of the nation's biography. In the final chapter to the revised edition, entitled *Memory and forgetting*, Anderson (1983) points to the crucial importance of the way in which nations re-examine their past to prove their historical existence (Smith & Jackson, 1999). Inspired by the truism, 'in order for people to control how they define themselves in the present, it is necessary for them to control how they define the past' (Lattas, 1996: 257), the mobilisation of certain kinds of national story telling proves to be centrally implicated in nation building.

All of the papers in this Special Edition are situated, in one way or another, within such a social constructionist approach to nationalism insofar as they regard nations as 'imagined communities', 'narratives', 'invented traditions', and so on which are produced and reproduced by different social and political constituencies in different times and places for different social, political, economic, and cultural ends. Of course, research which treats the nation as a historical construct has traditionally been the provenance of historians, historians of memory, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists interested in nationalism, and cultural theorists. It is not surprising then, to see seminal thinkers from these fields (such as Benedict Anderson, Hommi Bhabba, Michael Billig, Avtar Brah, Ernest Gellner, Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, Eric Hobsbawn, Raphael Samuel, and Steven Vertovec), being routinely drawn upon to frame new geographical studies exploring the genealogies of nations (one thinks of the work of John Agnew, Ash Amin, Kay Anderson, Steven Daniels, Brian Graham, Peter Jackson, Jane Jacobs, Nuala Johnson, Gerry Kearns, Mike Keith, David Matless, Kathryne Mitchell, Catherine Nash, Jan Penrose, James Sidaway, Susan Smith, Gerard Toal and so on to name a few).

Whilst all of the papers in this Special Edition stand as exemplars of the recycling of seminal works on the 'nation as a narrative' into geographical research, they also serve nevertheless, to highlight one dimension in which geographers have actively sought to develop existing conceptual frameworks in new ways – the dimension of globalisation. As the inexorable growth in global interchanges of people, goods, capital, information, and so on shrinks the world to the metaphorical pin head, questions have arisen as to the impact of contemporary processes of globalisation upon the production and reproduction of narratives of the nation. For some, nations are best thought of as *sticky stories*; having sufficient tenacity to survive and thrive in the global village. Why else would conflicts between nation states such as those identified above remain so potent? For others, nations have outlived their usefulness and in place of the *vanishing tales* that once energised nations have arisen new, if medieval like, forms of territorial identification. Finally, against those who would argue that globalisation has marked the death of the 'nation', some geographers contend that biographies of the nation are simply undergoing a metamorphosis – nations are best thought of as *fluid narratives*. Globalisation processes have merely reworked and transformed national narratives to breath new life into them for the new world in which they have to serve.

Each of the papers in this Special Edition seek to embed historically and geographical distinctive 'nations' within their appropriate global habitats and each tells a different story about nations as sticky stories, fluid narratives, and/or vanishing tales. The wider contribution of this Special Edition then, resides in the degree to which the papers included herein help to consolidate and extend existing work within Political Geography on the impact of globalisation on the imagined communities of the nation. Given the clarity of the core arguments advanced in each of the papers, the purpose of the remainder of this brief introduction is *not* to present a resumé of the individual contributions. Instead, an effort will be made to signpost a number of contexts which readers might find productive to hold in mind whilst reading across all five papers. Of course the contributions contained herein display a wide range of analytic approaches, objects of analysis, and case study materials. In providing readers with a number of vantage points from which to view the collection in its entirety nonetheless, the intention is to stimulate thinking about the range of cross cutting themes which help the collection to hang together despite its diversity.

Three contexts in particular will be introduced as of generic importance. First, attention might be given to the ways in which the increased embeddedness of 'in situ' national communities in trans-national networks has radically altered the scales at which people negotiate their primary identities. Here, the global goes local. Second, attention might be given to links between memory, nationality, and identity in past and present *diasporic* communities. Here, the local goes global. Narratives of the nation might be conceived of as undergoing a transformation as they are filtered through different diasporic worlds. A final theme which might usefully be flagged up is the *changing modes* of narrating the nation which accompany both of the above forms of globalisation. In particular, attention might be given to the *shifting importance* of the concepts of memory and history as vehicles of narration.

The global goes local: the global quarry from which nations are sculpted

No nation is an island. The sculptors of all nations are embedded with a particular global context and the fruits of their labours always have to be interpreted relative to this context. Stemming from this observation, a great deal of attention has recently been paid to the manner in which the post-oil crises (post 1973) globalisation of capital, embodied most visibly in the rise of transnational corporations and the development of media technologies, is serving to shape the canvas upon which nations were once etched. The muscle and power of the world economy over weakened and vulnerable nation states indeed, has been used by some to assert a certain death for the latter. Nation states it would seem, are becoming ever yet more toothless in the wake of bruising and bullying global corporations, and their original social, cultural, and economic reasons for existence are appearing daily yet more anachronistic.

Among those studies of the tumultuous re-scalings of governance that mark the contemporary world economy, Jessop's (1995) thesis – that the state is currently being 'hollowed out' – stands as the most lucid. According to Jessop, globalisation is creating an imperative for the formation of supra-national

political institutions (EU, NAFTA, ASEAN, LAIA, etc.) – as capital goes global so too must governance if it is to continue to have any leverage. At the same time, in so far as it is leaving markedly different economic conditions in different regions of countries in its wake, globalisation is also stimulating demands for devolution and a rise of sub national, regional and urban structures of governance. The consequence of this combined ‘pincer’ threat from above and below is a sidelining of the central state itself and a rise in multi-level governance. Indeed, according to James Anderson (1995) the spectre of multi-level governance that is currently crystallising out is so eroding national sovereignty that we are witnessing a reversal back to a medieval system of governance based upon a series of overlapping and sliding layers of authority.

Of course, Jessop’s (1995) thesis concerns the scaling of state form. Whilst rescaling the institutional fabric of the state can in itself be a source of bloodshed (witness the workings of Euro-sceptics all over Europe at the moment), a parallel re-scaling of territorial identification and affiliation is clearly a much more difficult enterprise again. There would appear to be considerable inertia to attachments to the imagined communities of the nation, and creating new imagined communities (of continental blocks or regions for instance), to legitimate and naturalise the new emerging scales of economic governance, is proving far from easy (Sidaway, 2002). The apparatus of state governance might be reverting to a *medieval* form, but such a shift continues to be frustrated by very *modern* attachments to narratives of nations.

How do the papers contained herein speak to these debates? In her account of the role of global governmentality in the shaping of the lives of poor migrants in Quito, Ecuador, Lawson’s paper addresses debates about the metamorphosis of territorial identifications in the wake of contemporary rescalings in the scaffold of economic governance. Arguing that the power of the Ecuadorian state is being corroded as a result of its collusion with supra-national bodies such as the WTO, the IMF, the World Bank and so on, Lawson chooses to focus upon the shifting territorial allegiance of poor ‘internal’ migrants in Quito. Her analysis points out that whilst indigenous elites wish to relocate narratives of Ecuadorian nationalism within a global neo-liberal paradigm, migrants caught up in the residues of economic liberalisation have established heightened territorial allegiances to rural regions of origin.

Whilst Lawson’s paper can be read as a direct contribution to literature on the fate of national identification, in the wake of the post 1973 restructuring of the world economy, the four remaining papers meanwhile, provide a salutary reminder that contemporary globalisation processes reflect merely the latest phase in a wide range of globalisation projects that have served to shape the production and reproduction of national narratives. For instance, the Irish case studies confirm the importance of the British imperial project to Ireland’s historic and contemporary sense of itself. More generally, one has to look no further than Robert Mugabe’s fiery rhetoric and dramatic political activities in Zimbabwe at present, to appreciate the fact that many post-imperial liberation nationalisms continue to define themselves in relation to their colonial heritages (Van der Veer, 1995; Brah, 1996; Harney, 1996; and Raj, 1997). Indeed, beyond Western European and Japanese imperial projects, similar processes of nation building

can be evidenced too in a number of post-communist nationalisms (Kolsto, 1996; Skrbis, 1997; Smith *et al.*, 1998; Lieven, 1999; Smith & Jackson, 1999).

Related to but going deeper than the various imperial legacies of western capitalist and Soviet command economies, Bonnett's paper meanwhile represents a particularly sophisticated reading of the role of conceptions of the West in the forging of national identities in the Asian Occident. Whilst a timely theme given contemporary geopolitical tensions between 'Western Christianity' and 'Eastern Islam', this article draws upon the more historical writings of Japanese Westerniser and nationalist Fukuzawa Yukichi and the Turkish nationalist and critical proponent of Westernisation, Ziya Gökalp. Looking at the construction of the West, outside of the West, and the ways in which these constructions were therein put to use in the articulation of narratives of Turkish and Japanese nationalism, Bonnett seeks to highlight how the rise of the West as an idea, represents yet another crucially important globalising project against which national biographies in the East have been articulated.

The papers contained in this collection then, would appear to reiterate the need for a much deeper historical geography of global economic and political integration. To be sure nations are undergoing all sorts of rehabilitations, modernisations, and transformations under this latest round of global economic restructuring. It is clear nonetheless, that globalisation, and its attendant affects on narratives of nations, has a longer heritage (with European colonisation and the rise of Western liberal democracies being mere exemplars). If the latest phase of globalisation in which we are living is raising questions about the survival and metamorphosis of narratives of the nation, then it is clear that a deeper understanding of antecedent global formations and configurations of power is required if the genesis and initial shaping of nations is to be properly understood.

The local goes global: making and escaping nations in diasporas

Populations in situ not only have to formulate new understandings of the place of their nation in the world in the light of becoming caught up in networks of global capital, commodity flows, geo-political and imperial projects, media messages, and so on. Challenges to the integrity of national identities derive also from the growth of international migration. Mobility and 'dwelling in displacement' (Clifford, 1994), often in the far reaches of the world, must be considered to have a significant influence on processes of nation building. In particular, among those nations that have large diasporic communities (Jewish, Irish, Polish, Carribean, Chinese, Lithuanian, Scottish, and so on), attention needs to be given to the ways in which national biographies become bolstered, rejigged, recalibrated, and transformed in the new worlds into which diasporians have settled.

Using one of the oldest, largest, and longest established diasporic worlds as an exemplar, the Irish/Ulster diaspora, three of the papers in this Special Edition take up this theme of the impact of global migration patterns on the sculpting of nations. Whilst Mulligan's focus is upon the role of Irish America (specifically the Eastern sea-board Irish) in the development of late nineteenth century Irish nationalism, Walter *et al.* choose to focus upon contemporary Irish national identities in the English town of Banbury. Recognising that up to one third of the

70 million people around the world at present who claim to be of Irish descent are Protestant, and often Ulster Scotch in origin, Ní Laoire meanwhile, seeks to decipher the schisms of national identity which exist within migrants from Northern Ireland currently living in England.

Reflecting broader trends within literature on diaspora, the concept of cultural hybridity is foregrounded in all three papers. Employing such highly spatialised metaphors as borderzones, diaspora spaces, interstitial spaces, third-time spaces, liminal spaces and so on, diaspora literature has the potential to furnish geographers with conceptual tools which might prove helpful in their attempts to explore how diasporic communities can be conceived as places where different stories – different *narratives* of nations, regions, cities, neighbourhoods, and peoples – creolise and hybridise. In these moments of hybridisation, *sticky stories* might consolidate their grip (there are no greater patriots than disaffected exiles) and *vanishing tales* might betray a transcendence of national affiliation (perhaps even leading to new post-national or cosmopolitan cultural attachments). Most frequently however, *fluid narratives* will bear testimony to the process of an ongoing reconstitution of understandings of national historiographies and identities.

In the hands of some authors, notable Hommi Bhabba, the notion of hybridity is invested with a very grand political significance – in the borderzones of diaspora groups, oppressed by the national narrative (women, gays, lesbians, children and so on) can emancipate themselves and establish new forms of belonging (Bromley, 2000). Freedom to experiment beyond the rigid and suffocating categorisations imposed by national biographies facilitates the production of new and liberating identities. Whilst there is certainly merit in locating the motivation for pursuing research on hybridity from this political perspective, critics have warned against the simplistic equation of hybridity with emancipation. In a polemic against what she refers to as the ‘hype of hybridity’ Mitchell (1997) notes the need for concrete case studies to demonstrate how hybrid cultural aspirations can energise real struggles on the ground and effect changes which deliver concrete benefits. Likewise, warning against the uncritical celebration of the political potential of hybridity, Coombes & Brah (2000) call for a Foucauldian style genealogy of the notion to reveal its multiple uses and meanings both past and present. Only when one gains an appreciation of the variety of institutions who have used the discourse of hybridity to secure power and extend influence does one get a glimpse of the dangers of celebrating the conventional usage of the term in an uncritical way.

To their credit, the three contributions offered herein demonstrate a sensitivity to the need to avoid too casual an engagement with the politics of hybrid identities. Indeed, by employing Avtar Brah’s (1996) concept of diaspora space, Walter *et al.* and Ní Laoire in particular surely point to fruitful ways of thinking through the political significances of hybridity. According to Brah (1996), the places within which diasporic communities settle would be better conceptualised if treated as *diaspora spaces*. Of crucial importance in this conception is the treatment of the biographies of diasporic subjects as intimately inter-woven with indigenous populations. As the trajectories of both settlers and indigenes become imbricated in one another, so too the significance of these

labels wanes. For Brah (1996: 209), the notion of diaspora space implies 'the entanglement, the intertwining of the genealogies of dispersion with those 'staying put'. The diaspora space is the site where *the native is as much a diasporan as the diasporan is the native*'. The implications of this claim vary according to the scale of analysis; in the Irish case, for instance, it might be equally legitimate to think of either whole countries (United States, Australia, Britain) or cities (New York, Melbourne and Liverpool) as diaspora spaces.

The entanglement of a multiplicity of biographies in diaspora spaces needs to be conceptualised as simultaneously being mediated by what Brah (1996) refers to as different modalities of power. Brah (1996) invokes the concept of *multi-axial power* to refer to the manner in which different modalities of power (principally, class, race, gender, ethnicity, nationalism, generation and sexuality) intersect in diasporic spaces. Diasporic communities are organised around different modalities of power and in the course of settlement are inserted into prevailing modalities of power in indigenous communities. The result is that diasporic communities can be marginalised along one modality of power but can be privileged in relation to another. This notion – that the binaries insider/outsider, majority/minority, and exclusion/inclusion need to be understood as being complicated by the multiple social relations which exist both within and between diasporic and indigenous populations – has found its way into literature on the Irish diaspora in the work of a number of feminist scholars (Walter, 2001; Gray, 2000). It serves well to draw attention to the power relations which both enhance and restrict the capabilities of different social groups to escape the straightjacket of national identities.

The ingredients of narratives: memories and histories

Given the recent surge of academic interest in the notion of memory, some commentators have expressed concern that memory is threatening to become one of those sexy 'coat pegs' upon which authors increasingly feel impelled to hang their work. The concept of 'social' or 'collective' memory in particular, has been the subject of much debate in forums as divergent as the discourse-analytic turn within Social Psychology (Middleton & Edwards, 1990), historical studies of memory (Samuel, 1994 – see also the special issues of the journals *Representations* (Davis & Starn, 1989) and *The Journal of American History* (Thelan, 1989)), anthropology (see the special edition of *Oceania* (Lattas, 1996)), and Theatre and Film Studies (see the special edition of *New Formations* (Carter & Hirschkop, 1996)). In a somewhat polemical critique of what he identifies as a 'new memorial consciousness' in the academy, Klein (2000) bemoans the manner in which less trendy terms like 'history', 'remembering', 'retention', 'recall', 'myth', and 'ideology' are being displaced by ill-defined concepts like 'memory', 'social memory', and 'collective memory' – without any apparent analytic benefit. Locating the growth of 'memory talk' in the context of a broader crisis in historical representation, Klein (2000: 145) lauds the manner in which memory has gained currency only because it 'figures as a therapeutic alternative to historical discourse'.

These reservations notwithstanding, it is clear that reflections on the content of narratives of the nation, the raw material from which national biographies are

constructed, are nevertheless increasingly making use of the concept of memory (see for instance studies of the place of memories of the Great War (1914-1919) in Canadian, Australian, American, and British nationalisms (Fussell, 1992; Winter 1996; Vance, 1997; King, 1998), and memories of the Holocaust within the Zionist movement (Young, 1994; Wiedmer, 1999; Novick, 2000; Zertal, 2000)). Of particular interest here is the changing relevance of different kinds of nationalist commemorative practice – from history through to memory – in each of the two forms of globalisation introduced above. As globalisation proceeds, does memory – in relation say to formal academic history – become more or less significant as a vehicle for carrying narratives of the nation between generations? As the global goes local, and/or the local goes global, can one discern a qualitatively significant shift in the importance of different *methodologies* of narration.

The work of Pierre Nora, arguably the greatest historian of French nationalism, might provide a starting point when addressing these questions.¹ Nora draws a distinction between what he refers to as *milieux de mémoire* (living memory), *lieux de mémoire* ('merely' sites of memory), and *history*. Living memory according to Nora is 'unself-conscious, commanding, all powerful, spontaneously actualising', and a feature most clearly found in the 'so called primitive or archaic societies' (Nora, 1989: 7). History in contrast, represents a critical and formalised investigation of the past. Nora's interests lie in theorising the links between what he calls the 'acceleration of history' and the 'flaring up of memories'. For Nora, the anxiety to register for posterity that accompanies rapid social and economic change brings a greater reflexivity and historical consciousness. In times of flux, memory 'crystallises and secretes itself' in a number of *lieux de mémoire*. *Lieux de mémoire* privilege history over memory, and memories come to be besieged, conquered, tyrannised and eradicated by history: 'What we call memory today is therefore not memory but already history. What we take to be flare-ups of memory are in fact its final consumption in the flames of history' (Nora, 1989: 13). Against the backdrop of the restless landscapes of global capitalism, Nora's thesis is that *lieux de mémoire* look less like 'memory' and more like 'history'.

Nora's distinctions then, between professional history, lay memory or *milieux de mémoire*, and organised cultural productions (museums, festivals, music, cinemas, literature, monuments and so on) or *lieux de mémoire*, provides an interesting framework within which to consider the actual mechanics through which nations get produced, transmitted, regulated, and consumed. Biographies of nations might be thought of as reflecting the interlacing of all three forms of commemorative practice in particular places at particular times. It is this interlacing that proves to be constitutive of the structuration of 'nations' through time and across space. Such a perspective indeed forms the cornerstone of Walter *et al.*'s paper, but it is omnipresent in all of the contributions, albeit with different emphases given to each type of methodology of narration. In so far as they base their analysis of feelings of national identity on migrants' oral history testimonies for instance, Lawson and Ní Laoire, focus upon the *milieux de mémoires* through which nations are carried. In contrast, Bonnett's reflections upon the scholarly, literary and political tracts of Fukuzawa Yukichi and Ziya Gökalp, and

Mulligan's study of the political writings of such Irish nationalists as Michael Davitt and Charles Kickham, and the publication of Irish American Newspapers like the *Irish World* in contrast, err more on the side of lieux de mémoire and the narratives of professional historians.

Whilst each of the papers study different methodologies of narration, none explicitly focus upon the shifting relationships between professional history, most often state sponsored lieux de mémoire, and lay lieux de mémoire under globalisation. Referring in part to studies of the genesis, reproduction and transformation of 'nations.', Klein (2000: 126) makes a telling point when he observes:

In preface after preface, an author declares that it would be simplistic to imagine memory and history as antitheses and then proceeds to use the words in antithetical ways in the body of the monograph. Such disclaimers have little effect on the ways in which words work. Where history is concerned, memory increasingly functions as an antonym rather than synonym, contrary rather than complimentary, and replacement rather than supplement.

It might be worthwhile ending then, with a plea for students of the various forms of time consciousness that constitute narratives of nations to tease out the kinds of distinctions Nora offers and to reflect upon the analytic significance of the shifting relationships between each in different phases of and forms of globalisation.

Note

1. Whilst this paper draws upon the 1989 translation of Nora's work in the journal *Representations*, interested readers should note that Nora's full work on *Les Lieux de Mémoire* has now been translated into English and appears as the three-volume *Realms of Memory*.

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