

Why anti-national?

When we declare our opposition to capital and nation, quite a few people would agree with the later part if we appended an ‘-ism’. Being a ‘nationalist’ is not a badge of honour these days, instead it is reserved for the types of the British National Party. A proper, democratic citizen does not consider himself a nationalist, instead the much more noble label ‘patriot’ is preferred. A patriot, so the popular idea, does not look down on other nations, but ‘instead’ and ‘only’ loves his own. This love expresses itself in many different ways:

- Cheering for the English, Welsh, Scottish or British team in whatever sport is on telly goes without question. That ‘we’ win if they win is for some reason understood.¹
- “British jobs for British workers” – Gordon Brown shared appreciation for this with some of the Lindsey wildcat strikers. The disagreement a liberal would register with this is that these sentiments harm ‘our’ economy.
- ‘We’ are all in this financial crisis together and need to pull in our belt. In the interest of ‘our’ economy we will have to take a hit. Although, some of those ‘greedy bankers’ might have to give up some of their bonuses as well in times of crisis for the sake of ‘us’ all.
- ‘Our’ troops deserve ‘our’ support in Afghanistan, one might disagree with the government but this does not alienate oneself from the troops who risk their lives in order to serve ‘us’.
- Some go even as far as asking how many immigrants ‘our’ culture and country can take.

While these statements deal with quite different topics, they all have two features in common. First, they are based on some common definition of who ‘we’ are, i.e. who belongs to this group and who does not: “Nation denotes a people who are believed to or deemed to share common customs, origins, and history” (Wikipedia). Some people also mention language. Second, these statements also imply some content that follows from this group membership (an entitlement for preferred treatment for instance, or a collective worth sacrificing for). The justifications of the groups in question and the demands made in the name of these groups is what we call nationalism.

In the first part of this article we will consider the various reasons being put forward to justify the nation. Some of them are clearly unfashionable these days and thus it might seem somewhat tedious and unnecessary to engage on this level with them. However, these justifications are not as obsolete as one might hope and furthermore have an implicit existence in citizenship law.

In the second part of this article we will explain why and how people are subordinated under the modern nation. We will also give reasons why the ideology of the national collective is so successful – and why in fact all the above mentioned examples of ‘patriotism’ are an expression of the same partisanship for one’s nation. Even if we accept the common separation between patriotism and nationalism, we note that the love towards one’s ‘own’ nation is the prerequisite for nationalists to look down on others. It is their positive judgement about ‘their’ nation which allows them to pass a negative on others. While not every ‘patriot’ must make the transition, appreciation for one nation is the requirement for the nationalist disapproval of others. In any case, we critique nationalism for its love towards a country. Thus, the proposed division between patriotism and nationalism plays no role for our critique.

Before we get on to the particular justifications put forward for nations and nationalism in general we note that need to justify or explain a particular collective or group by something else only appears if the common interest in that group is not a sufficient or self-evident bond. Who would worry as much about the common ground of some skittles club's members (compared to members competing with each other in a modern nation-state)? For the skittles club the common ground is so plain – to skittle – that nobody would bother looking to justify it or in fact give reasons for why this club has really strong bonds and should therefore be a group of common interests.

1 Foundation Myths of the Nation

Common Blood

The claim that human beings can be split into various races and peoples based on their biology and in particular their blood is rather out of fashion these days (except for most fascists) and can quite easily be proven wrong. The most common biological differences of blood types are the rhesus factor (of which someone can be positive or negative) and a blood group. In all parts of the world, there are people with A, AB, B and 0 as blood group and there is no nation which has members of one blood group only.² There are biological variations with a specific geographic distribution. In some cases a certain illness might only exist in a certain area or in some area far more people have a biological specificity compared to the global average. However, there is no correspondence to the way the world is split up in nation-states; biological features do not respect the boundary between various nation-states. For the moment, we will not concern ourselves with the question why people are ready to take this classification as a founding cause for national unity. Here the point is to simply show that biology cannot be the logical reason for citizens of one nation to belong to it.

Common Language

Language is something all states³ refer to: it is a matter of law and all states have one official language – or several. Switzerland for example makes the point by its mere existence that a language cannot be so utterly decisive for a nation: The country has four official languages. This does not seem to be a reason for a widespread call for its division into four separate units or to join neighbouring countries on a linguistic basis. On the other hand, the British do not have an exclusive usage of the English language as their mother tongue. One nation = one language is obviously not the criterion the world is divided by and language cannot be the reason for the existence of each nation.

Nevertheless language is a common instrument for movements of national liberation to legitimise their cause. During the 90s, it was quite common in Yugoslavia to stress that the Serbo-Croatian language was in fact not a language at all – Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian (and Montenegrin) were, so the claim goes, all languages of their own. After some hard work first results showed: words were invented in e.g. Croatian, which Serbs did not understand and the other way around. The formalisation of those differences did indeed split up what was spoken and written in different parts of the country.⁴ The other way around vice versa: when the German state was founded in 1871 2% spoke German roughly in the way it is used today. Linguistic unity was established by means of decree and force and well accepted by the population of most modern states.

Alleged and established differences or not, the language argument ignores the fact that there are more often than not no clear-cut boundaries between languages: many neighbouring tongues are similar and influence one another. There is no objective criterion for what makes a dialect a dialect of some language or a language of its own.⁵

But even if language were proper means to divide the world into nations: language is a skill which can be learned. It is merely the outer form of a thought. The content of any text can be written, spoken or thought in any language. The language in which the idea is expressed does not presuppose any content or even feelings. It therefore cannot be a reason for national differences and thus a proof for why and how nations are nations.

Common Culture

The same argument applies to the criterion of 'customs' as well. Sure enough, quite a few English know how to enjoy a cup of tea – but obviously not all do so (rumour has it some even hate it) whereas some people from abroad do love it. All fondness of behaviour, skill, smell etc. is a matter of taste. To give oneself up to the taste of tea simply presupposes two things: that the person knows about the drink and that she is interested in it or wants to find out whether she likes the experience on her tongue. But her decision to get involved in that particular activity is a matter of will. The result of one's decision is not predetermined by one's nationality, so the nationality cannot be the reason for neither cultural highlights nor cultural horrors.

This argument may seem quite formal. After all, no-one (the BNP and folks alike aside) has asserted that all members of a nation share all of the qualities. It would merely be a tendency: people in the UK on average or by numbers speak English, drink beer, are polite and critical of the war in Iraq. More globally speaking: surely there are certain regions where the sitar is played regularly, whereas it is completely unknown elsewhere. However, the claim that this statistical difference would be a reason and foundation for a nation is still wrong. For any example in the field of language, culture, custom etc. there will be members of one nation who will have more in common with members of other nations. And one member of a nation that has culturally nothing at all in common with another member of that same nation, at least not on the basis of the discussed definition. The only objective difference is the higher likelihood that someone from a particular region is exposed to a particular custom, dish etc. while people from far away might be ignorant towards it – a situation which can be redeemed easily on a personal level, e.g. by reading a book. Finally, even if there was a particular region with a particular custom not practised anywhere else that still is no reason for a nation-state. The adherents could simply found a club, team or whatever suits them best.

The spreading of culture is not as innocent as it might seem. The state 'supports' its citizens making cultural choices. What national culture means is communicated in education from kindergarten to university. Through diverse programmes and schemes from the ministry of cultural affairs, the government decides which exhibitions, which artists, which cultural stream to boost. National culture is something co-produced by the state and a result of its actions.

The nationalist appreciation of culture includes the stressing of the 'real Englishman' Shakespeare or 'our' J. K. Rowling – just as if every British person who appreciates the writer would be best friends with her and therefore happy for her books to be received so well. But the idea is a different one: through 'our' J. K. Rowling 'our' national culture is ostensibly expressed. Indeed any cultural work refers to other cultural products and that includes pieces of art from the same

national origin. It is a reflection on the existing. However, by baring the traces of and processing present and past art, each piece of art is something new exactly by making that reference. To put it differently, it is exactly the lack of identity which distinguishes a cultural product, its uniqueness, not its identity with some national culture. The much praised cultural treasures are treasures because they are not like the rest. Furthermore, while the references made by cultural products will not be a tribute to all kinds of work everywhere, art never did stop at national borders nor is it a national product. Simply by the artists' citizenship art is declared as English, French or something else – owing to people perceiving it as such. But there is nothing about the piece itself that would make it belong to a nation.

Common History

Common history seems to be a rather objective founding principle at first. It is something that happened and that required (usually) many people to take part. No one can write history on his own. Common history, i.e. history shared by a nation is, what happened to the people belonging to that group in the past. The UK for example was founded in 1707, was a world power in the 19th century and a little longer, and helped to win WWII. In more modern days, its government took a strong stance against the organised worker's movement in the 80s, the UK public lively discussed the need for British troops in Iraq as well as the size of a healthy model and worries about its teenage pregnancy rate.

So far, so bizarre. Again, the question is, if all that really founds the nation. Talking about these facts in Britain's long-ago as well as its more recent history, exactly the unity of the people which is ought to be substantiated is already presupposed. National history before the nation-state was formed as a backward projection: Once and only if the 'we' is defined, a group of people long or very long dead can be made into a collective. A collective bound by history to the current one. Anyway, for any occurrence, say, more than a hundred years ago there simply cannot be a physical 'we', since no one is left who actually took part. But even for anything more up-to-date, most endeavours and decisions are still taken with at least a considerable minority of people opposing the project; yet, they are still citizens. The other way around makes it fit: If the nation already exists with all its citizens, than there is a collective and a history that can be referred to as 'ours'.

If this history is given as a (or even the) reason for the nation, then that turns the real relation of nation and history upside down: without the nation there would simply be none of its history the history is the result of its formation.

Again it is the state which fosters this quid pro quo by educating its junior and senior subjects about 'their' history in history classes, museums and on public TV channels.

NB: Some remarks on the making of the British

Let us have a closer look on how the British were made. Where shall we start? Stonehenge and King Arthur? The Celtic tribes in Britain did not refer to themselves as Britons and did not think of each other as fellows; King Arthur is a myth. Maybe the Battle of Hastings? A massacre, because two ruling elites had a conflict about land and about who was allowed to exploit the peasants – what a nice point to start. How about the Founding of the Church of England? A King who wanted a male heir and took the chance to get supremacy on the church (and the wealth of the clergy) plus a Queen who used the protestant belief to stabilise her reign, that's for sure a reason to cherish a nation! Might Cromwell and the First Revolution be something to start with?

Of course, especially the invasion of Ireland and the colonial, quasi-racist regime. A landmark in English and Irish history for sure. Shall we continue with the union between England and Scotland, where the Scottish nobility was bribed by the English crown – if you cannot beat them, buy them! It was of course not done to unite all ‘British brethren’, but so England could get rid of a competitor and a permanent threat on the British Isle and to allow the Scottish bourgeoisie to get their deal when Britain started to conquer its Empire. One could continue certainly, but it would only lead to one conclusion: Britain, as every other nation, is a product of bitter fights, massacres, wars, class struggles, economic interests, monarchical strategies and even mere coincidences.

When the process of nation building started, no one thought of a nation-state, but it was its result – with all the consequences. Kings and Queens might have had in mind prestige, holding court and loyal subjects, priests upheld the Virgin Queen versus Virgin Mary, aristocrats and merchants cared about wealth. It ended up in a state that had one goal: national success. Convinced of a special white protestant mission, scared of their French, Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, Swedish, and other competitors, interested in loyal subjects and soldiers, the ruling elites of Britain did all they could to spread ‘Britishness’. For over 200 years, Britishness meant Englishness because of the economic, political and cultural dominance of English gentry and bourgeoisie. It was taught in schools, preached in Anglican and dissenter’s churches, portrayed in art and literature, transported even by advertisements for Olde English products and so on. The invention of a national heritage was not a conspiracy but based on conviction.

But one has to forget and forgive if one really wants to love one’s country. That is what national history is about – to encourage everybody to see the history through national glasses: Think of Britain as it is portrayed in the upper class kitsch of English countryside in summer. Do not think of all the people who died in the making of Britain. Or if you do, then do not see it as the bloody suffering, the hunger, the terror, the cynical use of human lives by politicians, capitalists, kings, nobles, generals – see it as ‘a heroic sacrifice for all of us’. And do not dare to ask who is ‘us’.

Some people now might say: right you are, Britain is made up. England, Scotland, Wales, Ulster and/or Ireland – that is the real thing! With the decline of the Empire new nationalism began to succeed in Britain, partly invented, partly revived – and today discussions about identity, devolution and a possible break-up of Britain catch public attention. But this is no way out of hell, rather it is a prolongation and intensification: One can show that what is true for British history is also true for the details of the history of the ‘four⁶ nations on the British Isles’. It does not make sense to wonder about national identities and mourn about hidden and suppressed national history. It would be better to have a closer look at what the politics of nation-states is about. The answer to that does not lay in history.

Civic Patriotism

Some answer the question of what holds that nation-state together by referring to an assumed decision by all the people belonging to that nation. This understanding suggests an agreement by all with the values and heart of the political organisation of that nation – be it the human rights in principal, be it the constitution or the Magna Carta. In short, it is the idea of Rousseau’s social contract founding the nation. It might be true that indeed most citizens agree with most of the principles that govern the societies they live in – but have they ever truly been asked? Or can anyone enter a modern state simply by signing the Bill of Rights after being given it by a friendly border patrol officer at the airport? Obviously not.⁷ It is more or less taken for granted (and

actively fostered) in a democracy that people share a belief in the political system, but it is nothing decided by them.

Commonality and affirmation

But even if our refutations would all be wrong and any of the above mentioned characteristics or others were the source for and of a nation, it would only found the existence of the national context on some self-evident basis of affiliation. It would prove, that the people in one nation are culturally, historically or by language somehow bound to one another. But it would still fail to explain why people should refer positively to the nation. Even if one's mother tongue is English, even if grand-pa fought in WWII for the allied forces and one likes tea. Nothing of this implies any partisanship in matters which do not affect tea, discussions in the English language and camp fire war stories. These features do not explain partisanship.

2 Foundation of the Nation

So far, this article has merely provided deconstruction of the myth that nations exist because of common bonds of their subjects. But this deconstruction can only be the beginning: the usual justifications for nationhood are not an explanation of the nation. However, nation-states do exist, they are far from illusions.⁸ Nation-states' fundamental act is their assertion of their monopoly on violence. Nobody but the state itself may use force to break someone's will. That calls for people under the state's rule and a territory where its power is unchallenged: the nation-state asserts itself as the supreme power in society and makes the people living on its territory its subjects.

By declaring and exercising that power over its subjects, it creates some similarity among them: each one of its subjects is subordinated under its rule.⁹ The nation is a forced community and it is based on violence: at each border people risk their very lives and many die when trying to get in (or out depending on its attractiveness to people). No one born in one state is ever asked, whether they actually like it or not – they are granted citizenship.¹⁰ Thus, the popular “we” is objectively based on an act of power by the state. Consequently, the usage of the word “we” as a shorthand for being subject to the same monopoly of violence would not be ideological. The British state does create the British. But this is hardly ever what is understood when people talk about “us”. They take it as something natural, as a quality of the people who happen to live on the area that once has been subordinated and united by the nation-state. The talk about ‘us’ expresses identification, a positive attitude towards the nation:

3 Nationalism

With all its power over its subjects there is one thing the state cannot do: it cannot create consciousness in general. In particular, it cannot make people nationalists: it cannot create the fitting consciousness. It can punish people for saying certain things, but it cannot control what they think. This, they have to do themselves. Yet, almost everyone does have a positive attitude

towards 'his' nation.¹¹ Almost everyone does consider it as a desirable collective. This ubiquity of nationalism leads back to the way people work and consume in this society.

Mutual dependency

Everybody needs stuff: food, clothing, beer, Macbook Airs, the collected works of Calvin & Hobbes Since most of those products are quite complicated to get together, people are dependent on each other through division of labour. In any form of division of labour the producers are materially dependent on each other. However, division of labour in this society is something quite different from a rational, sane division of labour of producers working according to a common plan.

Liberty from each other – private property

In this society commodities are produced for the market and sold in order to earn money. A steel manufacturer does not first and foremost care about the steel that is produced in her factory nor what nice goods can be made out of steel but the profit she can make. Similarly, the workers in her factory do not have to give a damn about the final product, they work to earn a wage. The organisation of this process is done without direct coercion. Even the most dependent participants the working class are not made to work using brute-force but their material condition are enough to spark an interest in working for someone else's wealth. Their interest in their wage is convincing enough, because they materially depend on it. Economic subjects pursue their own private interests, a right granted to them by the state.

The capitalist state grants its subjects liberty from each other. That is, no citizen may break the will of another citizen (except when explicitly sanctioned by the state). Alice's will is the barrier for Bob's will: he cannot use force to make Alice do stuff she does not want to do. This applies in general, but it also applies with respect to objects in particular: private property. The capitalist state insists that, for instance, Alice may dispose over her chair factory exclusively: Bob has no say, because it is her property; thus her will applies exclusively. While Bob is dependent on the products (such as chairs) produced by other citizens, Alice can be completely ignorant towards the needs and wants of others simply because the chair factory belongs to her. For all this it does not even matter whether Alice or anybody is actually using the factory. One can own a piece of land in Northern Scotland without ever leaving Cardiff; this is how fundamental this exclusion is. Vice versa the other way around. Alice is dependent on products by others who were granted their right to ignorance by the highest power in society, the state. The only way they can come to an agreement on the basis of private property is to offer their own property in exchange; to exploit some other party's interest in what they have to offer. This implies collisions of interests: one is dependent on others and is thus required to exploit their dependence on oneself. They will try to do the same.

The fact that people busy themselves against each other in this way is something the state has an interest in. It exploits the self-propelled interest for its own might: to use the strength of its national economy against other states, to use taxes to finance its own apparatus. The state establishes, fosters and relies on an economy which requires its participants to pursue their own interests out of their own free will.¹² This economy relies on the materialism of its subjects. The state does not command its citizens what to produce and how. It merely sets the conditions and everyone is free to use these conditions to his own advantage.

Law

The state controls the relationship of its subjects among themselves and towards itself in the form of law. The capitalist state ensures that if people have a conflict, and they will, they execute this conflict according to its general and universal rules; usually expressed as rights. In exchange, it offers all counterparts the guarantee that their demands are valid and have as much reach as its law allows. The offer of the state under the rule of law is: if you restrict yourself (i.e. obey the law), you can make use of the highest power when pursuing your legally approved interests. Quite practically this means that the state arrests thieves, enforces contracts and evicts squatters. Or, if for example a worker does not come to work breaching her employment contract, a capitalist can take action against the worker with the help of a civil court. Vice versa the worker can sue her boss in order to get her redundancy pay if it is illegally withheld. No matter what particular situation people are in as long as they can claim the law on their side, the state will make it his case or provide the legal means to pursue one's goal.¹³

Chances and opportunities

The state ensures with force that peoples' materialism stays within the limits set by private property and other regulations. It ensures that property is without alternative. Thousands of coppers and judges watch over the subjects to ensure that they are law abiding. Since this way the subjects are first of all excluded from the immense collection of commodities and are without alternative, they have no choice but to make use of the miserable means – law – as a means.¹⁴ As workers, owners of corner shops and investment bankers they need their rights because any business is done in mutual dependency and enmity of interests. The precondition for them to pursue their interests is the state. All of them are character-masks in the capitalist economy. As such they have an interest in the guarantee of the existing politico-economic order so they can pursue their interests. The state thus is the expression and the guarantor of the general public interest.

This practical necessity of dealing with the conditions set by the state, the necessity of pursuing one's own interest under hostile conditions, and the offer made by the state suggest a certain way of looking at the world: the granted liberties are not just restrictions (e.g. when granted to others which they can use against one's own interest), but also offer opportunities (e.g. when applied to oneself). This interested standpoint considers the state from the point of view what it is for me instead of what it is.

The erroneous conclusion people draw from this misery is to translate their own restrictions into a set of chances and opportunities, such that even being made redundant is sometimes seen as a new opportunity in this best of all possible worlds. Thereby citizens do not only accept the offer they cannot refuse by the state, but are also willing to mistake the guarantee of rights for a chance rather than a restriction. The state first deprives one from the means of reproduction and then offers ways of gaining access to those means. Misinterpreting these offers as chances is like a prisoner appreciating the opportunity of prison labour as a way to pass the time behind walls without considering the bars as a fundamental restriction. While this misapprehension is suggested and encouraged by the state and its agents, it cannot effect acceptance on its own, this needs a conscious subject: she either believes it or she does not.¹⁵

It turns out state coercion is not needed: many people do believe it. They criticise the economy as too brute and compliment the state for neutralising its effects to some extent through social welfare programmes by providing education, roads and environmental protection plans. The state is seen as the tamer who domesticates the lion the lion being either the economy as such or simply (a part of) every human being which needs to be controlled by someone, i.e. the state.¹⁶

Virtuous materialism

This materialism – which mistakes hostile conditions as chances and opportunities – is quite a particular one. The state expects from its subjects that they ask themselves if they are permitted that which they want. As materialists of the decent kind they want the restriction of everybody's materialism in the interest of their own materialism;¹⁷ they exercise a virtuous or decent materialism. They do not demand the means of living but a fair wage.

This virtuous materialism has two aspects which contain the kernel of the nationalist ideology. First, whoever follows this line, accepts the restriction of private interests in the general public interest; this person wants everybody's means to be restricted according to the general and universal rule. The nationalist call for sacrifices for the nation contains the same train of thought. Second, it comprises the idea that if one does exercise decency, behave virtuous and restrict one's own interests according to the principles of private property and such, then one shall get what one deserves.¹⁸ In virtuous materialism the initial materialism still appears. For example, the nationalist demand "British jobs for British workers" presupposes the submission on the one hand but calls for meeting virtuous interests on the other.

Standpoint of the general public interest

Even the sum of interests that are followed in a virtuous manner do not form the general public interest. Neither is the general public interest accomplished by itself. It requires people who have it at heart either as professionals (such as politicians and many journalists) or as amateurs. They remind the rest of the citizenry of the fact that a restriction as a prerequisite for the pursuit of private interests is still a restriction. They take the perspective of what hardships have to be imposed in the interest of the nation.¹⁹ Quite often in this perspective private interests mainly appear as a negative, as what needs to be restricted ostensibly to their own benefit.

Nationalism

In summary: nationalism is the misunderstanding of taking nationhood as something prior to the nation-state, which inverts the actual relationship.²⁰ Nationalism is the loyalty towards the state as such and that objectively implies one's own subordination under the nation-state and thereby under goals that do no good to people. Nationalism has nothing to offer most of the time but "blood, toil, tears and sweat" (Roosevelt/Churchill). People do of course not follow the logic of

this slogan because they want to suffer. Somewhere underneath the nationalism there is the hope that the well-being of the country does mean the well-being of its citizens.

Disappointment

Yet that the restrictions for everyone are actually useful for oneself is refuted by reality for most people almost every day: they are poor, live under miserable conditions and potentially work long hours if they were so 'lucky' to find a job. Reality presents material to correct the mistake that the legitimacy of an interest implies support for its realisation. The legitimate job hunt does not imply guarantee of employment. If someone's rights were violated and the state does exercise its power, even then it does not necessarily imply that the damage is repaired. If someone's bicycle is stolen the police might search for the thief but they will not give a new bicycle to the victim of the theft. Instead of realising the origins of the damage to be found in the societal set-up and to either criticise it or to simply accept it as a given, most people proceed this disappointment with nationalist answers. Some put them forward in their pure forms, others mix and match.

Idealists insist on the misunderstanding that their virtuous materialism must be realisable at least in principle. Next or above the existing law they put an ideal of the law which should be realised. Left-wing parties like Respect with their demands to "tax the rich" fall into this category: they place their ideal of the state above the actual state. The not so left-wing demand "British jobs for British workers" follows the same logic. The materialist starting point is still plainly visible, this ideology insists that the fundamental order should allow these just interests to be satisfied.

Righteous people also start from the violation of their private interests. They notice a damage, which causes them to complain. They too insist that the fundamental order is not hostile, be it the market economy or the nation-state. They are proud because they live according to these principles which they accept. Searching for a cause of their harm, they end up identifying people who violated these just principles. As a corollary, neither them nor 'their' society is responsible for their hardship. People who do nothing but complain about the fact that 'we' have to pay for 'their' mess in the aftermath of the financial crisis, do not want to push through their interests not even in principle. Righteous people accept austerity measures and pay cuts, but would never leave out the point that they are not responsible for it. This is where righteous criticism stops and thus in the most consequent form of this position a direct link to improving one's conditions is missing. However virtuous the materialism was they started off with, it is absent in the end of this train of thought.

Fascists, on the contrary, conclude that it is the system that is to blame since those cheeky private interests pursued by others are not sufficiently restricted. They claim that these private interests ruin the nation. They demand that these violating interests are suppressed by the state such that the general public interest can prevail. They do not allow for the contradiction between the private and public interest, they demand identification. Virtuous materialists want the general public interest as the precondition of their private interests, fascists want the private interests to be expressions of the general public interest.²¹ Fascists finally put the nation as an end in itself, surpassing all other interests. They are the most consequential nationalists, the apotheosis of nationalism.

Attitude towards the outside

First and foremost nationalism is an ideology of identification with the nation. However, it is also the basis for citizens to pass a negative judgement on their own kind – i.e. other citizens – if they

are from abroad – i.e. not citizens of the home country. To explain why this is not some individual ‘moral failure’ one needs to look at the material basis for this belittlement. That this world is divided into nation-states and that no nationalist dreams of inviting all of human kind into the fatherland is evident.²² So far so general. Apartment complexes too are divided into flats and rarely do neighbours invite each other to move in. However, nation-states do not exist side by side, relatively unaffected by each other, at most exchanging a more or less friendly nod when they meet in the hallway, to stick to the analogy. They engage on the same world market, have disputes over land and people and compete for power and resources: they compete against each other. Some states are outright hostile towards each other (such as Iran and the UK currently), some form alliances in order to push their own agendas (e.g., NATO and WTO members) and some even argue about their common currency (e.g., Germany and Greece). The world is full of nation-states claiming to execute the general public interest and each nation-state is confronted with its peers disputing this claim. From the UK perspective French interests are usually only French interests (when in disagreement) and British interests are usually just, global and necessary. Vice versa the other way around. That under these conditions the attitude towards foreign states and their citizens is usually not indifferent or even positive is no surprise.

The belittlement of other nations is a logical consequence of the appreciation of one’s own interests between them conflict. However, this does not imply that someone fond of his nation must draw that conclusion. Insofar the separation between ‘patriotism’ and ‘nationalism’ – addressed at the beginning of this article – is indeed possible. Even though we do not believe most ‘patriots’ that they do not make this transition from just loving their own country to belittling others, uncovering pejorative thoughts on foreigners is not a worthy task. The admitted identification with the nation provides sufficient material for critique; the task cannot be to prove that someone’s ideology is secretly something else, but to show how this ideology itself is wrong and harmful.

National separation and liberation

Some are indeed fundamentally unhappy with their subordination under the state they live in. If they cannot or do not want to join another nation and are not critical of state domination as such, they have two options left: to change the political system of the state or to found a new one. Both national separation and liberation movements perceive that the power they are subordinated to has too little or nothing to offer to them. Their cause is to correct this mistake; to establish a just domination by their own kind. Even where the material basis for the virtuous materialism is missing, nationalist movements apply this ideal.

Separatists base their disagreement on the ‘finding’, that there is a second unity within the nation which differs and should be equipped with its own power apparatus. The material basis for this observation is often a lack of or a rather slack application of equal treatment. Whatever the foundation myths of their ‘nation’ might be, their actual commonality is their oppression. In most cases, it is this oppression which creates this group and respectively the corresponding movements.

For example, the Turkish state suppresses Kurdish customs and language. Kurds are not treated as subjects equal before the law, but they are confronted with a general suspicion of disloyalty and of undermining the unity of the nation. Kurds might have formal citizenship but they do not experience the invitation of the state to use its power to pursue their own interests like other Turkish citizens do. The consequence the Kurdish liberation movement draws from this observation is the demand for their own state. In Turkey nationhood is, as usual, asserted by force

and the movement towards another nationalism, the Kurdish nationalism, is not welcomed at all by the Turkish state.²³ It wants all its citizens to be committed to itself, not to another state (to be). The forceful assertions by the Turkish military who has the monopoly on violence further encourages the separatist movement. Separatist movements for their part often re-enact the state's discrimination by referring positively to the division made by the authorities.

Those who want to liberate a pre-existing nation observe the hostility of the state they live in towards the majority of the population. Neither do they challenge the conception of the nation nor do they deny the need for a matching domination. They just insist that the current one caters to foreign or minority interests instead of the nation. Most of these movements, after seizing power, did not improve the livelihood of their populations since they did not challenge the basic tenets of the economic conditions, they merely aimed at swapping out the political (and economical) personnel. However, one might wonder, there are indeed states where after such a national liberation a higher living standard for the population could be observed such as Cuba,²⁴ a state which disengaged from the world market and expropriated big capitalists within its borders. Is such a nationalism not a sign that nationalism can appeal to people to get them enthusiastic about a different organisation of society? If successful, would that not be helpful in challenging the capitalist mode of production? Indeed, improving healthcare, provision, literacy who would argue against that? However, this does not rescind the truth that national collectives are forced collectives and that the myths about them remain wrong. On top of that, it is strange to rally for the interests of the people, for their provision, for them in the name of something else; be it Christian love, national solidarity, the glory of socialism, history or true human nature. If a project which ostensibly is about improving the livelihood of the people appeals to something other than the abolishment of poverty and domination, this is a clue that this project is at least not only about those advancements.

Both separatist and liberating nationalist movements observe a nation-state which appears clearly hostile towards the people they claim to represent. From that observation one could learn about the nature of the nation-state and oppose it. However, these movements have so much appreciation for the very subject which suppresses them that they want one of their own. Their main experience with the nation-state is one of suppression with brute-force. But even this demonstration of the obnoxious quality of such a power apparatus does not manage to convince them of the undesirability of such a thing. All the skull crushing exercised in the name of the nation does not crush the thought that the nation is a desirable thing. This does not diminish their bad experience, but this experience does not justify their conclusion.

So, why anti-national?

First, nationalism simply is not correct: no myth about the foundation of nations can be substantiated and from none of the proposed criteria follows endorsement of the nation (or the nation-state). This is argument enough to show that the ideology has nothing to do with ending domination and exploitation.

Second, any nation is a forced collective, it is the result of domination. Appreciation for the nation is appreciation for domination.

Third, nationalism is an ideology of sacrifice. It presents a cause the nation which ostensibly justifies to soft-pedal on one's own needs.²⁵ On top of that, in capitalist societies which always

mean mass poverty it justifies scarcity. It stands in diametrical opposition to the demand for luxury for everyone.

Fourth, any legitimization being put forward for people to come to terms with exploitation and subordination deserves critique. One of the most powerful ideologies accomplishing this is nationalism, the idea of some sort of natural belonging to a context of subordination and its offers to make sense of the misery experienced everyday.

Footnotes

1 The inversion of the argument, namely that those who cheer for a particular team must be partisans of the corresponding nation is not necessarily valid.

2 Even biologists and anthropologists (the latter's job being to categorise 'peoples') have realised by now that race is no objective category. See for example: <http://www.aaanet.org/stmts/racepp.htm> It seems even for them the early days when scientists and pseudo-scientists tried to prove naturally existing human races by measuring peoples' head sizes are over.

3 The state is the material basis of a nation as a generally accepted power unit. Therefore, the material state needs to be analysed before the nation and its affirmation can be explained (cf. the section "Foundation of the nation").

4 By mistaking this political development as something given and natural, some anti-imperialists racked their brains about the justification: if indeed Serbo-Croatian was one language, the separation of Croatia would be unjustified but if these were different languages, one should support the separation along the language border.

5 Some Linguists have recognised this fact. A saying by Max Weinreich stresses the state's power over the definition of what is the common language and what is a dialect: "A language is a dialect with an army and navy".

6 Four or five (add Northern Ireland) or six (add Cornwall) we could not care less.

7 It is indeed expected for everyone to stick to a country's rules. A stronger demand might be put on people applying for citizenship. More and more modern states including the UK test their potential new subjects on their knowledge about British history, language and laws. Who may even take this test is decided by the government. The civic patriotism criterion plays a role only negatively: one cannot base one's decision on which country to join on its legal or political ideas – the main quality of an immigrant still is to be useful in some way for the chosen state. If one is considered useful though, sticking to, knowing about and being tested on these rules becomes the next obligation.

8 The pamphlet "Against Nationalism" by the Anarchist Federation (<http://libcom.org/library/against-nationalism>) contains many sound arguments on nationalism, imperialism and left wing responses. However, like many other on the (far) left the Anarchist Federation considers the nation merely as an illusion: "The nation is a smokescreen, a fantasy which hides the struggle between classes which exists within and across them. Though there are no real nations, there are real classes with their own interests, and these classes must be differentiated. Consequently, there is no single 'people' within the 'nation', and there is no shared 'national interest' which unifies them." Their critique of nationalism is thus based on the opposition that they "do not see a world of nations in struggle, but of classes in struggle." On the contrary, in this text we aim to

demonstrate how a “world of nations in struggle” has to be explained on the basis of “classes in struggle”; how the interest in wage labour suggests an interest in the nation.

9 The definition of who is a subject and who is a foreigner is documented in citizenship law. Around the globe the laws concerning that matter know two principles: jus soli (right of soil) and jus sanguinis (right of blood). According to the former being born on the soil of a state grants right to citizenship. According to the later citizenship is determined by having an ancestor who was or is a citizen. Some states (such as Germany) almost only exercise the “right of blood” while most states have a mixture of both principles. We know of no state which does not have the jus sanguinis in one way or another, e.g. a state where the children of citizens are not claimed as citizens. This is the fundamental enforcement that biological heritage corresponds with nationality. Vice versa the other way around: the claim of some part of humanity as citizens of a certain nation-state also defines the opposite. It excludes everybody else on the same grounds, the lack of correct ancestors denies entry. Every citizenship law is a very practical racism. Most modern states allow for some procedures to gain citizenship later in life. However, these schemes depend on the adopting state’s calculation whether those people will be usable or not. Citizen or not – anyone on the territory of a state has to obey to the law.

10 In a world existing of nation states only, it is not a very feasible choice to simply get rid of that member-club-card by throwing one’s passport away in order to be free of any rule there is no territory under no rule. All resources and land is owned by private or legal subjects or states so there is hardly any possibility to build up another form of organising mutual reproduction, i.e. live together untroubled by any possible domination.

11 Which does not mean that people would nod anything through. Most people would criticise a lot: this government decision, that judgement in court, or a certain police action. However the point here is that the nation as such is usually not questioned at all.

12 When the state is threatened, for example in times of war, this economy can be suspended in favour of direct command.

13 There are indeed differences in what the government or sometimes a particular judge or Crown Prosecutor finds worth dealing with. But those are deflections from the rule, visible as such. Even where some legal rights are systematically not enforced the ideal prevails that they should (see below).

14 Strictly speaking, law is no means to satisfy one’s needs and desires since it first of all excludes one from the means of fulfilment and then provides a means to overcome its own limitation (such as private property). It does not contribute to consumption in any way.

15 Any theory which claims to derive what people think from their material reality contradicts itself. The very thought, which obviously deviates from the derived consciousness, could not be thought if it was true.

16 The picture though does not reflect reality correctly. The tiger can happily live without a tamer in contrast, capitalism needs the state: from guaranteeing contracts to educating workers (so they are in shape to be used as a resource) capitalism would not work without state power.

17 For example, in a version like “Sure it would be nice if I could simply take anything I need from the shop without paying – but if everybody did it, society would very soon stop to function.”

18 What people ostensibly deserve is subject of constant political debate: Economic liberals think people deserve whatever they can get on the market, whereas a little bit further to the left people tend to see the state as the instance providing justice for reasonable citizens who are not taken care of by the market.

19 “Ask not what your country can do for you ask what you can do for your country.” – John F. Kennedy

20 We touch on national liberation and separation briefly below.

21 The national-socialist slogan “you are nothing, your people is everything” is an apt summary of this idea. While John F. Kennedy presupposes a separation between the private interest and the national interest when he asks the citizens to ponder what they can do for the nation, this separation is not accepted by the fascists.

22 While political Islam is an ideology which shares many features with nationalism, this is something that sets it apart. It indeed welcomes all human kind into the Umma, the collective of all Muslims, once they converted to become ‘true believers’.

23 The politics regarding the ‘Kurdish question’ is a battle field of the political establishment in military and bureaucracy and the upcoming elite of AKP.

24 If one considers Cuba a good project or not is not the question here. Likeable or not, the least to say about it is that this state is certainly not a prime example of striving for capitalist accumulation. That is all, this case serves for here. Also, this is not meant as a contribution to the debate whether ‘socialism in one country’ is viable.

25 This does not mean that any cut back is always unreasonable. If in a planned economy there was, say, a huge storm destroying lots of soy crops. For someone not vegan it could make sense to leave the soy milk for the vegans for as long as there is a severe shortage. It would make sense in reflection on the mutual dependency in division of labour and the realisation that this mode of production is beneficial for oneself. The later is not given in capitalism, its severe shortages are perpetually produced not the exception.