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## Nationalism and belonging: introduction

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# Nationalism and Belonging: Introduction

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But of course not everyone belongs.

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(Spiro 2007, 3)

## Introduction

This themed section brings together three articles which were keynote talks at the 24th Annual Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism (ASEN) Conference in 2014 on the theme of Nationalism and Belonging. In the three years since the conference, the theme of belonging and nationalism appears even more prescient. Issues such as the Syrian refugee crisis, the UK's membership of the European Union and the growth of right wing populism in Europe and the US all point to fundamental questions of belonging. These questions include: how belonging should be conceptualised and institutionalised; how we, as scholars and citizens, should conceive of responsibilities to refugees who no longer have a state to which they can belong; how we should conceptualise those with different sense of belonging within the UK and how this, in turn, relates to pan-national and European/EU forms of belonging; and, how we should respond to ethnicised, racialized and nativised forms of belonging invoked by right wing populist politicians.

The conference on Nationalism and Belonging sought to address a gap in the study of nations and nationalism by foregrounding the concept of belonging within the field of studying nationalism. Existing research in the field of national identity, the nation and, in particular, nationalism, has explicitly or implicitly discussed the importance of belonging for nations and nationalism scholarship, but few have made belonging itself the object of study (Antonsich 2010). This section aims, ambitiously, to propose a research agenda within nationalism studies which deals with belonging more explicitly, in particular the mutual constitutive relationship between belonging and the concepts of the nation and nationalism. Bringing together historical and contemporary examples, and interdisciplinary perspectives, the three articles of this section on Nationalism and Belonging—by

Bo Strath, William A. Callahan and Alain Dieckhoff—address questions such as: *How and why did identity become integral to conceptions of belonging to the nation? How is belonging conceived and constructed by projects of long distance diaspora nationalism? How cohesive are projects of belonging to nations? How do conceptions of belonging shape nationalism projects, and domestic and international politics?*

In this introduction, I begin by discussing the importance of belonging to the study of nations and nationalism, exploring the continued pre-eminence of the nation, and nation-state, as providing the locus of belonging. Second, I briefly situate the concept of belonging theoretically, to consider how belonging has been conceived within and beyond studies of nations and nationalism. Third, I summarise the articles of this section, considering their contribution to debates on belonging and nationalism, especially their effort to conceive of belonging as something beyond identity and membership. Finally, I reflect on emergent gaps in studying belonging vis--vis nations and nationalism, and suggest some further directions for future research consistent with a research agenda which foregrounds the analysis of belonging within nationalism studies.

## The Importance of Belonging to the Study of Nations and Nationalism

As Skrbia et al. (2007) argue, belonging has long been considered as one of the softer concepts of social science. Yet, paradoxically, belonging is also fundamental to some of the hardest issues in the contemporary world, such as immigration, diversity, integration. These issues raise questions of who belongs and how to institutionalise belonging. As Beck (2003, 454) argues: to belong or not to belong that is the cosmopolitan question.

The continued importance of belonging follows critics of cosmopolitanism, such as Calhoun (2003, 532), who have remarked that belonging to particularist solidarities, such as nations, is neither escapable nor in decline. In other words, universalising solidarities, as argued by theorists of cosmopolitanism, have not yet taken hold. Similarly, Brubaker (2010) argues that the nation-state remains the central locus of belonging, even if accompanied by shifts towards more universalist or at least regionalist (EU) political and cultural projects. If anything, post-national forms of belonging such as forms of long distance and diaspora nationalism (as discussed by Dieckhoff in this issue) retain, but de-territorialize, links to the nation (Yegenoglu 2005, 110).

These universalising, regionalising and pan-national projects, in response to migration and globalisation, may reinforce rather than erode the nation-state as the locus of belonging. Even in era where dual citizenship is becoming more common, tolerated and facilitated, and a far cry from the one nationality only principle of the early twentieth century (Hague Convention 1930), belonging remains codified and regulated. Indeed, this is arguably increasing, for example via citizenship tests, where belonging to the nation-state has to be proved, by demonstrating knowledge of history, culture and values, before membership is granted (Michalowski 2011). Yet within nation-states,

as Skey (2014; 2011, 326) argues, hierarchies of belonging remain, where some are conceived as belonging more to the nation than others. *How, then, do we conceptualise the relationship between belonging and nationalism?*

## Theorizing Belonging: Identity vs. Membership

Belonging is a typically under-theorized and fuzzy concept (Crowley 1998; May 2013, 17), conceived variously as identity, citizenship or both (Antonsich 2010, 645). This Introduction considers belonging, vis--vis nations and nationalism, in terms of identity and membership. Here, membership encompasses both citizenship, as a formal expression of belonging and security (648), and informal dimensions also, where formal institutions of belonging, offered by citizenship, do not automatically equate to belonging (Brubaker 2010; Geddes and Favell 1998). This Introduction will also, in situating the contribution of this themed section of Nationalism and Belonging, argue that conceiving of belonging needs to go beyond identity vs. membership, in terms of the relationship between belonging and nationalism, to consider the role of politics, distance, contingency and contestation.

For May (2013, 3), belonging concerns more than identity because it is a dynamic and relational concept, between the self and society. Belonging is actively lived, as a concept, because it is achieved by being and doing in the world (May 2011, 363, 72), by comparison to the more banal, one-dimensional concept of identity which begins from the separate, autonomous individual (May 2013, 9).

Belonging to nations is seen as extending beyond formal membership by requiring reciprocal relations between members, such as expression of commitment, loyalty and common purpose (Crowley 1998; Gellner 1983; Guibernau 2004), and sharing common attributes, such as a shared national identity. Guibernau (2004) considers national identity to demonstrate the sentiment of belonging to the nation, which does not have to be tied to a state (i.e. this sentiment of belonging is irrespective of whether the nation has or does not have a state of its own). This demonstrates the reciprocal and reinforcing relationship between belonging to the nation as identity and as membership (Guibernau 2013, 4).

Perhaps belonging is conceived as soft and vague concept because it is often attached to feelings and emotions. Following Webers concept of *Zusammengehorigkeitsgefuhl* (a feeling of belonging together), Brubaker and Cooper (2000, 19) describe the emotionally laden sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded group. For Brubaker and Cooper (2000, 19-20), the nation is a particularly strong kind of belonging which provides a sense of oneness to those conceived as members of the nation and boundaries, as well as a sense of difference, to those who are conceived as outsiders, i.e. non-members. For insiders, belonging to the nation is a personal, intimate, feeling of being at home (Antonsich 2010; Yuval-Davis 2006, 645), which engenders an emotional (or even ontological) attachment as an ongoing project of belonging to groups and places (Yuval-Davis 2006). Similarly, Kiely et al. (2005, 155) show how belonging is an ongoing construction by observing that markers of belonging, in their empirical study of forms of belonging in Scotland, includes not just Scottish

blood and birth in Scotland but also as residence in and commitment to Scotland. Belonging, then, may be constructed out of civic or ethnic ideas of the nation or expressed via a subtler combination of the two through markers such as birth, ancestry and loyalty (Kiely et al. 2005; Zimmer 2003, 152).

Belonging to nations as identity and membership also involves the construction and maintenance of boundaries, by reinforcing who belongs by virtue of recognizing and excluding those who are the others (Antonsich 2010; Geddes and Favell 1998; Triandafyllidou 1998). As Skrbia et al. (2007, 261-262) propose, nation-states are involved in a dialectic of seeking and granting belonging, by determining who can belong as formal and informal members. For Skey (2014, 327), these boundaries create hierarchies of belonging which, in turn, are consequential for determining who is entitled to resources and benefits within the nation-state, such as housing and jobs. Thus: I belong more than you also means I deserve more than you (327). Those who are conceived as not belonging within this hierarchy such as migrants and minorities, even if they hold formal membership, are faced with informal and symbolic barriers that restrict their ability to belong and leave them outside the nation-state, in terms of belonging (Geddes and Favell 1998, 11). These perspectives point also to the dynamic and active dimension of belonging, i.e. belonging as an ongoing and performed act, as to opposed to something to fixed and passive concept, as categories of identity are often conceived (Brubaker and Cooper 2000).

These various conceptual and empirical studies of belonging focus, overwhelmingly, on belonging in terms of national identity, as well as on how this impacts on the nation, and its boundaries and systems of membership, both informal and formal. What belonging means for the study of nationalism remains largely unexplored. Defining nationalism, following Gellner (1983, 1), as a project that seeks congruence between the political and national unit, and vice versa, what is the role and relationship, in a mutually constitutive sense, between nationalism and belonging? In conceptualising and analysing this relationship, these articles which follow show that interventions need to go beyond identity and membership, to consider other dimensions, including politics, distance, crisis and contingency.

## **Foregrounding Belonging in the Study of Nationalism**

These three articles contribute to the empirical and theoretical foregrounding of belonging within the study of nationalism and provocatively challenge assumptions concerning the meaning and relationship of belonging vis--vis nationalism.

Bo Strath offers the strongest challenge to the idea of belonging as identity and membership. Strath argues that contemporary studies of nationalism see it through the lens of the present, assuming identity to be as fundamental to conceptions of belonging to the nation in the past as it is today. Strath disputes this, arguing for a contingent and recent relationship between nation and identity and suggesting that previously other forms of belonging to the nation, based on class-based social solidarities and institutional capacity for class compromise, were more significant. Strath

argues that identity is a recent concept which emerged in the 1970s to compensate for the erosion of the institutional capacity for social compromise and solidarity. More radically, and recently, identity has merged with a strong version of ethnic nationalism against the backdrop of the lack of a convincing political response to the social question. Strath offers a new spin on debates about earlier forms of nationalism and its relationship to national identity, imploring researchers not to project the present into the past but instead to read forward from the past into the present.

William A. Callahan analyses the parallel rhetorical strategies of national dreamspatriotic worrying in China and the American Jeremiad in the US as signifiers of Us, who belong to these nations and reflections of the Other, who do not belong. Callahan argues that national dreams are exemplary sites for studying belonging, as projects of a nostalgic longing for the past as a model for the future, and where values are integral for constructing these contrasting, if not contesting, national projects. Callahan highlights through national dreams the tension between freedom and equality in the US, between the individual and the collective in China. These national dreams are critical for normative debates in both cases and, in themselves, are consequential for international politics. While Callahan demonstrates the importance of belonging as something beyond identity and membership, it is interesting to reflect how membership criteria in themselves reflect these national dreams. China regulates membership tightly, restricting dual citizenship, while the US increasingly permits (as do many other democratic states) multiple memberships and, arguably, multiple allegiances (Sejersen 2008).

Alain Dieckhoff argues for the importance of idea of exile from territories constructed as national homelands for fostering projects of belonging and, ultimately, concepts of the nation and projects of nationalism. Using the case study of Jewish diaspora organisations in the US, Dieckhoff considers both the role of long distance nationalism in fostering and maintaining projects of belonging to Israel as well as challenges to the claims about homogeneity implicit in these projects. Dieckhoff demonstrates the importance of the heterogeneity and multiple cleavages within this diaspora, cleavages which are consequential for the relationship between nationalism and belonging, showing how notions of belonging intersect with these cleavages to create different expressions of political mobilization vis--vis the homeland.

These three articles offer perspectives on nationalism and belonging that extend beyond previous conceptions of belonging as identity and/or membership, and of the relationship between belonging, national identity and the nation. The authors are primarily concerned with the relationship between nationalism and belonging. They demonstrate, respectively, the importance of contingency, distance and contestation, within and beyond projects of nationalism that invoke a sense of belonging, as ways to build legitimacy and longing.

All three articles provide top-down accounts of belonging vis--vis nations and nationalism. Such a perspective is important for understanding how elites and institutions have propagated ideas, myths and institutions of belonging, beyond formal systems of membership. This leaves space for future research to examine nationalism, beyond studies of national identity, and belonging from the bottom-up. Such a bottom-up engagement with belonging and nationalism would complement

the top-down perspectives on nationalism and belonging contained here.

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