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Professor Gregory Millard

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Gregory Millard, B.A., M.A. Political Science (McGill University), Ph.D. Political Studies
(Queen's University)

**The Jealous God:
A Problem in the Definition of Nationalism**

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Gregory Millard
*Department of Political Science
Kwantlen Polytechnic University*

Introduction

There is a recurring problem in scholarly definitions of nationalism. Many make it a sine qua non of nationalism that the nation must be a jealous god: a supreme object of loyalty and obligation, overriding all other communal affiliations. The result is what might be called “restrictive” definitions of nationalism that needlessly exclude the most commonplace manifestations of the phenomenon. This paper seeks to demonstrate that a significant number of scholars of nationalism have committed this error (and continue to commit it), and that it is indeed an error; but also that making this demonstration is harder than it first appears. Refuting a restrictive definition requires that we do more than point out that many nationalisms are not insuperably jealous. It demands some specific and pointed inquiry into the linkage between nation and political jurisdiction, especially statehood, and most crucially the ultimate sacrifices of war and conscription that states have been presumed entitled to impose upon their members. The argument here, then, is that we should indeed favour more expansive conceptions of nationalism, but that *thoughtfully* doing so takes rather more work than is usually realized. Restrictive definitions prove a surprisingly robust target.

The limited nature of the case must be conceded up front. This is not an attempt to contribute to ongoing debates over the nature and history of nationhood, as manifest in the “modernist,” perennialist,” “ethno-symbolist” and other schools of scholarship on nationalism (for example, Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1992; Calhoun 1997; Hastings 1997; Smith 2004, 2009; Hutchinson 2007). Those seeking empirical case-studies in one or another variety of nationalism

will similarly be disappointed. Since the “jealous” nation is liable to seem less attractive than more pluralist alternatives, the analysis here may be relevant to the extensive normative debates over nationalism and its rivals, providing indirect fodder for the claim that nationalism can be agreeably liberal (Tamir 1993; Kymlicka 1995; Moore 2001); but no formal and detailed examination of this connection can be undertaken here. Nor can this paper engage with the full range of considerations given in the complex relationships between national and other identity formations (Yuval-Davis 1997; Baum 2001). Its animating question is simply whether we are better served by thinking that nationalism necessarily demands that the nation trump all other affiliations, or by dropping this requirement. Must we say that “nationalism exists wherever individuals feel they belong primarily to the nation, and whenever affective attachment and loyalty to that nation override all other attachments and loyalties” – a restrictive definition (Alter 1989: 8-9)? Or is it enough to propose, much more modestly, that “the essence of nationalism is the goal of national flourishing [and that] nationalists are people who identify with their historical group and want it to flourish” (Nathanson 1998: 178-79)? The latter is the sounder course.

Defining the problem: the substance and prevalence of restrictive definitions

Restrictive definitions bear an eminent scholarly pedigree. “What is nationalism?” asks Hans Kohn. “Nationalism is a state of mind, in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due to the nation-state” (1965: 9). Like Elohim of Exodus, the nation permits no other gods before it. Elie Kedourie deems it “beyond doubt” that nationalism “asserts that the members of a nation reach freedom and fulfillment by cultivating the peculiar identity of their own nation and by sinking down their own persons in the greater whole of the nation” (1960: 73). Similarly,

Isaiah Berlin, according to whom nationalists believe that “the pattern of life of a society is similar to that of a biological organism; that what this organism needs for its development...constitutes its common goals; *that these goals are supreme* [and that] in cases of conflict with other values...these supreme values should prevail” (1981: 341-2; italics added).

This chord echoes through later scholarship. John Breuilly’s *Nationalism and the State* explains that “a nationalist argument is a political doctrine built upon three basic assertions,” one of which is that “the interests and values of this nation take priority over all other interests and values” (1985: 3). Peter Alter agrees that nationalism means that “loyalty to that nation [must] override all other attachments and loyalties” (1989: 8-9). In *Ethnonationalism*, Walker Connor is deeply concerned with the (ethnic) nation’s emotive power, such that it overrides even states and summons us to die on its behalf, and notes that where there is conflict “it is nationalism that customarily proves the more powerful allegiance” (1994: 207). If the seminal Ernest Gellner touches only incidentally upon a “restrictive” conception in our sense (1983: 54; 1994: viii), Eric Hobsbawm “use[s] the term ‘nationalism’ in the sense defined by Gellner, namely to mean ‘primarily a principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent,’” but adds “that this principle also implies that the political duty of the Ruritians to the polity which encompasses and represents the Ruritanian nation, *overrides all other public obligations*, and in extreme cases (such as wars) all other obligations of whatever kind” (1992: 9; italics added). Josep Llobera’s aptly-titled *The God of Modernity* claims that “[t]he nation, as a culturally defined community, is the highest symbolic value of modernity” (1994: ix). Indeed, according to Sam Pryke, the entire “modernist” school of nationalist theory – by far the most influential such school – can be characterized in terms of its belief that “nationalism insists that the political responsibilities of the citizen to their nation override all others,” with only the vague qualifying

adjective “political” leaving any doubt as to the comprehensiveness of nationalism’s demands, according to this point of view (2009: 5).

Examples multiply. “Nationalism locates the source of individual identity within a ‘people,’ which is seen as the bearer of sovereignty, *the central object of loyalty*, and the basis of collective solidarity,” for Liah Greenfeld (1993: 3, italics added). Anthony D. Smith claims that the “ideology of nationalism” features among its core doctrines the proposition that “an individual’s primary loyalty must be to his or her nation” (2004: 245). That “the nation’s claim to loyalty overrides all other allegiances” is one of three defining features of nationalist thought given by Joep Leerssen (2006: 14). For Martha and Richard Cottam, the nation presents itself as a “terminal loyalty,” such that “[a] person who identifies with the nation first and foremost, who gives the nation primary loyalty and identifies with it with greater intensity than any other group, is a *nationalist*” (2001: 2; italics in original). Steven Grosby, meanwhile, assures us that “[d]istinctive of nationalism is the belief that the nation is the only goal worthy of pursuit – an assertion that often leads to the belief that the nation demands unquestioned and uncompromising loyalty” (Grosby 2005: 5). Nationalists think that “[c]ategories [of identity] must be subordinated to the national category,” according to Patrick Colm Hogan (Hogan, 2009: 57); “category hierarchization is crucial to all forms of nationalism, and “nationalizing” projects “serve to establish the national category as predominant” (66). And in reiterating his own “discursive” interpretation of nationalism in the most recent edition of his authoritative survey of the literature, Umut Özkirimli confirms that nationalist discourse “states that the values of the nation has absolute priority and that loyalty to the nation overrides all other forms of loyalty, individual or collective” (2010: 208-9).

This brief catalogue can be expanded in several directions, inasmuch as restrictive definitions may also surface in more oblique forms. Bhikhu Parekh suggests that although “European states have [sought] to cultivate and *privilege* a strong sense of national identity and to orient and order their citizens’ moral lives,” the ineradicable multiplicity of our attachments exposes the “incoherence” of the nationalist project (Parekh 1999: 309, italics added). If nationalism cannot privilege the nation over other attachments, it seems, the project must *by definition* be untenable. We might read a similar tendency into the proliferating use of the term “postnationalism” to describe the relative displacement of nationhood by other identity formations. *Ceteris paribus*, and with due deference to the subtleties of the relevant literature (for example, Habermas 2001; Frost 2006) this terminology would only fully resonate on the assumption that the “national” properly entails either a monopoly on identity or ultimate supremacy over competing forms of attachment. But lest we overreach, it may be best to settle on Jacob T. Levy’s *The Multiculturalism of Fear* as a paradigmatic and sophisticated case of a restrictive definition of nationalism.

Central to nationalism, according to Levy, is the claim that “you ought to be willing to place the needs of your nation and of your co-nationals above the needs of subsets of the nation, including ethnic, religious, economic, or political subgroups. You as an individual are also a subset of the nation and so ought to be willing to put its interests ahead of your own; ultimately, this includes a willingness to die for the nation” (2000: 72). He goes on to distinguish this position from a more benign “moderate and generalized communitarianism,” or “MGC,” according to which “we are morally permitted (and perhaps morally obligated) to be at least moderately morally partial to fellow members of all of the affective and cultural communities to

which we belong.” Quite unlike nationalism, “MGC holds that *all* of our cultural memberships and communal affiliations are morally relevant” (70).

The supreme priority which nationalism accords the national attachment poses insurmountable problems, according to Levy, because there is no “universal empirical marker” (74) for identifying what does and does not constitute a nation; yet if the nation is a purely subjective category – we belong if we think we belong – then how can others demand a supreme obligation from those who do not happen to share the same identification? How can a fervent British nationalist turn to a Welsh nationalist and say she has an overriding moral duty to the British nation that trumps any other allegiance (including her Welsh identity)? Clearly he can no more do this than she, in turn, can wheel around and demand that someone who happens to share Welsh ancestry but self-defines primarily as British has a transcendent duty to Wales. It’s simply not possible to say that someone is flatly wrong about their national identity (and by extension, their duty to that nation). Thus the idea of “universal nationalism,” of “each nation... determin[ing] its own fate without posing any necessary danger to other nations” (69) is false. Specific populations, and perhaps more importantly the territory with which they are associated, will always be claimed by rival “nations.” Further, since (a) “universal nationalism” is merely an idealized extension of nationalism per se, with its insistence on a surpassing duty to the nation, (b) membership in the nation is inescapably subjective, and (c) since we cannot bind others to a strong moral duty based on our subjective definition of them, the very foundation of “universal nationalism” is, for Levy, incoherent. Indeed, the many “apparently successful attempts to construct a universalist nationalism typically *actually* justify” the “moderate and generalized communitarianism” defined above (70). What look like theories of liberal nationalism, or other agreeable defences of nationalism, aren’t truly nationalist at all – in part because they do not

explicitly accept the supremacy of national allegiance over all other attachments (although they do end up tacitly privileging national identity over other identities by giving them “political priority,” according to Levy [76-77]; which point we’ll revisit later).

Nationalism does not only claim that one ought to be partial to some subset of humanity and that one ought to be loyal to something larger than one’s family. One might be so partial and have loyal to many communities simultaneously. There could be some obligations one owes to one’s co-religionists, some to one’s fellow citizens of a state, some to the other speakers of one’s language, and so on. This kind of morality, moderate and generalized communitarianism is utterly incompatible with nationalism. MGC says that the Kurdish Turk or the Quebecois Canadian owes something to both groups, to both identities...Nationalism, however, makes a claim of priority. *One ought to choose one’s nation over one’s current state, over the claims of religion, and so on.* The nationalist [asks me to choose] between Quebec and Canada (75; italics added).

So a great deal rests on the overriding supremacy of national attachment. For definitions such as Levy’s and the others listed above, if we count allegiance to the nation as (merely) one weighty communal obligation among others, then we cannot *truly* be nationalists. Communitarians of some kind or other, perhaps; but not nationalists.

What’s wrong with restrictive definitions?

If the above suffices to impart a sense of the nature of restrictive definitions and the prominent place they occupy in the literature, we may now turn to critique. And we needn’t look far. Much scholarly work either tacitly or explicitly rejects “restrictive” definitions on the grounds that they confuse the species for the genus (Miller, 1995: 8). Indeed, many scholars would follow Frans De Wachter in classifying as “extreme meanings” those definitions of nationalism according to which “all particular relations (family, class, religion) become subordinated to interests which are shared with members of the nation” (1998: 98) Apart from the fact that many influential definitions hold no particular brief with the idea of the nation as jealous god, scholars have

grown increasingly attuned to the pluriform nature of nationalism; and there has been a proliferation of theories of “liberal nationalism” that – at least at face value – steer us toward attractive views of nationalism as enjoying a complex relationship with our other commitments and not necessarily acting as a trump in relation to them. For instance, Will Kymlicka argues that “[n]ations [and nationalism] can be inclusive/tolerant one day on one issue, but not the next day, or on the next issue,” reflecting “ongoing contests about the necessary forms of commonality and homogeneity, and the desirable forms of tolerance and diversity” (2003: 146) Or even more pointedly, Adrain Hastings:

Most members of a nation and many nationalists have other communities of loyalty to which they also belong and to which they may, on occasion, give superior recognition – communities of religion, family or class. The extreme nationalist will indeed regard all other values as insignificant compared with the imagined requirements of the nation but many nationalists would see those requirements as limited to some extent by other requirements of morality, religion, or even the rights of other communities. Certainly, most members of a nation or potential nation-state are, most of the time, far from being extreme nationalists, or even nationalists of any sort. Nationalism often exists as a latent presence, something which flares up extremely quickly in times of war or some real or imagined threat...to subside in altered circumstances almost as quickly as it has been inflamed (Hastings 1997: 31-32).

Now the latter assertion – that nationalism lies so “latent” that most of us, most of the time, may not be nationalists at all – should be challenged after the fashion of Michael Billig’s *Banal Nationalism*. Billig shows that the supposed latency of nationalism is a myth; we are receptive to nationalist mobilizations at any given moment precisely because nationalist discourse “flags the homeland daily” and indeed suffuses our understanding of the world, serving as a sort of received affective background that primes us for more overt or “hot” manifestations of nationalism (1995; see also Hutchinson 2007: 116 –153). But that important point aside, Hastings is correct to suggest that the restrictive move of assigning supreme priority to national

obligations as an a priori prerequisite of nationalism plainly fails to capture the lived experience of national allegiance for most people in the postwar west. The mundane, day-to-day realities of nationalism only occasionally involve any explicit evocation of a supreme duty or loyalty. People can feel and express a powerful affinity for the nation's symbols and landmarks, honour its flag, sing its songs, cheer its teams, mourn its defeats, inveigh against perceived threats to its integrity, and in one way or another strive for its success, all without necessarily implying that this commitment overrides all others. Yet these and related behaviours cannot qualify as "nationalist" on a restrictive account such as Levy's. Thus, George W. Bush must not be classified a "nationalist" if it can plausibly be shown that (say) his religious affiliations vie with the nation for equal standing in his public discourse or his personal commitments. Ditto those socialist revolutionaries who fought for national liberation movements in the heyday of decolonization; any claim along the lines of "we are nationalists because, as socialists, we do not want our country to be absorbed by...world capitalism" (Horowitz 1985: 367) is rendered gibberish by definitional fiat, insofar as this formulation accords priority to socialism. Triumphant Canadians desecrating the American flag after winning the Olympic gold medal in men's hockey (Aulakh 2010) could not be said to be acting as "nationalists" should we discover that they possess other communal attachments which they regard as equally weighty, or that they repudiate outright any notion of the nation as the ultimate identity trump. Public policies designed to protect and promote the national culture must not be characterized as nationalist unless they happen to manifest the assumption that the nation is the supreme obligation overriding all others. Indeed, the same condition would apply to far-right nativism or to populist backlashes against asylum-seekers and immigrants.

Such analytical consequences seem slightly perverse. What we need is an account that allows for a proliferation of such pro-national sentiments and behaviours even given diverse and shifting hierarchies of loyalty and attachment. Thus, we are better to follow Stephen Nathanson, who (again) holds that “the essence of nationalism is the goal of national flourishing [such that] however we conceive of the national group, nationalists are people who identify with their historical group and want it to flourish” (1998: 178-9); Johann P. Arnason, for whom nationalism should be “equated with the explicit and affirmative articulation of national identity” (2006: 44); or Margaret Moore, who writes that “[w]e should understand nationalism...as a normative project that confers moral value on national membership, and on the past and future existence of the nation, and identifies the nation with a particular homeland or part of the globe” (2000, 5). We should then agree with these and others, such as Hastings, Kymlicka, Miller, and Craig Calhoun, that the nation is not such a jealous god after all – or at least, that the diversity of nationalist phenomena prohibits their reduction into this narrow box.

Proponents of restrictive definitions are aware, of course, that many expressions of national allegiance seem at face value to be wholly compatible with a plurality of commitments. They generally resolve the difficulty by hiving off “nationalism” (jealous, by definition) from less demanding manifestations of national allegiance. Hence, Levy’s slightly ungainly label of “moderate and generalized communitarianism.” A more familiar approach is that of Stephen Grosby, who saddles up that old terminological war-horse, “patriotism,” “the love that one has for one’s nation,” (2005: 16) against nationalism, which “repudiates civility and the differences that it tolerates by attempting to eliminate all differing views and interests for the sake of one vision of what the nation has been and should be” (2005: 17). Patriotism thus allows for love of country/nation, but also permits for other attachments and commitments to flourish alongside it.

More is said about patriotism later on in this paper, but for now it may suffice to observe that – while scholars are always free to re-label phenomena as they please – it seems counter-intuitive to withhold the adjective “nationalist” from behaviours and beliefs that express an allegiance to, and a concern for the flourishing of, what members typically refer to as the *nation*. There may even be undesirable consequences to doing so; but before exploring these, we need to examine in greater depth whether the cut-and-dried dismissal of restrictive definitions which I have thus far offered is sufficient to put them to rest. The basic claims made to this point are, I want to maintain, correct; but fully supporting them turns out to be a more complex matter than the discussion has thus far allowed.

Restrictive definitions revisited

The key claim is that nationalism does not necessarily require the subordination of other loyalties. The nation is, so to speak, a “swinging” god, freely allowing for the promiscuous allegiances of its followers. But a proponent of a restrictive definition might aver that this free-swinging conception of nationalism overlooks the familiar and absolutely critical historical linkages between *nationhood* and *statehood*. Once we make this connection, it becomes more plausible to say that nationalism *does* in fact presuppose an absolute trump over other allegiances. That this right is not always explicitly asserted in nationalist discourse proves nothing, necessarily. Nationalism always holds *in reserve* the authority to demand ultimate sacrifices, even at the expense of our other loyalties and commitments, in the nation’s name. And so the nation remains an ineluctably jealous god.

It may seem telling, in this context, that the tendency to elevate the nation to the status of a trump over other affiliations can be discerned even in affably mild contemporary theoretical

justifications of nationalism. When Kymlicka (arguably) elides “nation” with “culture” and argues for group rights for minority nations on the grounds that culture offers a “context of choice” necessary for the meaningful realization of individual autonomy (1987), he clearly places the individual at the centre of his ethical framework, but he also *seems* at least to imply that a culture/nation subsumes other communal attachments within it (Buchanan 1998: 300-301; see below). Margalit and Raz are even more explicit: the nation is an “encompassing group,” overarching “[f]amily relations, all other social relations between people, careers, leisure activities, the arts, sciences, and other obvious products of ‘high culture’” (1990: 448). More to the point, on most such theories, “nations” receive political recognition and institutional accommodation, while other group identities (religious affiliations, for instance) typically don’t.

To which Allan Buchanan retorts that

in pluralistic societies nationality will be only one source of identification and allegiance among others, and for some people it will be of little or no importance relative to others sources of identification and allegiance, whether these are cultural or occupational or religious or political or familial...in a society characterized by dynamic pluralism, singling out nations as such as being entitled to self-government is nothing less than a public expression of the conviction that allegiances and identities have a single, true rank order of value, with nationality reposing at the summit (1998: 294).

Jurisdiction implies prioritization – the bestowing of political, legal and therefore coercive power in the name of one identity, however thinly defined, to which the rest necessarily become subordinate. But this rules out the uncritical acceptance of any view that tries to reconcile the “dynamic pluralism” of which Buchanan writes with the characteristic demands of nationalism for political jurisdiction. Buchanan has isolated a major dilemma facing “liberal” or pluralistic nationalists, who want to accommodate both nationalist demands for self-government and the idea that nationalism need imply no final supremacy for the national attachment.

If this is correct, then there can be no coherent view of nationalism that foregoes a restrictive definition. But is it correct? In the first place, there remains the question of just how much prioritization a given jurisdiction implies. Sovereignty nowadays tends to take partial forms, so as to accommodate either transnational structures such as the European Union, or the unfeasibility of complete independence for minority nations who consequently accept (or demand) devolution. Nationhood hardly ever entails some pure, undiluted form of sovereign statehood, and therefore seldom implies an analogously pure, undiluted supremacy of allegiance. We'll come back to this. But before we do, we should consider Charles Taylor's influential arguments about the central role of *recognition* as a source of dignity in identity politics (of which nationalism is "the original species," in Taylor's view) (1995; 1992; 1993). What animates nationalist demands for self-government, Taylor suggests, is less the absolute prioritizing of the national attachment such that only the most important attachment gets a state, than the idea that similar *categories* of identity warrant similar *status*, as a requirement of equal dignity. The "modern nationalist turn," Taylor argues after Gellner, derives from the "recognition of the need for difference...felt existentially as a challenge, not just as a matter of valuable common good to be created but also viscerally as a matter of dignity, in which one's self-worth is engaged. This is what gives nationalism its emotive power. This is what places it so frequently in the register of pride and humiliation" (1995: 45).

Margaret Moore complements this point. She observes that by placing national identities on all fours with other affiliations, Buchanan "ignores the political aspirations that tend to characterize national identities, and not other kinds of identities" (2001: 48). "Indeed, national identities are *primarily* political identities; they are concerned with the political community with which one identifies" (34; italics in original). This is not true of, say, gender, religion, or sexual

orientation; and “it is a fallacy to think that treating [all identities] equally means treating them the same way” (49). Furthermore, because national identities “cannot be regarded as purely private conceptions of the good,” and because states *cannot but* privilege a certain national identity in constructing their institutions and self-understanding – neutrality being impossible on these fronts – once one nation achieves juridical expression, equal treatment drives other nations in the same direction (34; see also Kymlicka 1995, esp. 111-115).

These are important insights. They help to show that the demand for jurisdiction need not be understood as an automatic statement of the supremacy of national identities over other communal attachments. To each identity according to its need: while nations require some form of jurisdictional expression in order to flourish, religion, gender, and other affiliations can enjoy all that is required for their full flourishing within this framework. Nor should every act, law or policy of the national jurisdiction be interpreted as a direct expression of the supreme, overawing will of the nation, given that such measures need not impinge upon that flourishing.

For all of this, the problematic linkage between jurisdiction and supremacy of attachment arguably remains in play. Come back to the matter of the limited nature of sovereignty in the contemporary world. That nations nowadays accept constraints on their sovereignty does not a priori mean that national identity is other than supreme among our communal affiliations. Membership in the EU, for instance, is often justified in terms of the national interest – and is ultimately revocable, at least in theory, should the national jurisdiction so desire. That the nation delegates its authority does not *prima facie* demonstrate its abdication of the same. Relatedly, participation in a multinational state may ultimately be contingent upon the state’s furthering the purposes of the nation. This is indeed the essence of such arrangements, according to Taylor’s famous vision of “deep diversity” (Taylor, 1993: 155-186). The nation remains the final and

ultimate arbiter of the federal commitment. The widespread acceptance of limited sovereignties turns out to have indeterminate ramifications for the jealous god.

Moore's strategy of emphasizing the uniquely "political" nature of national identities, meanwhile, downplays certain consequences of hooking up identity and jurisdiction. The arguments we drew from Moore and Taylor do suggest that the elision of jurisdiction and nation is not in itself a decisive reason for insisting upon the jealousy of the nation; but they still need to reckon more fully with the gruesome historical experience of modern war, and, especially, conscription, which amounts the legally enforced demand that members of the nation be prepared to sacrifice everything they cherish in its name. Indeed, I would suggest that *this* line of thought is weighty enough that it should give pause to scholars such as De Wachter who simply dismiss restrictive definitions as "extreme."

Jamie Mayerfeld nicely sharpens this issue. His answer to Buchanan's rather arch question, "what's so special about nations?" is that "[n]ational identity is *especially dangerous* [because] it usually entails identification with an armed group...[n]ationalists are aware that the nation can use military force, that it can 'defend itself'" (1998: 560; italics added). In a world of armed nations, war is a perpetual possibility, and the nation always retains the right to demand of its members the supreme sacrifice. It is therefore an entity that lays at least a tacit claim to being the absolute trump over all other communal commitments.

Noting that the self-interested social contract of liberal myth cannot seem to offer any motivation for sacrifice in defence of the commonwealth, Yael Tamir suggests that "nationalism [is] an answer to [liberal states'] legitimate needs of self defense or, to put it in even more dramatic terms, as a remedy to their malaise – namely, the atomism, neurosis, and alienation that inflict liberal states and may leave them defenseless" (1997: 229). Benedict Anderson similarly

gives great weight to this aspect of nationalist experience: “ultimately, it is this [nationalist] fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many people, not so much as kill, as willingly to die [and make] colossal sacrifices” (1991: 7). A critic of our earlier sketch of the relative innocuous “banal” nationalism lived out by most denizens of the contemporary west – the flag-wavers, the proponents of nationalist cultural policy, etc. – could thus retort that this portrayal ignores an inescapable assumption undergirding the whole nationalist project. That assumption is that, in principle, we may legitimately be called to forsake everything, including all our other loyalties and attachments, for the nation. Given that most western countries have enjoyed over 60 years without total war, and have indeed largely dispensed with compulsory military service, it may be easy to forget this. But the nation does not forget. With every national rite of remembrance, the sacrifice is both recalled and, at least implicitly, justified – for how many, at such times, call into question the right of the nation to demand it? “The fact that exemplary individuals willingly give up their lives for the state is purported to prove that the state is worthy of such an offering, while the merits of the state make the sacrifice of the fallen worthwhile” (Tamir 1998: 227; see also, among others, Langman 2006, and Barreto 2009: 105-134). It seems, then, the argument of this paper must be incorrect. Nationalism really does entail an ultimate obligation to the nation. Here we strike a bedrock argument for restrictive conceptions of nationalism.

The argument still fails. *Pace* Özkirimli, the demonstrable fact that “many people simply refuse to kill or die for their country” (215) is not among the reasons for saying so; for while this does show that not everyone is a nationalist in the restrictive sense, it cannot be a requirement of any sensible theory of nationalism that every last citizen be a nationalist. Andrew Vincent offers a more promising suggestion for our purposes when he observes that “Marxism, liberal

democracy, human rights, race, a valued occupation, trade union, Christianity, the family, atheism, Buddhism, Islam, the idea of freedom, a belief in civilization, or weird and wonderful combinations of these...all have been seen as worth dying for time and again” (2002: 61). If there is nothing particularly special about nations in this respect, we have an important clue to rescuing nationalism from restrictive definitions, as we’ll see. On its own, though, the above quotation still falters before Mayerfeld’s key insight that, in the context of modern liberal democracies, states/nations are *routinely* “armed communities” in a way not characteristically true of the affiliations Vincent lists. Extremism is one thing, but the mainstream experience of such societies, especially over the last century and a half or so, has arguably been characterized not so much by large numbers of people dying for religion, trade unions, atheism, or whatnot, as by masses of ordinary citizens dying for the nation-cum-state. That people have died for affiliations other than the nation is not enough to exonerate nationalism of the charge of being uniquely imperious in its claims on us.

Vincent lands a more direct hit when, drawing from David Miller, he asserts that “defending a nation in war may, in fact, be a more visceral defence of one’s children or loved ones, a familiar and loved neighbourhood, village, town, landscape or religion” (55). Perhaps the invocations of supreme sacrifice on behalf of the nation *really* work as proxies for more profound commitments. This might indeed be one way of reconciling nationalism’s most demanding manifestation with a panoply of comparably weighty affiliations – although the suggestion remains hard to verify.

In any case, there is more to say about Mayerfeld’s argument. For instance, in characterizing nations as armed communities, Mayerfeld bluntly elides state and nation, and this of course oversimplifies. As Montserrat Guibernau reminds us, “stateless nations” abound

(1999). Since these cannot even pretend a monopoly on the legitimate use of coercion in a territory, it follows that many nations are not in fact armed communities. Yet such truisms fail to displace the view that war and conscription offer decisive proof of nationalism's claim to supremacy. Most states operate as what Roger Brubaker calls "nationalizing states" (1996), and one reason for the historical plausibility of Max Weber's definition of a nation as "a community which normally tends to produce a state of its own" (1991: 176) is precisely that modern states have identified as nations to such an extent that the failure to achieve this identification over entire territories and populations has been thought problematic, even pathological (Hechter 2000). Most states remain nation-states, not in being culturally or ethnically homogeneous, but in the less ambitious sense of containing strong and self-defined national identities that command the allegiance of large numbers of their citizens (Gellner 1983, Hobsbawm 1992, Hechter 2000). Further – to say nothing of violent irredentism – many national minorities have spawned independence movements, which seek precisely the right to monopolize the legitimate use of coercion on their territory and, by implication, to empower their nation to demand the supreme sacrifice from its members. In short, we tend to elide state with nation because most states *are* nations, in the specific sense of being aligned with some meaningful form of self-defined national identity; and a fair number of nationalists would like their nations to be states, even if they are willing to settle for less. Thus, it remains the case that when the state musters us to war, a *nation* generally does too (see again Tamir 1997). So the supremacy of our duty to the nation must remain an inescapable part of nationalism.

We seem to have crashed yet again upon the rock of the "restrictive" position. Never fear. For it remains a *contingent rather than a necessary feature of nationalism that it calls forth such an ultimate obligation; and the same ultimate obligation would inhere in other communal*

attachments under the same circumstances. It makes no more sense to say of nationalism that it necessarily involves a supreme obligation overriding all others, than to say this of religion, or gender, or ethnicity, or other cultural and communal attachments. We do not typically endorse such restrictive definitions for these other attachments. Nor should we – but then, neither should we do so for nationalism.

In explicating this, it may pay to look a bit more closely at religion in particular. We seldom find it helpful nowadays to insist upon a restrictive definition of religion, such that, unless one accepts a hypothetical duty to kill and die for one's religious faith, one is not a true believer. The whole question seldom comes up in the liberal west, because the entire strategy of liberal toleration since at least Locke assumes that one can authentically and fully partake of religious membership without necessarily acceding to such ultimate demands. True, radical fundamentalism often insists upon those demands, but this is part of what makes it so shocking, and this is one reason why we tend to reach for special labels, such as "radical Islam" or "Islamism" rather than "Islam," or "strong religion" rather than "religion" per se (Almond, Appelby and Sivan 2000) in describing it. Thus, modern liberals tend to see it as a *contingent* rather than a necessary feature of religious membership that it operate by definition as the supreme locus of individual identity, the claim that overawes all other communal allegiances (including citizenship and nationality). And an analogous contingency, I want to insist, is true of nationalism and national allegiance.

This analogy may seem to beg the question, because what distinguishes nations from religions in the modern west is (once again) that only the former are *armed* communities. The Pontifical Swiss Guard and extreme cases such as Northern Ireland during the Troubles notwithstanding, Roman Catholic churches don't typically have trained fighting forces, let alone

guns, bombs, and tanks, ready to lay waste the Free Presbyterians across town. States/nations typically *do* have such resources ready to deploy against rivals. And this is because they, unlike modern churches in liberal states, think themselves entitled to make ultimate demands of us.

How much should we infer from this? Perhaps not very much. If it clearly is the case that states/nations are armed communities, it is equally clear, again, that they do not *in fact* make ultimate demands on us, most of the time. Indeed, in light of the (highly significant) decline in compulsory military service throughout the western world since 1945, we might even argue that most states/nations have tacitly conceded that they *cannot* make supreme demands of us save under dire circumstances – viz., when the very existence or well-being of the state/nation is believed to be in jeopardy. It is noteworthy here that the administration of George W. Bush, having ensnared itself in a war in Iraq which did real damage to America's finances, prestige, and even capacity to promote its interests elsewhere, declined to pursue conscription as a means of strengthening the overburdened military. No doubt, this reflected the political reality that conscription would have been massively unpopular; but this in turn illustrates the decline of the nation's unconditional right to make supreme demands upon our loyalty. Saying that the nation, *when facing imminent jeopardy*, may of necessity assert a strategic supremacy over all other allegiances is quite different from claiming that the nation has a blanket claim of priority over them all the time. And it does not a priori imply any special status for the nation unavailable to other commitments.

Context is all here. The national state operates in a quasi-anarchical global environment, famously analogous to Hobbes's state of nature. This makes it more likely than our other communal attachments to be confronted with circumstances that promise to be poor, nasty, and brutish, if in most cases not terribly short. The consequence, in turn, is that the nation is more apt

than our other commitments to demand the ultimate sacrifice – because such sacrifices are more likely to be required in order for the community to survive or flourish. In the quite different context of a successful liberal state, such absolute demands are seldom necessary for the flourishing or viability of our other attachments. Here, Roman Catholic churches, say, face no credible existential threat, unless it be the threat of declining membership (which a turn to radical violence and supreme sacrifice would hardly fix). Indeed, for a Hobbesian, this absence of existential threat is the entire point of political order. Should the order break down, and the society shatter into factional conflicts, it would be rather surprising if our communal allegiances did *not* redefine themselves as trumps, urging their members to extreme sacrifice before the ensuing perils. If the Free Presbyterians across town are killing us Roman Catholics, and the state is powerless to impose a decent order, then we, surely, are apt – albeit tragically – to respond in kind, or at least to do whatever it takes to save the ship.

Thus, the claim to supremacy over other allegiances is latent in any of our most powerful communal identities. Because people are apt to display intense defensive responses to severe threats to the identities they most cherish, such attachments may command supreme acts of loyalty and sacrifice under circumstances where these seem to be absolutely required for the community in question. *All* communal identities are thus potentially jealous gods. What makes nations appear special in this regard is not nationhood per se, but rather the sometimes violent and anarchic environment in which nations move. Were our other attachments to find themselves in a comparable setting, they would likely make the same kinds of demands that nations sometimes make. So there is at root no difference between Levy’s “moderate and generalized communitarianism” and nationalism. Fortunately, under conditions of stable and tolerably decent

political order, such dire circumstances seldom arise; they do surface rather more often in the international environment – but the basic principle remains.

When Levy describes nationalists asking me to choose “between Quebec and Canada,” then, he ignores the fact that for many nationalists, this is a contingent and regrettable outcome. Granted, earlier generations of Quebec sovereigntists did tend to see divided or nested loyalties as pathological by definition (see Aquin 1979; Maclure 2003). But the last two decades have seen a proliferation of Quebec nationalist argument to the effect that, if only Canada were to affirm within its institutions Quebec’s national identity, and accord Quebec a sufficient level of autonomy, Quebecers would no longer have to choose. It is only through the error and injustice of the Canadian order that one’s nationalism has to take a separatist form (Seymour 1999). Similarly, many defenders of Canadian unity have defended Canada as a polity in which Quebecers can fully enjoy membership in both orders of identity, the Québécois and Canadian; as former prime minister Jean Chrétien declaimed only days before the 1995 Quebec referendum, “le Canada, c’est mon pays, le Québec, c’est ma patrie” (see Cardinal, 2005, for context). Either these federalists are not Canadian nationalists, or the restrictive definition is wrong. This dichotomy is even starker for more dramatic cases. One who is confronted with Sartre’s famous dilemma of whether to join the resistance or stay with their bereaved mother will plainly be tormented by the necessity of choice itself (in this case, between national liberation and family); that extreme circumstances force a choice is of course part of what makes them so terrible.

At the end of the day, then, most of us indeed are what Levy calls “moderate and generalized communitarians,” and it is characteristic of this breed that any of our deepest communal loyalties can push its hold upon us to the level of a supreme commitment under the

right (that is, the worst) circumstances. We will prioritize that which is in dire need of saving over that which is not. But it does not follow that we will thereby have permanently abandoned or subordinated all of our other allegiances. It makes no sense to single out only one of these affiliations, the nation, and say that it alone must be rigidly defined in terms of an imperious claim to supremacy over all others.

And so our original critique of restrictive definitions stands. People just do have a range of allegiances, and we should not define away their allegiance to the nation as somehow “non-nationalist” if they happen to give equal or higher billing to other attachments. We saw that the argument that most states are nations, and hold in reserve the right to demand that we subordinate all affiliations to the supreme claims of nationhood, poses a real challenge to this assessment. On further investigation, however, the argument from war and conscription turns out to identify a characteristic that is latent in *all* strong communal attachments. What is crucial here is not something specific to nations qua nations, but the *context* in which nations typically find themselves. Other identities, in analogous contexts, will respond similarly and make similar demands. Clarity is therefore reduced, not sharpened, by incorporating into our definitions of nationalism a claim of absolute priority for the nation. Scholars should abandon this lingering habit.

Coda: a note on patriotism and minority nationalism

And a little more may be at stake here than just analytical clarity. If the above argument is right, those national identities which are most likely to make absolute demands on the nation’s behalf will likely be those facing significant existential threat, and these are apt to be nations that are disadvantaged in some way – nations where the need to inflate the moral salience of national

allegiance is a compensatory response to significant threats or degradation. Now, that all nations, even the most powerful, can come under threat is a corollary of our quasi-Hobbesian international environment. Even the United States faced what appeared to many quite rational people to be a bona-fide existential threat after September 11, 2001 (as it did for much of the Cold War); the expressive surge in American nationalism we witnessed after the Twin Towers fell should hardly leave us agog (Olmstead 2009: 205-232). Nonetheless, nations are probably more likely to demand ultimate sacrifices when there is something ultimate at stake, and *prima facie* this is more likely to be true of more vulnerable national identities. At the most moderate end, national minorities are more likely to face serious and ongoing affronts to their dignity by virtue of their minority status (Taylor 1993). Such dangers as cultural degradation and disappearance, oppression by a wider majority, forced assimilation, ethnic cleansing, etc., pose more extreme challenges, and again are disproportionately likely to be faced by vulnerable or subordinate national minorities. Without positing some “iron law,” we may hypothesize that the graver the threat, the more commensurately dramatic the nationalist response is liable to be – ultimately driving us to the point of elevating the nation to the status of a supreme good subsuming all others.

This is one reason why states/nations will often be confronted with antagonistic nationalist movements reflecting some such array of grievances. If we insist that nationalism by definition claims supremacy for the nation over all other affiliations, we shall find it rather too easy for members of a comfortable national majority, comparatively confident in its existential prospects and in their shared control over state institutions, to respond to a hot-blooded nationalist uprising by dismissing *nationalism itself* as some sort of exotic virus from which they are somehow immune. After all – unlike our enlightened selves – the embattled minority seems

to fetishize its nation and to subordinate other attachments to it. It is furthermore tempting to conclude that these nationalists (and the people for whom they claim to speak) are by definition less pluralist, less liberal, less sophisticated, perhaps even less rational or civilized. Those wild-eyed “nationalists,” we may go on to think, seem obsessed with their nation and hyperbolic about its woes. *We’re* not like them; *we* don’t make such a fuss over national identity; *we* have ordered our allegiances in a properly moderate balance. By defining “nationalism” in terms of its more extreme manifestations we thus leave nationalism to the extremists, even as we continue *in practice* to act as nationalists (although, as noted earlier, we then require a more pious term to describe this nationalism of ours – say, “patriotism”). This is of course a variation on a theme that Billig strikes powerfully in *Banal Nationalism*. “Those in established nations – at the centre of things – are led to see nationalism as the property of others, not of ‘us’” (1995: 5, 55). Levy himself draws attention to this self-excusing move by majority nationalists when he argues that “civic” nationalism, which often presents itself as of a higher order than alternative varieties, is on all fours with other types of nationalism (2000: 84-91). Regrettably, Levy’s definition, and the entire family of definitions to which his terminology belongs, encourages us to think of nationalism as something “other.” No: the enemy is us.

Indeed, the very tendency to cast “patriotism” as something distinct from and probably preferable to nationalism arguably tends to reveal this tacit bias against national minorities. As the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* suggests, patriotism functions most comfortably in English as a synonym for love of country; “support for the political community of which one is a part, for its fundamental constitutional arrangements, irrespective of the ethnic or national composition of that community,” is how Andrew Levine puts it (1998: 357). On this definition, though, how could a Basque or a Mohawk nationalist *ever* earn the admirable title of “patriot,” given that they

typically do *not* support their political community's fundamental constitutional arrangements, and certainly could not do so irrespective of its "national composition?" It may be that, excepting a cluster of 19th-century *canadiens* rebels, we seldom refer to minority nationalists as "patriots" precisely because their nation lacks a sovereign state and thus the fully-realized apparatus of laws and institutions that go hand-in-hand with statehood. Deprived of the independent state infrastructure associated with "patriotism," they are rhetorically condemned to the murky moors of "nationalism" – thence to be derided for their less than "civic" mode of allegiance. *Pace* the sophisticated and flourishing literature on patriotism and republicanism (Viroli 1995, Primoratz and Pavkovic 2007), there is much to recommend the view that the main difference between a patriot and a nationalist is that for the former, nation and state are more-or-less congruent, while for the latter this is not true. "Most of what passes as patriotism in common parlance implicitly advances the interests of one nation at the expense of others in multinational states. In the present framework, such activities are instances of state-building nationalism" (Hechter 2000: 17). Even blunter (if perhaps oversimplified) is Stephen Nathanson's assessment: "[m]any people who are patriotic do not think of themselves as nationalists, but 'patriotism' is simply another word for nationalist" (1998: 178; see also Craigie 2010: 231).

Restrictive definitions of nationalism contribute to this problem by leaving "nationalism" to others. Here, then, is another reason why we should cast a cold eye on further instances of their use. Fortunately, many scholars nowadays do this; but as this paper has sought to show, a rather tangled set of questions underlies our refusal of the jealous god. Sorting out a few of these can serve to enrich our understanding of the capaciousness of nationalism.

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