

# State Construction and the Use of National Narratives

Written by Holly Catling

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

## State Construction and the Use of National Narratives

<https://www.e-ir.info/2011/08/03/state-construction-and-use-of-national-narratives/>

HOLLY CATLING, AUG 3 2011

The use of national narratives in the making of nation-states is a process linked to migration and migration policy; migrant and minority groups may be either included or excluded by the national community as part of the nation-building project. The modern idea of the national and who it encompasses emerged in European and other states that now make up the global North. I will begin by looking at this process and then compare this to the way national narratives have been used in the process of nation building in states of the global South. The South African state's post-apartheid use of national identity provided a way to include and unite the disparate ethnic and cultural groups inside its territorial boundaries. In Sri Lanka nationalist myths are used to unite and define a national identity on ethnic lines, which excludes ethnic minority groups from this imagined 'nation'. In Malaysia political elites manipulate immigration and inclusion in the nation-state to justify and sustain their own political power. In both of these states national identities and narratives are manipulated to ensure continued elite hegemony. I conclude with some observations about alternatives to the state monopoly on identity formation, and look at the challenges faced by states in the increasingly globalised and transnational international 'market of identity'.

Origins of the concept of the 'nation' and nationalism:

Brubaker outlines six norms of state membership: egalitarian, sacred, based on nation-membership, democratic, unique and consequential (Brubaker 1990:380-1). This is how citizenship has come to be understood because of the way it developed in western, liberal states. The idea of citizenship solidified as a sense of the individual belonging to a state in a contractual relationship where membership was of worth to the individual and cost them something (Brubaker 1990:381. Triadafilopoulos 2004:402). The norms of sacred membership and the uniqueness of this membership form the citizen's side of this contract: they must agree to act on behalf of the state, to protect it if required, and they must give their loyalty to only one state (Brubaker 1990:380-1). In return the state will guarantee full and equal membership, democratic rule and defence of the idea of belonging to the nation as a privileged identity; the state both shelters and dominates the individual (Torpey 1997:240-241). However, what Brubaker describes is an ideal of membership; the actual existence of and practice of these norms by states varies hugely and the ideal of a 'nation-state' as a fixed entity exists in theory alone (Brubaker 1990:385). Newly emerged democracies often find the maintenance of such norms, especially policing uniqueness, difficult to uphold as they lack the necessary infrastructure (Sadiq 2005:113). For example in South Africa the weakness of the institutions of citizenship means that some citizens, as well as legal immigrants, are punished by state institutions for being illegal immigrants (Landau 2005:343). Access to, and proof of, national identity has become an essential aspect of the international state system as part of what defines a state is its control over and monopoly of movement across its borders, and membership documents support this control (Torpey 1997:239-40). Furthermore, if a nation is to be recognised as an equal by other states it should maintain at least the show of an egalitarian democracy, or else risk sanctions and ostracisation from the international community, as seen in the case of South Africa under the apartheid regime.

The inability to achieve this ideal of citizenship may be why states use nationalism and national myths to build a sense of belonging to bolster citizenship; the state cannot guarantee ideal citizenship and belonging, but nationalism may create an 'imagined community' to unite the people inside its territorial bounds with state membership meaning national-membership (Gupta 1992:67). The nation-state as this 'imagined community' of membership has been privileged as the source of identity in the current international system (Gupta 1992:67. Bloemraad; Korteweg; Yurdakul 2008:159). However, just who inside these bounds deserves to be given the status of citizen is problematic

# State Construction and the Use of National Narratives

Written by Holly Catling

and systems differ between states (Klotz 2000:834-36. Brubaker 1990:387). The different historical contexts of state formation inform the development of the nation-state's migration policies, and result in these different approaches (Brubaker 1992:385-86). Using a simple, binary distinction for the purpose of this analysis, it may be stated that European states followed two paths of nationality and citizenship in the nation building project: civic and ethnic. The central concerns of these two forms of citizenship built nations with significantly different ideas of who was entitled to membership in the nation, because of the reasons used to justify that membership.

The use of *jus soli*,<sup>[1]</sup> as seen in France, was not adopted in the German context because the existence of a common birthplace was not seen to be sufficient to ensure a feeling of national identity and belonging (Brubaker 1990:396). This was a result of the different ways in which Germany and France developed and became states: France was more confident and assimilatory when it began to view itself as a state, whereas Germany relied on exclusion to form a reified national identity and give it the attributes of uniqueness and value that Brubaker presents as necessary in the maintenance and creation of nationality (Brubaker 1990:397-8). Thus, through *jus sanguinis*<sup>[2]</sup> Germany sought state unity in the absence of a unifying national cause, such as the French commitment to a 'crusade for liberty' (Brubaker 1990:390,393). Therefore German migration policy was more exclusionary because it had less confidence in the idea of the German nation-state as a unified community (Brubaker 1990:398). This choice of *jus sanguinis* meant that Germany nationality was, in a broad sense, ethnic while France's was civic: if somebody behaved as a French citizen then they were French, whereas German membership was reliant on descent (Brubaker 1990:386,389). Thus the ethnicisation of identity can be understood as a sign of a lack of confidence in the idea of the nation.

This is even borne out to an extent in the French case; in the wake of defeat at German hands French nationalism became more ethnic (Brubaker 1992:101-3). However, it still maintained its assimilatory aspect: the French 'race' was even seen as unique because it could assimilate others so readily (Brubaker 1992:102). This was evident in the assimilatory *mission civilisatrice* of French colonialism, where African countries were made part of the French Republic, meaning that colonial subjects could even, in theory, attain French citizenship (Cumming 2005:233). If state regulation of people flow helps to show how identity is defined in that state, then this discourse of assimilation shows that French nationalism was not really ethnically based, even when the French nation-state seemed to be weakening (Klotz 2000:835). Who belonged inside the 'nation' in Europe depended upon the context of state formation and the confidence of the elite in the nation-state as an idea.

Nationalism came to match territorial bounds as nation-state came to signify a territorial area, thus creating apparently independent states that have been studied as discrete units (Wimmer; Schiller 2002:225-226). However, this match is a creation of theory rather than practice, but such theory has normalised this assumption that nation and state should and do match (Smith 1986:138). This normalised the ideal of the nation-state, enabling nationalists to emphasise the 'sacred' aspect of it as something worth dying for (Wimmer; Schiller 2002:227). That some states pursued the assimilatory path of the French, embracing a diverse population, led to concerns about the loyalty of that population to the nation-state and an interest in ensuring it; state sovereignty may be threatened if such loyalty is not secured (Wimmer; Schiller 2002:227). Indeed legal citizenship on the French model does not necessarily guarantee that the citizen is 'truly French', whatever that means (Brubaker 1990:395). The presence of groups inside the state who may have split loyalties is often seen as a security risk by political elites: their commitment to protect the state as something sacred is not assured (Brubaker 1990:381. Hammar 1990:29). However, this apparent threat can be mitigated if they are either excluded or included in the nation as citizenship becomes a form of 'territorial closure' (Brubaker 1990:397). This attempt to maintain a unified nation-state identity, despite the presence of migrant groups with different 'foreign' ideas about how society should function, can be understood as a move to protect the 'public order' of the nation-state (Carens 1987:260): this may involve nationalist discourse being deployed to excuse discriminatory policy as the defence of the 'indigenous' cultural community.<sup>[3]</sup> This may happen via exclusionary nationalism in states with ethnic citizenship, or assimilatory nationalism in states with civic citizenship (Brubaker 1990:397). Nationalism is used to consolidate the nation-state when its cultural and political communities do not match, if its cultural community is split by territorial state boundaries, <sup>[4]</sup> or if its imagined uniform identity is challenged by migration flows (Wimmer; Schiller 2002:227-228). Thus, in an attempt to defend the ethnic identity of the nation-state migrant groups may be excluded by national narratives or myths.

# State Construction and the Use of National Narratives

Written by Holly Catling

If a large number of disparate groups moving into and challenging the idea of a unified national community was visible in emerging states, where the state was not yet confident enough in itself as a 'nation' to include 'different' groups, then exclusionary nationalism was used to define citizens and non-citizens (Triadafilopoulos 2004:395. Brand 2010:81). It was feared, for example, that the unsuitable cultures of migrants would corrupt the emerging national identity of Canada so immigration policy tightened (Triadafilopoulos 2004:396).[5] The idea of a national community became linked to ideas of citizenship and territorial space, and exclusionary *jus sanguinis* policies were adopted in such states to try and ensure that the population was unified as a cultural body, it was felt this would aid the project of state formation as 'nation building' (Triadafilopoulos 2004:396). This sort of exclusionary nationalism excludes migrant groups from the state: they are not integrated via 'naturalisation' and cannot become a part of the identified cultural group that constitutes the 'nation-state' (Brubaker 1990:382). This leaves migrant 'guest' workers in the position of perpetual outsider, alienated and thus, potentially, more likely to move against the state than if they were either naturalised or else assimilated via civic based citizenship (Adamson 2006:196). Exclusionary nationalism can produce this internal threat and this may be one of the reasons that *jus soli* has been understood as the more 'modern' of the *jus sanguinis-jus soli* binary: it allows for the inclusion of such migrants in the state as part of the nation (Joppke 2003:435).

Naturalisation was adopted later on in Canada's formation, as it was assumed this would create a unified cultural interior by assimilating 'suitable' migrants as citizens (Triadafilopoulos 2004:401). Many states, especially those in Europe, have pursued cultural unity of the nation via *jus soli* naturalisation policies, involving citizenship requirements such as knowledge about the country of integration, but migrants may not necessarily choose this route of assimilation because they could lose their right to citizenship in their home state and may resent the imposition of citizenship requirements as a form of 'inclusion through exclusion' of their cultural identity (Soysal 1994:26-27. Bosniak 2006:208 n31. Castles; Davidson 2000:215). In the more recent context of migration in post-war Europe this pattern of assimilation has not been followed in the same way as in the US and Canada (Soysal 1994:27). European states had a more established national identity, making them perhaps better able to cope with the higher levels of migration that globalisation seems to have set in motion (Adamson 2006:197). Instead, multiculturalism has been pursued by many European states, but in recent years scholarship and policy has begun to move against multiculturalism: it can leave migrant communities isolated and subject to inequalities, and political elites have then linked this alienation to a potentially greater threat from such groups against the host-state (Bloemraad *et al* 2008:161).[6] The German Chancellor even declared that multiculturalism as a project had failed in Germany in 2010.[7] European states seem to be moving back toward a more assimilatory path, especially in visible symbolic ways: the veil has been made illegal in France and women arrested under new anti-veil laws face either a fine or lessons on French citizenship.[8] Even as transnational identities and calls for dual nationality are getting stronger and more common, European states are rejecting ideas of multiculturalism within their own territories, as they look instead for ways to strengthen the idea of their national community (Soysal 1994:27).[9] Thus nationalism persists, and continues to be used to exclude or include migrant populations.

## National narratives and state building

The creation of the community of a state is by definition one of inclusion and exclusion as the 'other' or 'outside' is identified through the labelling of the 'inside' (Bloemraad *et al* 2008:156). Torpey terms this the 'embrace' of the community by the state (Torpey 1997:244). This 'insider-outsider classification' thus produces the national community (Brand 2010:81-82). This state formation also produces migration flows which may not be the active choice of the individual, as is the case with political refugees (Zolberg 1983:24). Further, this process of state formation reveals the tension between the idea that the nation should mean a defined and homogeneous cultural community, and the idea that the nation should comprise the state; unity is pursued blindly and nation is simply equated to state (Brubaker 1990:381. Joppke 2003:431). This is in part a result of the way that the idea of the 'nation' has been naturalised and conceived of as something inevitable and 'primordial' (Brand 2010:82). However, no nation-state consists of a homogeneous group of people because of migration and the arbitrary imposition of colonial territorial boundaries (Wimmer; Schiller 2002:227. Brubaker 1990:385. Brand 2010:82). The problems of integration of migrant communities into the nation have thus been addressed through nationalism and the manipulation of national narratives by political elites (Brand 2010:109).

# State Construction and the Use of National Narratives

Written by Holly Catling

Brand's study of the cases of Jordan and Lebanon and the challenges posed by flows of migrants from Palestine looks in more detail at state use of national narratives to incorporate new cultural groups into the imagined community of 'nation-state'. She asserts that national narratives are primarily used for 'self-definition' and assertion, or re-assertion of boundaries of the nation-state (Brand 2010:79). She distinguishes between national narratives and nationalism, but sees that nationalism may make use of national narratives to pursue its ends (2010:80). This has certainly been the case with Sinhalese nationalism in Sri Lanka, where history has been used and manipulated by the political elite for nationalist purposes (Peebles 1990:44). Indeed the Sri Lankan use of an idealised Sinhalese history closely fits Brand's model of the use of national myths to legitimise the modern state (Brand 2010:81). Gupta also recognises this tendency, and sees it to be especially active in education, specifically in history (1992:68-69). Brand's case studies of Lebanon and Jordan look at how such use of history can be used to include or exclude migrant groups and how this works to protect the national identity formed to create the nation-state. This inclusion or exclusion via national narratives parallels state choice of *jus sanguinis* or *jus soli* migration policies: the former tends to be ethnic and exclusive while the latter is more assimilatory and inclusive, but both aim for 'ever "impossible unity"' (Brand 2010:109).

In the cases of Jordan and Lebanon the huge numbers of Palestinian migrants, so many in the case of Jordan that they formed a majority group, meant that for these states to survive with their national identities intact they had to incorporate these new citizens and ensure their loyalty (Brand 2010:103). In Jordan the loyalty of this new group of citizens was seen as of value to the state and it was sought via education which made selective use of history to justify Palestinian migrants' loyalty to the Jordanian royal family (Brand 2010:104-6). In Lebanon the national narrative appropriated Phoenician history as Lebanese state history, to try and maintain links to the diaspora, while uniting a community made less homogeneous by migration by emphasising the multiple but linked origins of modern Lebanon (Brand 2010:91-2). In this way both states seek to incorporate their migrant communities. However, in Jordan especially, assimilation also entails occlusion and exclusion of the migrants' 'foreign' culture as they are 'embraced' by their new nation-state and made to conform to its already present national cultural community through 'forced inclusion' (Brand 2010:108). This may be a two way process of cultural change, but it is likely that the new group will feel discriminated against, and this will be intensified by state policies that seek to ensure that the 'original' inhabitants enjoy a more privileged relationship with the state: for example Transjordanians are favoured by state policy over Palestinian-Jordanians (Brand 2010:108). This was also a punishment for the actions of Palestinian-Jordanians in fomenting the civil war and a way of re-affirming state power over citizens (Brand 2010:98-99). Thus it can be seen that in the nation-state project the attempt to preserve the idea of the national community may leave migrant groups in a position of exclusion, even if they are apparently given membership as citizens.

## National narratives in context

The ethnic aspects of citizenship may intensify this sense of exclusion. If an individual is born within a nation-state's territorial bounds but denied full citizenship because of the dominance of *jus sanguinis* in that state then they may resent their new home state.[10] This could increase the potential threat to state unity that migration produces: shared repression or marginalisation may work to solidify group identities across other boundaries such as class (Wayland 2004:411 n.28). In this way ethnic based citizenship, while intended to increase state unity by ensuring that the political community matches the cultural one, works to increase the alienation of, and thereby the difference of, migrant groups. Such groups will always be present inside the state because, despite this attempt to reject the outsider by denying them access to equal citizenship, migrant labour is needed by the state (Triadafilopoulos 2004:403-404). However, the migrant can still be used to bolster the nationalist project; by doing jobs seen as below the notice of native citizens they emphasise the superiority of citizens and underline their own inferior status (Triadafilopoulos 2004:409). For example in South Africa labour is needed, but migrant labourers are not given state protection, as they are not full citizens, and may also be victims of state led or state sponsored violence (Klotz 2000:838-839).[11] This results from the way nationalism is used as a tool to promote national unity to make the nation more legitimate in the international.[12] Nationalism may also be an attempt to prevent outward migration flows of those skilled citizens needed by the state, or as a way of maintaining links with diaspora who have already gone and through their achievements further encourage national pride (Brand 2010:90,92). Nationalism even fed into the Nonaligned Movement which Gupta presents as a way for states in the global South to assert their sovereignty and independence in the international (Gupta 1992:66). In these ways nationalism both unifies and

## State Construction and the Use of National Narratives

Written by Holly Catling

legitimises the nation-state (Adamson 2006:181).

After the end of apartheid the South African state was faced with the difficulty of creating the unified 'rainbow state'. Whereas previously South Africans had been split on lines of race, now they were supposed to be united by their territorial space and forget such divisions. The potential for splintering and disunity must have been strong, and still in contemporary South Africa racial divisions can be a problem, but race relations remain 'surprisingly good'.<sup>[13]</sup> This is in part a result of the way the South African state has promoted nationality as the primary identity (Landau 2005:334). This use of nationalism and the extension of the idea of the national *laager* (a protective circle of wagons, a Boer image) to include black South Africans has helped to ensure unity and a strong nation-state: all South Africans take on the sense of superiority once only enjoyed by the white population (Klotz 2000:837). However, this led to xenophobic rather than inter-racial violence and Klotz underlines the fact that 'bonds of black solidarity' are broken in this context: black-on-black violence has and does take place against migrant workers, even if they have a right to live and work in South Africa (Klotz 2000:837-839).<sup>[14]</sup> This has also impacted on native South African citizens; some were targeted in the 2008 violence because they spoke minority languages.<sup>[15]</sup> Sadiq makes the salient, if uncomfortable, point that when ethnicity and race communities do not match national communities prejudice may be mis-deployed as 'they' can look just like 'us' (Sadiq 2005:107,115). South Africa needs migrant labour but fails to protect migrants from the nationalism it has used to re-create the post apartheid state as a united one; this nationalism now threatens native citizens as well as legal refugees and migrants (Landau 2005:343. Klotz 2000:843).<sup>[16]</sup>

This stems in part from the problems of institutionalising citizenship in states of the global South. South African migrants may gain legal citizenship, but it is limited and un-enfranchised: without voting rights the political elite has no interest in policies that would protect migrants, especially if this was unpopular with the majority (Klotz 2000:841-2). Further, even when migrants are granted citizenship by the state such citizenship can be worthless if the institutions of citizenship in the receiving state are weak: in South Africa documentation may mean little to law enforcement officials and does not guarantee the documented holder their citizens' rights (Klotz 2000:838).<sup>[17]</sup> In Malaysia this difficulty is intensified by the apparent access of illegal non-citizens to documents that many legal citizens do not possess, thus enfranchising many non-citizens so that they can influence state policy (Sadiq 2005:102). Sadiq implies that this has led to immigration policies that have given illegal immigrants greater access to legal citizenship (Sadiq 2005:116-117). In the Sri Lankan case the political system is also deeply divided on communal lines and so the larger number of Sinhalese voters effectively disenfranchises minority group voters; again if a policy is not in the majority's interest then political elites in such systems have little interest in supporting it (Scott 1999:176. Moore 1992:73). Nationalism may in this way be intensified by the impotency of groups which might otherwise limit its effect on migration policy if they had more political power.

It is perhaps these various experiences of citizenship, so different from Brubaker's ideal, that have led some critics to question the suitability of understanding nationalism in the global South via the kind of nationalism seen in the states of the global North; the context of state formation may be so different as to render such comparison misleading (Gupta 1992:75). However, nationalism does seem to be used in a similar way in the modern states of the global South as it was used in the creation of states such as Germany: foreigners are presented as a threat to the 'nation' and thus the 'nation' becomes alert for the threat of the outsider (Triadafilopoulos 2004:409 on Germany. Klotz 2000:837, 839 on South Africa). Perhaps it is the modern, globalised context that simply makes the process more visible, laying nationalism of the global South open to the sort of critique that it has received in retrospect.<sup>[18]</sup> However, nationalism was used to build the states of the global North and is still evident and active in modern European states: nationalist parties, such as UKIP, have gained voter confidence, using fears of uncontrolled migration to promote their policies as necessary to the nation.<sup>[19]</sup> Political elites may turn to nationalist discourse to distract citizens from other problems through the deployment of a legal or illegal 'other' present on the inside of the state and presented as a threat, even a cause of such problems, by the state (Landau 2005:336).<sup>[20]</sup> Nationalist policies may emerge from popular demand but I would argue that popular demand is shaped by political elite manipulation and potentially also by projection: if the real source of a problem cannot be attacked for being too powerful or too institutionally entrenched then a scapegoat, such as the migrant community, may be targeted instead (Snyder; Ballentine 1996:29. Wayland 2004:412).<sup>[21]</sup>

## State Construction and the Use of National Narratives

Written by Holly Catling

This use of the migrant as scapegoat can produce other problems though. For example, the labelling of the Sri Lankan Tamil community as a threat to national unity became a distraction for the majority Sinhalese population (Wayland 2004:412).[22] While this alienation and demonization of minority groups functions as a powerful tool of 'othering' and something to reaffirm national identity against in nationalist discourse, this scapegoat community of Tamils did not in fact pose a security risk to the state until paranoid Sinhalese nationalism encouraged violent suppression of their political voice (Velupillai 2006:105-106). This process can be seen in other cases of migrant and transnational groups in the international, such as Muslims in the US; when the state justifies and feeds such concerns it further alienates migrants, pushing them into the role it fears they already occupy (Adamson 2006:196).

This problem of alienated groups within the state is endemic in many post-colonial states where lines were simply drawn on a map with little regard as to matching the cultural community they enclosed to the political one; contemporary maps of Africa show numerous straight lines demarcating nation-states (Meredith 2006:1-4). Furthermore, the imagined communities of post-colonial states are a product of the colonial project; they cannot even claim the false naturalness of nation-states in the global North (Adamson 2006:163. Brand 2010:82-83). 'New' post-colonial nations were expected to join a game whose rules were not necessarily familiar or relevant to their own contexts. That such arbitrary boundaries have been aggressively maintained by modern post-colonial states in many cases has, in combination with non-homogeneous populations, led to secessionist violence because of the pursuit of a nation-state on the western, European model (Scott 1999:188). Further, the existence of various, rigidly demarcated ethnic groups inside many post-colonial states leaves them more vulnerable to elite exploitation of these differences via divisive forms of nationalism (Snyder; Ballentine 1996:20). The civil war in Sri Lanka is a result of this effect; political elites used a nationalist narrative to ensure their own continued power; the Sinhalese majority has ensured the election of Sinhalese political parties at every general election since independence (Tambiah 1986:127. Kemper 1991:195,203).[23] That this produced defensive Tamil nationalism and a secessionist movement is directly linked to this false imagining of the Tamil community as 'other' and alien to the nation-state of Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese homeland (Velupillai 2006:95,106). It is the ideal of nation-state unity that has led to the use of national narratives and nationalism by political elites in such settings, often in the name of addressing sectarian violence, but with the result of simply enflaming it.

As part of this project to protect the Sinhalese 'homeland' of the Dry Zone in Sri Lanka, a form of 'internal colonialism' has been used by Sinhalese elites who have encouraged Sinhalese colonisation of the area (Tambiah 1986:127. Peebles 1990:37). Thus Tamil minority groups have felt they are being ethnically overwhelmed in this area by Sinhalese settlers, leading to a strengthening of Tamil nationalism which sees Sinhalese Sri Lankans as a threat to their cultural community (Peebles 1990:38, 51). In the Dry Zone 'natives become foreigners in their own land' just as Sadiq claims they have in parts of Malaysia (Sadiq 2005:120). Indeed Sadiq points to a similar fear of being taken over by another ethnic group; just as the Dry Zone has been colonised by the Sinhalese, Sabah has been subject to a state condoned influx of Muslim-Malay immigrants who the state has then naturalised via census exercises (Sadiq 2005:112). This could be understood as a move to Malayalize Sabah: the political elite has apparently sought to increase their voting base by moving more members of the communal community they represent into their area and giving them voting rights (Sadiq 2005:116). Malaysian native citizens feel threatened by the influx of migrants who are given access to citizenship and voting both by the state and by illegal means (Sadiq 2005:120). Nationalism may be used against citizens who view themselves as members of the state, if not the cultural community identified as the nation.

Nationalist narratives in Sabah are hijacked by UMNO in an attempt to unify Malay-Muslims against the perceived threat of ethnic Chinese and Indian minorities.[24] The census also seeks to homogenise the nation by amalgamating categories, thus disguising this influx and further enabling the state's absorption of illegal migrants (Sadiq 2005:110-12). That this is in the self interest of the UMNO political elites only follows because of the way nationalist narratives encourage citizens to vote on ethnic lines for parties that represent ethnic interests: decisions about which residents qualify to vote are debated around election time in terms of how certain groups will help political elites to retain power.[25] Assimilation in Sabah has led to a perceived change of the ethnic-cultural and political community, which has been understood as a threat to the existing national identity (Sadiq 2005:108).[26] Political elites betray more of an interest in retaining their power than in ruling for the people through the conventions of democracy (Snyder; Ballentine 1996:17). Nationalist narratives have enabled this and deepened the emerging

# State Construction and the Use of National Narratives

Written by Holly Catling

sense of global distrust of politics and democracy as a system (Mair 2006:29).

## The market of identities

However, nationalism remains only one way of imagining a community. It has predominated in the international system because it is in the interests of a system of nation-states to promote national identity as the only and best way of imagining the self as part of a community.[27] This prioritisation of national identity has been augmented by academic focus (Gupta 1992:73-75). There are alternatives to the state monopoly of identity though, which are becoming increasingly visible in the globalised international. The identification of an emerging 'market of identity' in the international draws attention to the role of non-state actors as sources of communal identity (Adamson 2006:182-183). Furthermore, states themselves struggle to ensure the security and welfare of their populations under the pressures of globalisation and citizens may begin to look elsewhere for a structure more deserving of their loyalty (Klotz 2000:833). In a transnational model, such as that of the EU, migrants enjoy the rights of citizenship in states where they are not members because all nation-states adhere to international norms that privilege the rights of the individual; migrants' rights are protected by transnational political structures in a way not seen in previous migration history (Soysal 1994:142-145). This global market pressure on the nation-state as the source of primary identity and loyalty is becoming more visible in an international where transnational identities and dual citizenship are becoming normalised and migrants develop links that span more than one nation-state (Soysal 1994:28, 141. Adamson 2006:183 referencing Basch *et al* 1994:4). This could point the way to a transnational or even post-national future where the nation-state becomes only one of many identities competing for the individual's loyalties: diaspora networks and a defined cultural community could come to dominate in the emerging 'market of identity' (Adamson 2006:182. Soysal 1994:164-165).

## Conclusion

National narratives have been and continue to be used and manipulated by political elites in different ways and for different ends, but nationalism remains inherently linked to migration and the migration policy of nation-states. This is because of the way in which migration is also part of nation-building, and the exclusion and inclusion of certain groups by the nation-state seems unavoidable and natural because of the manipulation of national narratives and nationalist discourse. While a trend towards the growth of a market of identities in the international could mean a new imagining of the international as something post-national, it could also mean that nation-states, in a defensive mode, move further away from pluralism to counter the rise of transnationalism in a globalising world. The dangers of nationalism are apparent, especially in the context of the global South, and the tendency for nationalist narratives to produce violence means that political elites should not begin to manipulate this sort of discourse lightly; drawing the community of the nation inside the *laager* may help to unify it in times of crises, but use of nationalist narratives may produce unwanted consequences, even those nationalism was evoked to avoid.

## Bibliography

### Articles

Adamson, Fiona B., "Crossing Borders: International Migration and National Security," *International Security* 31(1) Summer 2006: 165-199.

Bloemraad, Irene, Anna Korteweg and Gokce Yurdakul, "Citizenship and Immigration: Multiculturalism, Assimilation and Challenges to the Nation-State," *Annual Review of Sociology* 34 2008: 1-27.

Brand, Laurie A., "National Narratives and Migration: Discursive Strategies of Inclusion and Exclusion in Jordan and Lebanon," *International Migration Review* 44(1), Spring 2010: 78-110.

Brubaker, Rogers, "Immigration, Citizenship and the Nation-State in France and Germany: A Comparative Historical Analysis," *International Sociology* 5(4) November 1990: 379-407.

# State Construction and the Use of National Narratives

Written by Holly Catling

- Carens, Joseph H. , "Aliens and Citizens: The Case for Open Borders," *The Review of Politics* 49 (2), Spring 1987: 251-273.
- Cumming, Gordon, "Transposing the Republican Model? A Critical Appraisal of France's Historic Mission in Africa," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 23(2) May 2005: 233-252.
- Gupta, Akhil, "The Song of the Nonaligned World: Transnational Identities and the Reinscription of Space in Late Capitalism," *Cultural Anthropology* 7(1) February 1992: 63-79.
- Joppke, Christian, "Citizenship Between De- and Re-Ethnicization," *European Journal of Sociology* 44 (3) 2003: 429-458
- Klotz, Audie, "Migration After Apartheid: Deracialising South Africa's Foreign Policy," *Third World Quarterly* 21 (5) 2000: 831-847.
- Landau, Loren B., "Immigration and the State of Exception: Security and Sovereignty in East and Southern Africa," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 34 (2) 2005: 325-348.
- Mair Peter, Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy, *New Left Review*, 42 November/December 2006: 25 – 51
- Moore, Mick, "Retreat from Democracy in Sri Lanka," *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 30(1) 1992: 64-84.
- Peebles, Patrick, "Colonization and Ethnic Conflict in the Dry Zone of Sri Lanka," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 49(1) 1990:30- 55.
- Sadiq, Kamal, "When States Prefer Non-Citizens Over Citizens: Conflict Over Illegal Migration into Malaysia," *International Studies Quarterly*, 49 (2) 2005: 101-122.
- Snyder, Jack and Karen Ballentine, "Nationalism and the Marketplace of Ideas," *International Security*, 21 (2) Fall 1996: 5-40.
- Torpey, John, "Coming and Going: On the State Monopolization of the Legitimate Means of Movement" *Sociological Theory* Volume 16, Number 3, November 1997: 239-259.
- Triadafilopoulos, Triadafilos, "Building Walls, Bounding Nations: Migration and Exclusion in Canada and Germany, 1870-1939." *Journal of Historical Sociology* 17(4) 2004: 385-427.
- Wayland, Sarah, "Ethnonationalist Networks and Transnational Opportunities: the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora," *Review of International Studies* 2004 30:405-426.
- Wimmer, Andreas and Nina Glick Schiller, "Methodological Nationalism and the Study of Migration," *European Journal of Sociology* 43 (2) 2002: 217-240.
- Zolberg, Aristide, "The Formation of New States as a Refugee-Generating Process," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 467 (1) 1983: 24-38.

## Books

Basch, Linda, Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (Langhorne, Pa.; Reading: Gordon and Breach, 1994)



# State Construction and the Use of National Narratives

Written by Holly Catling

Bosniak, Linda, *The Citizen and the Alien: Dilemmas of Contemporary Membership* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

Brubaker, Rogers, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*, (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992).

Castles, Stephen, Alastair Davidson, *Citizenship and Migration: Globalization and the Politics of Belonging* (Basingstoke: Macmillan 2000).

Chatterjee, Partha, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

Gombrich, Richard, "Is the Sri Lankan War a Buddhist Fundamentalism?" in *Buddhism, Conflict, and Violence in Modern Sri Lanka*, Mahinda Deegalle, ed., (London: Routledge, 2006) pp. 22-37.

Hammar, Thomas, *Democracy and the Nation-State: Aliens, Denizens and Citizens in a World of International Migration* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1990).

Kemper, Stephen, *The Presence of the Past: Chronicles, Politics, and Culture in Sinhala life*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991).

Meredith, Martin, *The State of Africa*, (London: The Free Press, 2006).

Obeyesekere, Gananath, "Buddhism, Ethnicity, and Identity: A Problem in Buddhist History," in *Buddhism, Conflict, and Violence in Modern Sri Lanka*, Mahinda Deegalle, ed., (London: Routledge, 2006) pp. 134-165.

Scott, David, "Community, Number, and the Ethos of Democracy," in *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999) pp.158-189.

Smith, Anthony D., *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

Soysal, Yasemin, *Limits of Citizenship: Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

Tambiah, S.J., *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986).

Velupillai, Alvapillai, "Sinhala Fears of Tamil Demands," in *Buddhism, Conflict, and Violence in Modern Sri Lanka*, Mahinda Deegalle, ed., (London: Routledge, 2006) pp. 93-117.

## Other sources

[http://www.aimforhumanrights.nl/fileadmin/user\\_upload/pdf/CRA\\_SouthAfrica\\_ExecutiveSummary.pdf](http://www.aimforhumanrights.nl/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/CRA_SouthAfrica_ExecutiveSummary.pdf) "Human Rights and Business: Executive Summary of the South Africa Country Risk Assessment," Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2006. Accessed on 16/04/11.

"Colour me South African: Learning to live in a rainbow society," *The Economist*, 3/07/2010 accessed via [http://www.economist.com/node/8362605?story\\_id=E1\\_RPGNGDV&CFID=168326944&CFTOKEN=16271449](http://www.economist.com/node/8362605?story_id=E1_RPGNGDV&CFID=168326944&CFTOKEN=16271449) on 14/04/11.

"Putting the Malaise into Malaysia," *The Economist*, 30/11/2006 accessed via [http://www.economist.com/node/8362605?story\\_id=E1\\_RPGNGDV&CFID=168326944&CFTOKEN=16271449](http://www.economist.com/node/8362605?story_id=E1_RPGNGDV&CFID=168326944&CFTOKEN=16271449) on 13/04/11.

## State Construction and the Use of National Narratives

Written by Holly Catling

Bernama, 31/05/2010, "Razali Laments Poor Malaysian Nationalism", *The Star Online*, <http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2010/5/31/nation/6372140&sec=nation> accessed on 14/4/11.

Cameron, David, PM's speech at the Munich Security Conference 05/02/2010 accessed via <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/speeches-and-transcripts/2011/02/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference-60293> on 17/04/11.

Chrisafis, Angelique, 11/04/2011, "French Police Detain Veil Ban Protestors," *Guardian* via <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/11/french-police-detain-veil-protesters> accessed on 11/4/11.

Editorial, "Immigration: Living with Diversity", *Guardian*, 15/04/11 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/apr/15/immigration-cameron-speech-coalition-cable?INTCMP=SRCH> accessed on 16/04/11.

Hong Chieh, Yow, 08/04/11, "Bersih Queries Rela's Voting Status as Volunteer Corps Grows," *The Malaysian Insider* <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/bersih-queries-relas-voting-status-as-volunteer-corps-grows/> accessed on 13/04/11.

Krieger, Norma, "Unprotected Migrants: Zimbabweans in South Africa's Limpopo Province," *Human Rights Watch*, July 2006: 18 (6(A)).

McGreal, Chris, "Thousands Seek Sanctuary as South Africans Turn on Refugees," *Guardian*, 20/05/2008 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/may/20/zimbabwe.southafrica> accessed on 16/04/11.

Pero, Davide, "On the Intersection of Ethnicity, Class and Nation in Contemporary 'Progressive' Politics," seminar given at SOAS 17/11/10 as part of the Centre for Migration and Diaspora Studies Department of Anthropology and Sociology and Department of Development Studies Joint Seminar Series, autumn 2010.

Rulashe, Pumla, "Talk of New Xenophobic Violence in South Africa has Refugees on Edge," 6/07/10, <http://www.unhcr.org/4c3339fd6.html> accessed on 16/04/11.

Weaver, Matthew and agencies 17/10/2010, "Angela Merkel: German Multiculturalism Has 'utterly failed'," *Guardian* <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/oct/17/angela-merkel-german-multiculturalism-failed> accessed on 15/4/11.

Whittaker, Richard and Philip Lynch, Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Leicester, "Explaining Support for the UK Independence Party at the 2009 European Parliament Elections," Working Paper March 2011. Accessed via <http://www.le.ac.uk/po/staff/documents/UKIPvoteworkingpaper.pdf> on 16/04/11.

Wilders, Geert, "The Failure of Multiculturalism and How to Turn the Tide," 14/04/2011. Transcript of his speech in Rome 25/03/11 accessed via <http://www.internationalfreepressociety.org/2011/04/the-failure-of-multiculturalism-and-how-to-turn-the-tide-by-geert-wilders/> on 17/04/11

[1] Defined here as civic membership dependent on birth in the territorial bounds of the nation, usually more open to naturalisation of migrants (Castles; Davidson 2000:86).

[2] Defined here as ethnic membership because of its reliance on descent as dictate of national membership (Brubaker 1990:386)

[3] Selective migration controls grew from the need for nation-states to exclude certain types of migrants seen as more of a threat to emerging national identities for example (Triadafilopoulos 2004:390-391). Also see Brand on preferential treatment of 'indigenous' Transjordanians over Jordanians of Palestinian origin (2010:108).

[4] For example a large Tamil community exists on mainland India, which the Sinhalese ethnic majority in Sri Lanka may perceive as augmenting the threat of the Sri Lankan Tamil minority to Sri Lanka, which has been imagined by the political elite as a Sinhalese nation-state (Gombrich 2006:28).

## State Construction and the Use of National Narratives

Written by Holly Catling

[5] Prevalent race theories were also a factor and racial groups labelled 'harmful to the development of the nation' were selectively excluded (Triadafilopoulos 2004:390).

[6] Cameron, David, from his speech at the Munich Security Conference 05/02/2010: 'Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream.'

[7] Weaver, Matthew and agencies 17/10/2010, "Angela Merkel: German multiculturalism has 'utterly failed'," *Guardian*.

[8] Chrisafis, Angélique, 11/04/2011, "French Police Detain Veil Ban Protestors," *Guardian* via <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/11/french-police-detain-veil-protesters> accessed 11/4/11.

[9] Cameron, 05/02/2010: 'we have allowed the weakening of our collective identity' via multiculturalism.

Wilders, Geert, "The Failure of Multiculturalism and How to Turn the Tide," 14/04/2011. In his speech in Rome 25/03/11: 'The multicultural society has undermined this rule of common sense and decency. The multicultural society tells the newcomers who settle in our cities and villages: You are free to behave contrary to our norms and values. Because your norms and values are just as good, perhaps even better, than ours.'

[10] Even if they are given opportunities of assimilation this is often unattractive because of the accompanying civics education that includes them through excluding their difference; such suppression of difference in the nation-state may provoke resistance (Castles; Davidson 2000:215)

[11] "Human Rights and Business: Executive Summary of the South Africa Country Risk Assessment," Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2006: states that migrant workers are not protected by human rights law because of the way immigration law is structured.

[12] This is also seen in Malaysian nationalist discourse: Bernama, 31/05/2010, "Razali Laments Poor Malaysian Nationalism", *The Star*.

[13] "Colour me South African: Learning to live in a rainbow society," *The Economist*, 3/07/2010.

[14] Rulashe, Pumla, "Talk of New Xenophobic Violence in South Africa has Refugees on Edge," 6/07/10, *UNHCR News*.

[15] McGreal, Chris, "Thousands Seek Sanctuary as South Africans Turn on Refugees," *Guardian*, 20/05/2008: 'some of the mobs have also targeted South Africans speaking minority languages such as Shangaans and Venda'.

[16] "Colour me South African: Learning to live in a rainbow society," *The Economist*, 3/07/2010: 'A study by the University of Cape Town last year found xenophobia to be "probably rife" in the country's workplaces.'

[17] McGreal, Chris, 'Some South Africans in the afflicted areas have taken to painting their names on their doors so they are not mistaken for foreigners'. Krieger, Norma, "Unprotected Migrants: Zimbabweans in South Africa's Limpopo Province," *Human Rights Watch*, July 2006: 18 (6(A)). Report showed that employers were not respecting the rights of legal migrant workers and that illegal migrants were subject to state violence.

[18] 'By the 1970s nationalism had become a matter of ethnic politics, the reason why people in the Third World killed each other' (Chatterjee 1993:3).

[19] Editorial, "Immigration: Living with Diversity", *Guardian*, 15/04/11. UKIP's performance in a recent by-election has forced the three main British political parties to pay more attention to the issue of immigration. See also Whittaker and Lynch "Explaining support for the UK Independence Party at the 2009 European Parliament

## State Construction and the Use of National Narratives

Written by Holly Catling

elections," March 2011.

[20] Pero, Davide, "On the intersection of ethnicity, class and nation in contemporary 'progressive' politics," seminar given at SOAS 17/11/10. He suggested that migrants were used self consciously by state elites as tools of governance.

[21] See also Gombrich 2006:28-29 on displacement of violence against such groups.

[22] The Tamil community are no more migrant settlers than the Sinhalese Sri Lankans are, but Sinhalese nationalism has imagined them as such by ignoring their role as joint nation founders (Obeyesekere 2006:139).

[23] The SLFP and UNP dominate Sri Lankan politics and both represent Sinhalese interests (Moore 1992:73).

[24] "Putting the Malaise into Malaysia," *The Economist*, 30/11/2006.

[25] Hong Chieh, Yow, 08/04/11, "Bersih queries Rela's voting status as volunteer corps grows," *The Malaysian Insider*: fears that giving postal votes to Rela 'would allow the paramilitary civil volunteer force to help BN unfairly retain hotly-contested seats'.

[26] For example the Kadazandusuns made up 42% of the population of Sabah in 1960, by 1990 the census recorded them as only 19.6%.

[27] It guarantees citizen's readiness to die for their reified state, and the widespread realist view is that states must always be 'prepared for the worst': war (Hammar 1990:29).

—

*Written by: Holly Catling*  
*Written at: SOAS, University of London*  
*Written for: Fiona Adamson*  
*Date written: 04/2011*