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The Future of Nationalism in a Transnational World

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Introduction: In and Out of Globalization

A few times in the past, a chorus of voices have claimed the imminent demise of nationalism: shortly after industrialization, Marx, Engels and others envisioned a permanent solution to the national question through the super-synthesis of proletarian internationalism.¹ After 1917, Lenin nuanced this belief by incorporating the principle of national self-determination within a supranational Communist political order (Connor 1984). Then, an even more crass and dogmatic neoliberal ideology prematurely announced the “end of history”, while preaching and celebrating extreme deregulation as the herald of a new era of peace and placidity in a world without conflict (Block 2018).

The key question considered in this chapter is not rhetorically intended: What is the future of nationalism? Rather than venturing into hard to prove conjectures, the chapter explores the intense changes at every level of politics and society since the inception of nationalism. It is organized into three chronological sequences: (i) the advent of modernity, arising from the combination of industrialization, science and the French Revolution, therefore merging the economic, cultural, and political spheres, (ii) the uncertain age of neoliberal globalization when, again, culture, politics, and economics merge and combine in an ill-defined mix, and, finally, (iii) the rapidly approaching and fast moving age of the Anthropocene, a new geological epoch shaped by human agency and intervention on an unprecedentedly massive and disruptive scale. At each stage the role and repositioning of nationalism is assessed.

Overall, the chapter looks at the changes and persistence of nationalism and what it means for the future of politics – and for humankind.²

The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism, First Edition.
Edited by John Stone, Rutledge Dennis, Polly Rizova, and Xiaoshuo Hou.
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Future Past: Modernity as the Midwife of Nations

Most studies identify nationalism as an outcome of the modern age independently of how the latter is circumscribed, whether it is defined as the age of industrialism (Gellner 1983), the age of cognitive and scientific revolution (Greenfeld 1992; 2013) or, as is most usual, a political movement initiated either by the French Revolution (Conversi 2012b; Hobsbawm 1990; Wimmer 2002) or by those it inspired (Brubaker 1989) – or the state-building centralization that preceded and accompanied it (Wimmer 2002).

Anthony D. Smith (Smith 1996; 1998) systematically criticized the predominance of modernity-oriented approaches, which he referred to as “modernism“. For Smith, the ancient ethnic origins of nations and nationalism dominate contemporary mass politics, while their roots reach deeply back into the pre-national past via their predecessors, the *ethnies*. These are pre-political communities shaped, like nations, by a belief in myths of common descent and a past golden age, but deprived of a political project *qua* ethnic communities. This approach has been comprehensively defined as *ethnosymbolism* (Leoussi and Grosby 2007).³

Since Smith’s groundbreaking studies, more researchers have attempted to further dismantle the modernist approach, with study after study moving backward in time, sometimes in Smith’s footsteps, in a strenuous effort to demonstrate the most ancient, and possibly perennial, chronological dateline possible. Many have since highlighted the pre-modern roots of specific nationalist movements and of nationalism in general.

Among those who began early on to date nationalism to before the French Revolution, Liah Greenfield (1992) identified the intersection between the English Puritan Revolution and Enlightenment thought as being the originating moment of nationalism. Before her, Ben Anderson (1983) had famously connected it to the revolution in communications generated by the emergence of print capitalism, aligned with Luther’s Reformation.

As the ethno-symbolic approach slowly became more widely endorsed, the tide moved further backwards to the early modern Dutch revolt against Spain in the Netherlands (Gorski 2000), Italian Humanism in the Renaissance (Hirschi 2012), Europe’s Medieval *Regna*, *Gentes* at the fraternity, guild, parish, and neighborhood levels as kin-like collectivities (Reynolds 1997), the translation of the Bible into English and other vernaculars (Hastings 1997), the role of sacred scriptures and holy texts in the formation of ancient Israel as the prototypical nation around 500 BCE (Goodblatt 2006) – ceremonially confirmed by the political use of archeological excavations (Killebrew 2010), and choosing increasingly more ancestral times. Nearly all of these interpretations brought Smith’s ethno-symbolic approach to its ultimate conclusion, placing the origins of nationalism further and further back in time sometimes to the level of hyperbole, leading to a collapse of the perennial into the primordial.

Many of the above studies are indebted to Smith’s (2003) concept of God’s “chosen peoples”, that is, communities which see themselves as elected by divine mandate or manifest destiny and hence feel foreordained to implement an earthly collective utopia. As David Martin (Martin 2014a; 2014b) convincingly suggests, religion played a central role in all of these pre-modern interpretations – but without necessarily disproving the role of nationalism as a “secular religion”.

Inevitably, approaches concentrating on the pre-modern essence of nations tend to focus on the literate elites. In fact, in several epochs and latitudes, elites sharing a common scriptural language and holy texts interacted in a way that led them to see themselves as belonging to a highly selected, God-chosen community. However, only with contemporary meaning can we *post facto* redefine many of these elites as “incipient nations”. Nationalism is usually better identified as a popular, mass phenomenon, rather than as an elite or elitist movement (Connor 2004; Conversi 2006b).

A key consequence of this demotic, mass aspect is the way political legitimacy is assigned as a core ingredient to discriminate the modern from the pre-modern. In comparison to previous God-bestowed legitimacy, political legitimacy needs now to be grounded on the principle of popular sovereignty, which demands that political leaders represent the people, rather than exclusive elites or corporate interests.

Empirically, a mass phenomenon such as this requires literacy and relatively widespread written intercommunication skills using a single language or code (Gellner 1983). This could hardly occur before the modern age. If we omit approaches focusing on micro-communities such as the elites, the historical record confirms that nationalism chiefly arose from the French Revolution, spreading throughout Europe, and far beyond, alongside Napoleon’s *Grande Armée*. Napoleonic incursions led to the reactive rise of German nationalism and subsequently to the Franco–Prussian wars; while colonial empires expanded, nationalism culminated with World War I and its sequel, fascism, with ethnic nationalism reaching as far east as Japan.

A modernity-oriented approach is thus not of limited importance to nationalism scholars. Its implications go far beyond academic disquisitions on the origins of nations; they lie at the very heart of most crucial societal developments of the modern age and are related to the rise of nation-states.

On the other hand, the notion of modernity as a partner of nationalism is interspersed with a constellation of unpleasant connotations. In the footsteps of Hannah Arendt and the Frankfurt School, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1989) described the Holocaust as the ultimate test and a full manifestation of modernity – as the *truth*, rather than a *possibility* that modernity contains, and as “a legitimate resident in the house of modernity” (Bauman 1989: 17). Genocide scholars often distinguish colonial/imperial genocides from nationalist/state-led genocides (Crook and Short 2014; Levene 2014; Moses 2005; 2010; Short 2016). They have tended to regard the latter as an eminently modern phenomenon: the trend began with the Young Turks’s archetypal Armenian genocide of 1915 (Akçam 2012; 2013; SunyGöçek et al. 2011; Üngör 2011) and lasted until the most recent massacres and genocides committed against the Yazidis in Iraq (2014) and the Rohingya in Burma (2017). All, including the most viscerally anti-Western, seem openly or tacitly to follow the homogenizing example of the Westernizing nation-state: the philosopher John Gray has outlined that even apparently anti-modern ideologies and movements act within the framework of Westernizing modernity and are inconceivable outside its impact (Gray 2003). For some, like the Indian political historian Pankaj Mishra, the roots of nationalist radicalization are to be found in the Enlightenment’s propensity to think in binary oppositions as this spread throughout the globe via colonialism (Mishra 2017). Accordingly, Westernization played a key role in the spread of ultra-nationalist and socialist modernism across the span of continents and ideologies, particularly during the Cold War – as in the case of Ethiopia (Kebede 2008). Taking heed

from Friedrich Nietzsche, Mishra argues that Westernization lies at the core of the current wave of global “*ressentiment*”. In fact, for Nietzsche, those who embrace petty nationalism have unmistakable personality traits:

They are all men of *ressentiment*, physiologically unfortunate and worm-eaten, a whole tremulous realm of subterranean revenge, inexhaustible and insatiable in outbursts against the fortunate and happy, and in masquerades of revenge and pretexts for revenge: when would they achieve the ultimate, subtlest, sublimest triumph of revenge? (Nietzsche 2010: 124).

Genocide has also been linked to international war (Winter 1989; 2003). This brings us to war as a state-making machine (Malešević 2010; Tilly 1985) and Hutchinson in this book). Although Tilly also refers to absolutism and the war of religions, the nationalism of the nation-state lies at the core of his explanations, as war-making becomes a functional appendix to state-making (Tilly 1996).⁴ Ernest Gellner (1983), who saw nationalism as a semi-spontaneous structural response to the spread of industrialism, missed such a war-coercion component – although coercion was tangentially touched upon in some of his other books (see Gellner 1988).⁵

A key problem, as I will argue, is that “modernity” is an increasingly controversial concept. As Bruno Latour (2002) has suggested, perhaps “we have never been modern”. In this light, modernism itself can be seen as an ideology – the very ideology which, assisted by nationalism, has informed nearly every aspect of political and cultural life over the last two centuries (Conversi 2012b).

What does all of this hold for “the now”, for the very moment in which our future is being shaped? Have we moved away from these extreme forms of nationalism and been able to develop more moderate expressions of patriotism?

Certainly, nationalism’s historical record and itinerary holds, I argue, important lessons for the future.

Future Present: Globalization and its Discontents

A long-held refrain reiterates that we live in an increasingly “globalized” world. The term “globalization” has often been used as a broad indicator to encompass a vast array of, often parallel, phenomena ranging from patterns of cultural behavior and consumption to mass migration, from international commercial exchanges to mass tourism and augmented travel opportunities, from the internet to the building of supranational institutions, such as the UN and the EU. Given this formidable conceptual span and resultant confusion, it is no surprise that the field of “globalization studies” has performed poorly in terms of both causal and explanatory powers (Conversi 2010). In comparison, the field of “nationalism studies” has been favored by a more pronounced definitional and conceptual clarity, thanks to the work of important precursors like Walker Connor (1994). The reason for this mismatch, I argue, is to be found in the fact that most scholars began to study nationalism about two centuries after it had emerged onto the political scene, while globalization studies are struggling to make sense of a phenomenon still in the making.

Recently, however, it has become acceptable to identify a variety of cultural and economic changes occurring under the umbrella term “neoliberal globalization” as lying at the root of current political upheavals, in particular the rise of far right nationalism (Milačić and Vuković 2017). In fact, the idea of globalization as a harbinger of ethno-national conflicts had been firmly anticipated from a variety of perspectives (Barber 1995; Chua 2003; Conversi 2006a; 2009; 2010; 2014a; Gray 1998; James and Nairn 2006; Kaldor 2004; Nairn and James 2005), while for others globalization was a conflict-ridden predatory process (Crouch 2011; Crouch, Eder et al. 2001; Smith 2006; Steger 2005). These were, however, *de rigueur* exceptions that scarcely affected the negationist nucleus of globalization studies, still largely operating within a stable modernist framework. Only quite recently have capitalist injunctions been tackled, suggesting a reversal back to the celebrated experience of the post-World War II era with a call to re-build global institutions and re-embrace a sort of New Deal (Block 2018).

What is less clear is whether we actually live in a “globalized” world. In other words, to what extent and how truly transnational, cross-national, multinational is the world we live in? Once we move from a consideration of the top tier of globalization “practitioners” (corporate, business, media and political elites) down to the bottom of the social ladder, we may see a different picture. Living and believing in globalization is not quite the same thing. The vast movement of people, information and merchandise we have witnessed over the last few decades cannot be said to be broadly pluri-directional, as claimed by globalization “practitioners”. It can be, and mostly is, painfully uni-directional – as was the case with the history of other empires that carved zones of influence.

This uni-directional expansion occurs specifically in the area of culture. Since culture shapes nearly all aspects of human interaction and the molding of societies, cultural globalization cannot be dismissed as irrelevant. It is not just one of the forms in which globalization may materialize, but the leading one.

In this area, uni-directionality has become the norm: that is, the movement has been from point A simultaneously to points B, C, D, E, G, etc. but not, or only minimally, from, or to, any of the other points – except *from* (but not *to*) A. A stands for “America” (in a semantic coup, US elites have successfully appropriated the name of an entire continent) and the remaining letters stand for the rest of the world. This gargantuan flow of “exchanges” from only one point of the “net” to the other points may reveal a lack of actual transactions, tradeoffs and swaps between groups and individuals not situated along the American super-highway – which, by definition, has been built to speed up the circulation of US entertainment and consumer products to the other formerly “national” markets. The traffic between these points is asymmetric and, at best, uneven. To simplify the matter, and depending on how we define cultural globalization, the latter can be considered (or not) as fully overlapping with Americanization. This goes far beyond the truism that “even a longer network remains local at all points” (Latour 2002), as the unevenness has implications for both sides of the asymmetric relationship.

In fact, insofar as the US is a demonstrable exception in the global market of cultural production and distribution, US exceptionalism may not only be “justifiable”, but a response to an actual ranking embedded in a myriad of tacitly accepted patterns and practices. This inescapable perception also accompanies the

international corporate voyages of many businessmen, CEOs, media operatives and politicians, as well as other US citizens. In these tours across the US borders, they observe the incomparable span of American cultural reach and clearly perceive the sublime splendor and “magnificence” of their unrivalled “empire” – now the only existing one. The tacit feedback is an augmented sense of self-importance, a ubiquitous feeling of being at the centre of the world, just as such “irresistible” prominence and overwhelming ranking is being confirmed by the *vox populi* across the globe – and in nearly every field of culture, particularly mass popular culture (De Grazia 2005). This tangible cultural supremacy nurtures and feeds into an expanding sense of WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant)-centered exceptionalism, which was well documented long before Trump’s Presidency (Lieven 2004).

The phenomenon of global cultural dominance remains, however, rarely analysed within current theories of nationalism, although it lies at the root of the original input of “cultural studies” as a self-standing discipline as intended by its founder, Richard Hoggart (1957). Hoggart anticipated the broader social critique of cultural globalization by identifying the demise of working class popular culture in Britain through the ubiquitous imposition of American mass culture, mostly through the media and advertising.

As one ventures into a study of the relationship between nationalism and globalization, confusion lingers. A highly idealized view of globalization as the ideological container for an infinite variety of multi-directional, pluri-cultural and multinational networks has precluded both historical and theoretical investigations from advancing significantly, leading to interdisciplinary inconsistency and conceptual incongruity. A pluralist or “hybridization” view is largely a barrier to the historical identification and analysis of the spread of dominant cultural patterns.

The apparent “transnational” dimension is easily envisioned through the example of the internet, the quintessential non-territorial network supposedly populated by individuals, groups and virtual communities liberally interacting of their own free will. Globalization ideologues championed the capacity of the internet to act as a tool for the unencumbered transmission of knowledge. They saw the lack of online regulation as a badge of liberty and democracy, as they did in respect of broader forms of cultural and economic, including financial, deregulation.

Globalization studies have generally failed to look into the darkest recesses of the internet. Besides the pioneering, but initially solitary, work of Benedict Anderson (1992) on “long-distance nationalism” (LDN), few have noted how unconstrained online communication had fomented and exacerbated radical nationalism (Conversi 2012a).

Yet, information and knowledge are two distinct things: information can include misinformation, propaganda, denial, fake news, and the deliberate distortion of reality – as massively experienced online. Cambridge Analytica data mining, Facebook manipulation, cyber spying and rigged elections, climate change denial and the frontal attack on science: these have all brought into question the capacity of the internet to serve as a tool for the dissemination of knowledge. Knowledge is not power, but it is empowering; lies can be powerful, but are disempowering.

Scientific knowledge, in particular, is supposed to travel faster than before, but, at the same time, new findings struggle to transcend the small circles in which they

originate and develop. Conversely, recent research has shown that false claims or fake news travel six times faster, and wider, than true facts and scientifically verifiable information (Vosoughi, Roy et al. 2018).⁶ Moreover, while the top 1% of false news reached up to 100 000 people, each item of verifiable news rarely reached over 1000 readers. Furthermore, Twitter falsities were 70% more likely to be re-tweeted than truths. The effect of the overwhelming dominance of fake news over verifiable facts points to an incomparable amplification of ignorance and manipulation, on the heels of the destruction of public broadcasting by neoliberal (de)regulation. Societies become inhabited by ignoramuses unable to perform the simplest intellectual task or, as in the science fiction movie *Idiocracy*, having lost all contact with nature to the point of forgetting that they can drink water, since this is wholly replaced by a “popular” soft drink.

Nationalism, whether or not supported by symbols of ethnic descent, plays a key role in this massive decline in the transmission of knowledge, as opposed to mere information. The result is a form of “nebulous nationalism”, a galaxy of ambiguously patriotic and/or xenophobic movements gravitating around US exceptionalism (Stone and Christodoulaki 2018).⁷ After Latour’s (2002) suggestion that “we have never been modern”, we should perhaps add that “we have never been global”.

Is it possible to speculate that nationalism will continue to remain, perform, and be experienced in the same way as it has in the past? How much has nationalism changed, how much is it changing, and how much will it change in the future? No answer is possible without first considering the new scenario that presumes a radical change in the conception of nations and nationalism beginning with the twenty-first century.

Future Uncertain: Entering the *Anthropocene*, Forecasting the Unknown

In recent decades, research across nearly all scientific disciplines has revealed with a rapidly expanding quantity of data that the current growth-based economic model is not only unsustainable, but responsible for the gravest crisis that humankind has ever had to confront. Already by 2013, over 97% of the world’s scientists, across disciplines, agreed about the anthropogenic causes of climate change – that is, human patterns of mass consumption and consequent environmental depletion are clearly at the root of the emerging catastrophic scenario (Cook et al. 2013).

There is also an increasing consensus across most disciplines that we have entered a new geological epoch characterized by the deep impact of human activity and patterns of consumption and waste. The neologism *Anthropocene* was coined by Earth scientists Paul Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000), to describe the irreversible human imprint on the geological surface and ecosystems of the Earth (Davies 2016; Waters et al. 2016).

Less consensus exists about the exact date when this gargantuan shift began (Zalasiewicz, Waters et al. 2015). Until a few years ago, there was limited consensus dating the onset of the Anthropocene to c.1750–1800, with the commencement of the burning of fossil fuels for industry (Malm 2014; Steffen, Grinevald et al. 2011).⁸ A less speculative way of defining the Anthropocene is to consider the rapid increase

in greenhouse gas emissions. The huge intensification in the consumption of fossil fuels since the 1960s in the West and the 1980s across the globe, has led to profound biospheric consequences (Levene & Conversi 2014: 282).

The Anthropocene is not simply coterminous with climate change. It is also about the massive accumulation of waste produced by humans: by 2015, about 6300 metric tons of plastic waste had been produced – only around 9% of which has been recycled (Geyer, Jambeck et al. 2017). Deposited on the ocean's seabed, microplastics ingested by plankton “form a pathway for contaminants to enter the food web” (Hammer, Kraak et al. 2012). Plastic consumption exploded in the 1960s and increased ten-fold by the 1980s. This timeframe clearly links the Anthropocene with the abrupt increase in human waste as a consequence of the political, cultural-economic requirements of “fossil capitalism”.

Accurate dating is important in the study of history. Dating the Anthropocene implies prioritizing causality and broad understanding over the study of the effects and consequences; it is hence about the location of agency and sociopolitical responsibility: Who is responsible for what? Whichever date is chosen, the number of potential perpetrators can be restricted geographically, ethnically, culturally, and economically: Unmistakably, they are recognizable with conspicuous recidivism as members of a miniscule Western upper elite imbued with modernist ideology and informed by an uncontrolled desire to accrue power and wealth. However, this monochrome picture has been muddled by the “intrusion” of new non-Western actors: the uni-directional expansion of neoliberal economic practices has led to the formation of powerful “*glocal*” elites shaped and informed by Western, mainly American, unilateral practices, aspirations, lifestyles and world vision.

As disagreements slowly dissipate, scholars tend to focus on the growth of extreme consumption patterns, predominantly fossil fuels, the depletion of planetary resources, waste and demographic pressures.¹⁰

The search for a safety exit is destined to expand throughout the entire span of human knowledge and every aspect of science. Put more harshly,

the knock-on effects for all academic disciplines ... are equally stark. Either we rethink *some* of our first principles, not to say standard *modus operandi* in the light of anthropogenic climate change, or we literally consign ourselves to the dustbin of history.

(Levene & Conversi 2014: 282).

Contiguous disciplines have, however, reacted differently. On the one hand, refugee and immigration studies (the study of the “other”) have rapidly caught up by envisioning new human actors and coining auxiliary concepts, such as “environmentally displaced persons” (EDP), “climate exiles”, “forced environmental migrants”, “eco-refugees” and “environmental-refugee-to-be” (ERTB). On the other hand, nationalism studies (the study of the “us”) grazes over a *terra nullius* apparently oblivious to such impelling changes. Such a view is part of what the Indian novelist and social critic Amitav Ghosh (2016) has identified as “the Great Deception”. Moreover, as asylum applications respond to temperature fluctuations (Missirian and Schlenker 2017), the demographic pressures exerted by climate change directly impinges upon nationalist and xenophobic reactions.

Many scholars of nationalism solipsistically work behind the well-protected fences of their carefully cultivated national garden. They barely have a grasp of the present beyond such secluded boundaries, let alone being able to anticipate the future.¹¹

The Anthropocene spells the actually possible death of nations, in all their human, cultural and historical components – in other words, in every manifestation except archeology. The latter could largely be an archeology of waste, because that is the most visible legacy nations may leave for a hypothetical extra-terrestrial visitor descending upon a planet bereft of life. Yet, nationalism may survive until the very death of nations, as the last cry before oblivion, as a symphony to human dereliction, as the epitome of political systems where the blind lead the blind. “Humanity writ-large now constitutes a geological actor on the planetary stage with the ability to change the most basic physical processes of the earth”, albeit “involving a trajectory towards epochal terminus so rapid that the Anthropocene will register as little more than a blip in earth history” (Levene & Conversi 2014: 281–282).

We began our analysis by dealing with the origins of nations, and we end it by considering their possible finale. The factual “mortality of nations” as a real rather than imagined possibility and as a self-inflicted final blow rather than an act of the usual foe could, and should, be an area to stimulate further research.¹² But, largely forlorn in academia, nationalism studies have not yet produced significant advances in the field.

Global Climate Change and Nationalism

The COP21 climate agreement arising from the United Nations Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC), unanimously signed in Paris by 196 countries in December 2015, was a unique cosmopolitan moment. Yet, the overwhelming presence of nationalism and big business behind the scenes hampered significant advances and the capacity to implement the wide-ranging changes that depend on international cooperation.

The relationship between climate change and nationalism is simultaneously one of the most relevant, and, paradoxically, least studied areas of interdisciplinary conjunction. Climate change and nationalism are intensely interrelated; in particular, climate denial and right-wing nationalism often go hand-in-hand. The advent of Trumpism is the clearest symptom of the repositioning of national antagonisms as catalysts for epochal discontent through a return to a state of avoidance and blissful ignorance.

In spite of its interdisciplinary origins, the field of nationalism studies has insufficiently cross-fertilized with contiguous disciplines. It has scarcely interacted even with its most significant and expected academic partners, such as the study of populism, fascism, genocide studies, and so on – with the partial exception of ethnic and racial/migration studies (Conversi 2004). In turn, these areas and sub-fields often reciprocate by ignoring ongoing research in the field of nationalism – for instance, the majority of works by genocide scholars rarely mention nationalism scholarship. Among various problems, this has led to a disregard, according to critics, of the relationship between nationalism and fascism (Miley 2018). The risk is to become

impervious to innovations emanating from other disciplines, particularly the hard sciences, with the prospect of irrelevance – as occurred with cultural studies and, perhaps, the field of globalization.

Conclusions

A crystal ball may not be needed to foresee that nationalism is likely to remain a crucial force in the coming years. And no additional crystal ball will be required to foresee that nationalism's permanence is likely to spawn a plethora of conflict and misery. Moreover, its continuing presence could be a titanic obstacle to the coordination of international political action in a host of key areas.

I have highlighted a paradox: while the future of nationalism appears to be assured, the future of nations seems, in contrast, far from being guaranteed. Paradoxically, the more nationalism flourishes, the more nations seem to be in peril. This time, however, the threat does not emanate from external foes and rival nations, but from a largely self-inflicted hazard derived from unsustainable aspirations and lifestyles. Nationalism tends to obstruct the necessary multilateralism needed to address global problems that elude the forces of any single state, even the most powerful one. As long as it is increasingly associated with unilateralism or bilateralism, the practice of nationalism threatens nations internally, internationally and through the cumulative combination of these multiple threats. I have shown this to be the case with the most pressing contemporary problem, climate change. Nationalism itself, together with the vested interests of the fossil fuel, automotive and other mega-industries, poses a conspicuous obstacle to the advancement of the political agenda needed to tackle the most pressing challenges faced by humanity.

Notes

- 1 When Tom Nairn (1977) wrote that 'the theory of nationalism represents Marxism's great historical failure', he referred to the Marxist belief during the Cold War that the ideology was able to resolve the national question effortlessly: by focusing only on class struggle, one could transcend nationalism as a form of false consciousness. Taking heed from Nairn, and witnessing the "fratricidal" war among two nominally Communist countries, Cambodia and Vietnam, Ben Anderson (1983) lamented that coeval Marxists had chosen to ignore the fact that nationalism had crept in among its rank and file.
- 2 I have applied this three-stage approach by comparing three historically and geographically distinct areas: the Pyrenean border between France and Spain as a locus of modernity; the city of Ciudad Juárez on the Mexico–US border as the epitome of globalisation; and the borderless scenarios emerging with the erosion of 'natural' river boundaries between Eastern African communities due to climate change (Conversi 2014b).
- 3 In 1995, I initially referred to Smith's interpretation as the 'ethno-symbolic approach' (Conversi 1995).
- 4 In the footsteps of Tilly, and influenced by social theory and historical sociology, Andreas Wimmer (2002; Wimmer and Min 2010) has used, among various methods, comparative historical analysis to connect state-making, modernity and nationalism with exclusion, boundaries and war.

- 5 Earlier on, a lesser known essay by A.D. Smith (1981) identified the role of wars in nation formation.
- 6 A large dataset study examining 126 000 news items circulating among 3 million Twitter users is the most comprehensive so far on the reliability of information accessed by global audiences (Vosoughi, Roy *et al.* 2018).
- 7 The denial of urgent environmental issues becomes intrinsically entwined with the reinterpretation of the foundational myth of American exceptionalism, whose crisis is to be superseded through boundary building under the slogan *#MakeAmericaGreatAgain!* (McMillan 2017).
- 8 Jason W Moore and others concentrate on the class/economic aspect, having identified the onset of the Anthropocene with the worldwide change brought about by the advent of capitalism: the term *Capitalocene* has therefore been used as an alternative to the Anthropocene (Bonneuil and Fressoz 2017; Chandler, Cudworth *et al.* 2018; Moore 2015; 2016). But I am more interested here in the Anthropocene as defined within the parameters of the hard sciences in terms of the release of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere and other unsustainable practices.
- 9 From the perspective of nuclear physics, the beginning of the Anthropocene can be established at a precise date: 16 July 1945, when the US Army detonated the first nuclear weapon as part of the 'Manhattan Project'. This was followed by the global spread of isotopes in the wake of nuclear proliferation and related experiments (Waters, Syvitski *et al.* 2015).
- 10 On the other hand, the obsession with 'techno-fixes' such as geo-engineering, solutions to fix the ecological crisis by technological innovation only, have been identified as spurious, dangerous and ineffective responses to new constellations of economic interests (Huesemann & Huesemann 2011).
- 11 For instance, few could anticipate the demise of the Soviet Union, among them the political scientist Walker Connor (McGarry 2018), the sociologist Randall Collins (Collins 1995) and, in a less academic setting, US Senator Patrick Moynihan.
- 12 A recent, otherwise excellent, book under the similar rubric of the 'mortality of nations', does not include climate change and the Anthropocene amongst the ontological/epistemic insecurities and existential threats to the endangered nations, as the mortality 'danger' uniquely emanates from the historical adversaries and enemies of the nation (Abulof 2015). Similarly, at the time of writing, the term Anthropocene does not appear in any of the published issues and volumes of the journal *Nations and Nationalism* and 'climate change' only appears *en passant* in four articles.

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