Immigrants and National Identity in Europe

Anna Triandafyllidou

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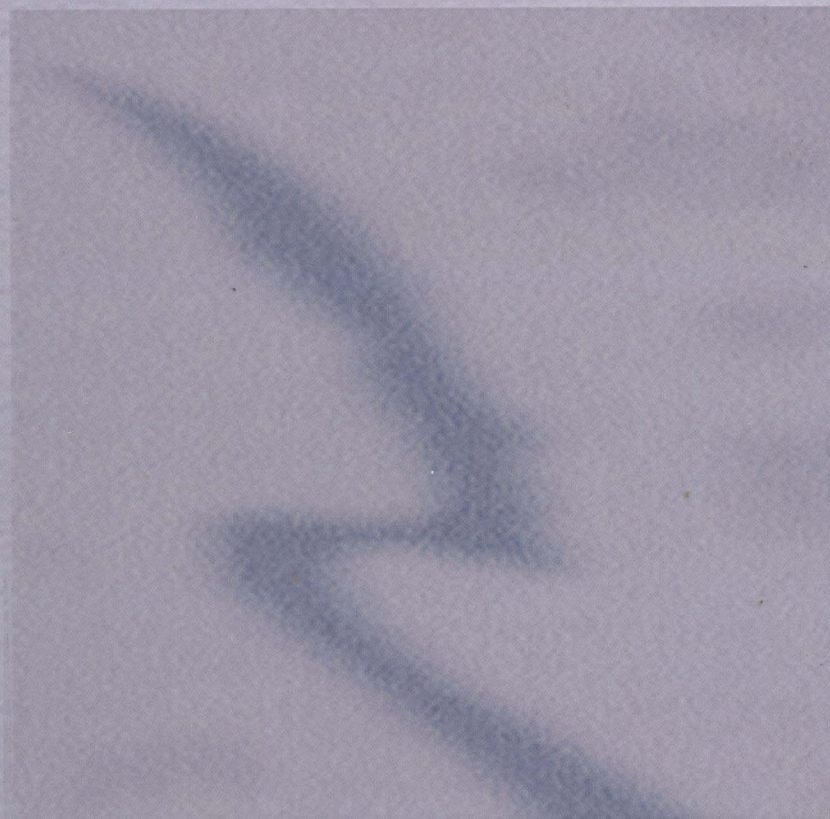

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στον Ευγένιο
for having come into my life

Preface

My interest in nationalism and xenophobia arose mainly as a matter of personal concern as I noticed a swift change in attitudes and a rapid spread of xenophobic behaviour in my home country, Greece, in the early 1990s.

This personal concern was soon transformed into an article, the fruit of a joint venture with my friend and colleague Andonis Mikrakis, which we called 'Greece: the "others" within'. Looking back at our conclusions from that study and comparing them with the findings presented in this book, I am still bitterly surprised by the short time it took for Greece and other southern European countries to engage in heated nationalist and racist rhetoric against immigrants. I am even more surprised that few people in any of the three countries I study herein – Greece, Italy and Spain – reflect on their own experiences as emigrants, or those of their relatives and friends, in a past that is still too near to the present to be forgotten.

New developments in southern Europe, as well as the stirring of 'old' problems in 'old' immigration countries, have fortunately attracted the attention of a number of scholars. Social, political and economic issues have been analysed and criticised, solutions have been proposed and theoretical principles to which Western societies – or indeed any society – should adhere have been elaborated. It is the aim of this book to make a tiny contribution to this larger debate by pointing to the dynamics that develop between national identity and the immigrants' presence in contemporary Europe.

My contentions are twofold. On the one hand, I have tried to show that Othering the immigrant is by no means the 'natural' order of things. It is triggered by a specific sociopolitical order, that of national states. Furthermore, it serves specific purposes that are linked not only to politics or economic interests but also (and mainly) to national identity. Othering the immigrant provides a source of security for the ingroup, while also legitimising several forms of direct or indirect exploitation of non-natives. On the other hand, this book points to the interactive nature of national identity and highlights the dynamics of its development and transformation. This does not mean to deny the historical embeddedness of nations and nationalism. I am rather propagating a more sophisticated approach to the study of national identity; this is an approach that takes into account interaction – both real and imagined – with Others.

The analysis of such interaction will also help us to understand better phenomena such as xenophobia and racism because it will highlight their relative–reflexive character. In reality, it is neither the intrinsic features of Others nor those of the ingroup that triggers hostility or discrimination. It is the interaction between the two that might generate prejudice and conflict. It takes two to make a fight, as the Greek saying goes. And it takes two to build an identity. This relativisation of national identity implies that it should be treated as contextual, not as less respectable, by members of the nation and by outsiders. I hope and believe that such a perspective will contribute to an understanding of identity dynamics, and will perhaps also help to resolve ethnic or national conflicts.

It usually takes a long time to write a book and this one took nearly 5 years to reach its present form. I started the research presented here at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), where I was offered the T. H. Marshall Post-Doctoral Fellowship in Sociology for the period between 1995 and 1997. This fellowship not only gave me the material means – with a generous financial contribution from the *British Journal of Sociology* – for conducting extensive fieldwork in Greece, Italy and Spain but also a unique opportunity to become involved in a valuable circle of colleagues: 'the ASEN crowd'. Among them, I would particularly like to thank Anthony D. Smith, the president and founder of the Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism ('ASEN'), who was my mentor, both officially and intellectually, during my stay at the LSE. His advice and criticism have guided my exploration of theories of nationalism. I have benefited enormously from the discussions held in his Ph.D. workshop on nationalism and ethnicity during the academic years 1995–6 and 1996–7. I would also like to express my friendship and gratitude to Gordana Uzelac, Atsuko Ichijo, Jessica Jacobson, Anna Paraskevopoulou, Beatriz Zepeda and Joanna Michlic for their affection and support during my London years and after.

In writing up the research, which took the form of several conference papers, journal articles and eventually this book, I have benefited from the financial support of the European Commission Research Directorate-General: serving as a Marie Curie Fellow at the Institute of Psychology of the Italian National Research Council in Rome in the period 1997–9 was a valuable opportunity for my professional development. During my stay in Rome, the personal and academic support of Laura Benigni, my 'scientist in charge' as the European Commission jargon puts it, was overwhelmingly important. In addition, the opportunity to spend 2 years in a genuinely Italian environment allowed me to broaden and deepen my research, and also to gain a fuller understanding of the Italian reality and its complexities. I hope that I have been able to do justice to it in the pages of this book.

I would also like to thank the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies of the European University Institute in Florence, my current academic home, for their institutional and financial support in the last stage of preparing this manuscript.

There are a few people who, although not related to sociology nor to this particular area of study, have provided me with support and encouragement during these years, and have listened and shared with me my doubts, disappointments or anxieties concerning this work. Το Ντίνα, Δημήτρη, Αλέξανδρε, Francesco, Simona: thank you for being there.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Jackie Gauntlett for her excellent administrative skills and sunny mood that were precious during my stay at the LSE. The Institute of Psychology administration team went out of their (Italian) way to resolve bureaucratic stalemates for me, and I would like to thank them for that (despite my Greek origins, returning to Mediterranean 'chaos' from the Anglo-Saxon sense of 'order' did give me a hard time). A warm thanks goes to Alexandra George for carefully editing the typescript, and to the Routledge staff, Joe Whiting, Annabel Watson and Yeliz Ali in particular, for replying promptly to all my questions and accommodating most of my demands.

A special thanks goes to my informants and interviewees, trade union leaders, public administration employees and NGO (non-governmental organisation) activists, who have generously shared with me their time and experience. It is impossible to list them individually as this would breach their anonymity, but without them this book would not have been possible.

I would like to thank *Social Identities*, the *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology* and *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (Taylor & Francis group, http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals) for allowing me to reproduce here parts of my articles published initially in their pages: 'Nation and immigration: a study of the Italian press discourse', *Social Identities* (1999) 5: 65–88; 'National identity and the Other', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (1998) 21 (4): 593–612; 'The political discourse on immigration in southern Europe: a critical analysis', *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology* (2000) 10: 5.

Naturally, I am solely responsible for viewpoints, errors and omissions.

Anna Triandafyllidou
May 2001

Immigrants and National Identity in Europe

National identity and nationalism are social phemomena of increasing importance in contemporary society and politics. Over the past few decades, European identities in particular have been called into question by peripheral nationalisms, the revival of ethnic allegiances, religious communities and the creation of social movements preaching universal values. National identity may be surviving the upheaval, but it is not surviving unchanged.

This work explores the role of Others, nations, ethnic groups and immigrant communities, in the formation and evolution of national identity.

The book contains three core elements:

- An overview of literature on nationalism.
- A new and original theoretical perspective.
- A rich set of original data.

The author reviews the main theories of nationalism and criticises their dismissal of the role of Others in nation formation. Drawing upon anthropological, sociological and social psychological perspectives, she develops a dynamic, relational approach for the study of national identity.

Her study also provides an empirical analysis through case studies concentrating on the press and political discourse on immigration in Greece, Italy and Spain. The results of these case studies are compared with earlier research on 'old' immigration countries, Britain, France and Germany.

Scholars and students of Sociology and Social Psychology, particularly those working in the fields of Nationalism and Ethnicity, Ethnic and Race Relations, Immigration Studies, Comparative Sociology, Southern European Politics and International Relations, will find this work pivotal in ascribing importance to the Other in national identity.

Anna Triandafyllidou received her PhD in social sciences from the European University Institute in Florence, Italy. She has held teaching and research positions in Brussels, London (London School of Economics), Rome (Cosiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche) and Florence (European University Institute), where she currently co-ordinates a research project on immigration policy funded by the European Commission. She is the author of four books and numerous articles on nationalism, immigration and communication.

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Peter Hurchings

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1 Introduction

Moral and political considerations

National identity and nationalism (the movement that develops either to generate or to protect and revitalise national identity) are social phenomena of primary importance in contemporary society and politics. Wars are fought, ethnic cleansing is practised, objects of art are created, families are divided and lives are wrought or flourish, all in connection to this fervently debated community, 'the nation'. During the 1980s, a number of scholars and politicians hurried to predict the demise of the nation and the nation-state, and to forecast their replacement by subnational and supranational forms of identification and political organisation. However, during the past decade we have witnessed a revitalisation of national loyalties, albeit through complex processes that also involve subnational and supranational groups.

In Europe, in particular, nation(al) states[1] have indeed been put to the test by peripheral nationalisms, the revival of ethnic allegiances, religious communities and the creation of other types of social movements preaching universal values, such as the environmental or women's movements. Moreover, the trend towards economic globalisation, the prevalence of a neoliberal market model, increasing population movements – in particular, immigration from eastern and central Europe and the Third World towards countries of the European Union – as well as the emergence of the European Union as a transnational polity have put the nation-state's legitimacy under further strain in Europe.

These pressures from above and from below do not seem to have extinguished the national flame, and allegiance to the nation has sometimes been strengthened in the process. However, it would be as misleading to argue that national identity is surviving this global upheaval quite unchanged as it would be to claim that it has withered away. In my view, national identity undergoes a process of change that is twofold. The nature of allegiance to 'the nation' as a primary, overarching and exclusive identification is put into question. At the same time, each nation undergoes a process of redefinition of its own identity, so that national identity is reinforced and the nation asserts its distinctiveness and is reciprocally differentiated from Others, groups or individuals, who do not belong to the ingroup. Today we are witnessing a fermentation of national identities

and the redrawing of their boundaries in relation to internal or external Others that threaten, or are perceived to threaten (which is nearly the same thing), their autonomy or presumed 'authenticity'.

In this book, I am concerned with this second aspect[2] of national identity change. There are a number of reasons why I consider the study of national identity and of the role and impacts of interactions between the nation and Significant Others[3] as important and necessary. These are of a moral–normative nature, with significant political and policy implications.

Ethnic and national conflicts are among the main concerns in international relations: our daily life is overwhelmed by news about the conflict in Chechnya, the aftermath of the war in Kosovo, the difficult cohabitation of different nations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Taliban assault in Afghanistan and the evolution of northern Irish politics. Moreover, the accommodation of ethnic minorities and immigrant communities within the social, cultural and political order of the national state has become an issue of concern for almost all European countries. Greece has recently been faced with the recognition of its immigrant and historical minorities, Italy strives to deal with the *Lega Nord* challenge and integrating its growing foreign population, Britain concedes autonomy to Scotland and turns away asylum seekers from eastern Europe, France struggles to incorporate its Muslim population, and Germany is in the course of revising its citizenship law to allow the naturalisation of its large foreign population.

Studying the relationship between the nation and the Other becomes a necessary tool for designing national and international policies and strategies that might help to avoid conflict and to accommodate the cultural or political demands of different communities. This point brings me to the moral concerns related to this study. Casting light on the identity dynamics underlying the debate on immigration, and analysing the rhetorical strategies through which the ingroup/nation is constituted in public discourse in opposition to the outgroup/immigrant Other are important tools for combating xenophobia and racism. Showing that prejudice against immigrants is mainly conditioned by ingroup–outgroup dynamics that become instrumental to the reinforcement and security of national identity but have little to do with the actual features of the immigrant population (be they cultural, social or religious) provides a powerful answer to those who fear that their lifestyles and sense of community will be 'contaminated' by the aliens.

Some introductory remarks

The double-edged character of national identity – namely its capacity to define who is a member of the community and, perhaps more importantly, who is a foreigner – raises a number of questions for the student of nationalism. First, it compels one to ask to what extent national identity is a form of inward-looking self-consciousness of a group, or the extent to which the self-conception of the nation in its unity, autonomy and uniqueness is conditioned from the outside, that is to say by means of its differentiation by Others.

The notion of the Other is inherent in the nationalist doctrine itself: the very existence of a nation presupposes the existence of other nations as well. Most national communities that are politically independent today have also had to strive for their survival and autonomy; so every nation had and has other nations and/or states from which it has tried/tries to liberate and/or distinguish itself. The question that I want to investigate in this book is the role that such Others play in the definition of national identity.

As a theory of political organisation, nationalism requires that ethnic and cultural boundaries coincide with political ones. Boundaries between political units are supposed to define the boundaries between different ethnocultural communities. Nonetheless, the term nation-state is generally a misnomer. It usually denotes a multinational or multiethnic state in which a given national group is politically, culturally and numerically dominant and, therefore, tends to think of the state as its own political agent. However, this situation involves a high risk of conflict between the dominant nation and minority groups.

Moreover, contemporary reality is characterised by a growing movement of people – asylum seekers and economic immigrants – who legally or illegally cross national borders. Ethnic and cultural diversity is often a result of such migratory movements that challenge the legal restrictions and police measures intended to keep them out of the national territory. Host countries are thus faced with the necessity of dealing with these 'Others within' whose presence defies the national order.

The coexistence of different nations or ethnic groups on the same territory requires the identity of each group to be constantly negotiated and reaffirmed if the sense of belonging to the group is to survive. It requires a constant redefinition of the ingroup that must be distinguished from Others who might be geographically, and also culturally, close.

The scope of this book is twofold. First, from a theoretical viewpoint, it aims to investigate the role of the Other in the process of the (re)definition of national identity. I shall discuss some of the most influential theories of nationalism in order to show that, although the existence of the Other as part and parcel of the definition of the Nation has been widely accepted in scholarship, the relationship between the Other and the Nation has not been investigated in depth. The notion of a Significant Other will be introduced as an analytical tool for the study of the double-edged – inward and outward looking – character of national identity. A Significant Other need not be a stronger or larger nation, nor a community with more resources than the ingroup. The feature that makes some Other group a Significant Other is the fact that its presence is salient, either because it threatens (or is perceived to threaten) or inspires the ingroup. The Significant Other defies the nation's sense of identity and uniqueness. The theoretical inquiry will be complemented by examples taken from contemporary European history and, more specifically, from south-eastern and western Europe.

The second aspect of the book concentrates on immigrants as a particular type of Others. Immigrants are characterised by their peculiar condition of

being others within the national territory. Moreover, there are a number of features that are distinctive about immigrants, such as their social visibility (dependent on their modes of dress and behaviour, as well as their complexions), their very condition of being economic immigrants seeking work opportunities and their supposedly temporary stay. An overview of the situation in the 'old' immigration countries of Britain, France and Germany is provided to illustrate the identity dynamics involved in the Othering of the immigrant population, and to highlight how such processes might serve functional needs of the dominant national group.

Three case studies from southern Europe – Greece, Italy and Spain – as well as a comparative analysis of their situations will be used to show that a nation typically engages in a process of redefinition of its own identity so as to keep immigrants 'outside' the national community. It is hypothesised that this process of re-elaborating ingroup identity in contrast to a new Significant Other is more pronounced in nations with a predominantly ethnogenealogical conception of nationhood than in communities of a civic–territorial character.

Greece, Italy and Spain offer a set of interesting case studies because their conceptions of the national community differ widely. Along the ethnic–civic dimension, Greece displays the closest to an ethnocultural conception of the nation. Spain, in contrast, is characterised by a predominantly civic identity, whereas Italian nationhood is based on a blend of ethnic and territorial elements. It is therefore possible to use these different characteristics to examine my hypothesis about the redefinition of national identity in different types of nations.

Moreover, these three countries have recently become magnets for immigrants from eastern Europe and the Third World. Their governments have been caught ill prepared to cope with either the economic or the sociopolitical implications of such influxes of population. Nonetheless, various programmes regularising the status of illegal immigrants have taken place in Italy and Spain, while non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the churches and local or regional administrations have, to a certain extent, compensated for defective state services. In Greece, NGOs and trade unions have increasingly been concerned with the issue of immigration, and a first programme for the legalisation of undocumented immigrants who are already in Greek territory was commenced in 1998.

This book introduces a new theoretical perspective from which to study national identity. It incorporates the notion of the Other in its definition and examines the role of the Other in the formation and change of national identity. The findings of the research cast new light on the study of nationalism by showing that national identity is double-edged, based not only on the specific features that make each nation unique but also (and perhaps primarily) on the presence of Significant Others within and outside the national territory that condition the ingroup's conception of its nationhood.

I also examine the identity mechanisms underlying xenophobia and prejudice against immigrants. It is my hypothesis that such phenomena are related more to the ingroup's own identity than to actual features of the immigrant population.

Last but not least, the study provides information about attitudes towards immigration in the three countries under examination. It thus contributes to a better understanding of the problems related to the acceptance of immigrants in these countries. It also identifies the identity dimensions by which domestic populations feel the most threatened by immigrants. These findings are useful not only for students of nationalism but also for scholars of international relations, politicians and policy-makers for the development of policies combating xenophobia.

Xenophobia, racism and nationalism: some conceptual clarifications

This study concentrates on the relationship between the nation and the Other, and particularly the immigrant Other. It is therefore important to clarify some of the concepts to be used in the theoretical discussion. Definitions of national identity, nationalism and the nationalist doctrine are provided in the following chapter. Here I am concerned with clarifying the concept of Othering, as well as related concepts such as xenophobia, racism and ethnic prejudice and the distinctions among them.

I use the term Othering to describe a twofold process that involves, on the one hand, the social and political exclusion of a group or individual (seen as a member of that specific group) from a given society and, on the other hand, the construction of an image of that group as a community that is alien to the ingroup; the Other is cast as different from and incompatible with – socially, culturally and politically – the ingroup. While using the term Othering, I shall also speak of Others to signify those groups that are, or have been, subjected to a process of Othering. The concept of a Significant Other will also be introduced to analyse the relationship between the nation and prominent groups excluded from the national identity.

The process of Othering is intertwined with xenophobic attitudes and behaviour, racist beliefs and ethnic prejudice. These terms – xenophobia and racism in particular – are often used interchangeably in everyday discourse. However, they in fact refer to quite distinct phenomena. Xenophobia involves a hostile reaction towards foreigners by members of a nation or ethnic group, and is linked to specific preconditions that foster its development (Mikrakis and Triandafyllidou 1994: 789–92). It is generally related to economic factors and its main objective is the expulsion of the new groups. By contrast, racism is linked to established 'social, political and economic practices that preclude certain groups from material and symbolic resources' (Hall 1989: 913). In other words, racism is not simply a negative attitude towards outsiders but rather aims at subordinating the Other(s).

Discussing the large number of theories and empirical studies that have analysed the concept and phenomenon of racism is beyond the scope of this book. It might be useful, however, to sketch the origins of the phenomenon, so as to explore its links with nationalism and national identity. Bodily appearance,

and skin colour specifically, have been important characteristics used to categorise and evaluate people. These phenotypic differences were developed into folk taxonomies and defined as 'races' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Evans 1996: 37–42). 'Scientific' arguments were provided to sustain a presumed relationship between such characteristics and moral or sociocultural features of the people classified into these categories. The underlying argument of such categorisations was that the white, European race was morally and intellectually superior to all others. Different versions of racist ideologies have found their political expression in Western colonialism and imperialism, slavery and Nazism (see, among others, Miles 1989; Todorov 1989).

'Scientific' arguments about the existence of biological 'races' that could be identified by specific sociocultural features have now been discredited. Racism nevertheless persists as ideology and practice in Western societies, although perhaps in more subtle and covert forms than in the past. As a matter of fact, immigrants and ethnic minorities are usually categorised on the basis of their physical appearance and associated cultural or ethnic features. As van Dijk (1991: 26) argues:

> Throughout western history [such categorisations] have been used to distinguish in- and out-groups according to a variable mixture of perceived differences of language, religion, dress or customs, until today often associated with different origin or bodily appearance.

The racial dimension is thus intertwined with an ethnic one. Most importantly, now that overt biological racism is morally condemned by liberal Western societies, racism is transformed into ethnicism (Mullard 1986): cultural differences are used to justify and legitimise practices of marginalisation and the exclusion of minority groups as well as the sociocognitive representations that underpin them (van Dijk 1991: 26–7).

Racism is not only about ideology but also about structural inequality and advantages of the dominant group over the dominated people. Overt forms of racial discrimination have largely been replaced by more indirect and subtle views of ethnic differentiation that can be defined as 'new', 'subtle' or 'symbolic' racism (Dovidio and Gaertner 1986). We can, in fact, distinguish between different *racisms* that are historically embedded, often internally contradictory and in a state of constant flux (Miles 1993: 41).

Racism might be conceptually related to nationalism in the sense that the process of nationalisation in Europe – the construction of a national identity and a national culture within each nation-state – involved, among others, a process of *racialisation* (see Miles 1989: 73–7). The bourgeois ruling classes of the European nation-states in the nineteenth century racialised the underclass as inferior and backward, while simultaneously portraying themselves as having a 'racial history and character' that was typical of the nation as a whole. In such discourses of ethnic descent and membership, the notions of 'race' and 'nation' often became indistinguishable (Miles 1993: 46–8). Put bluntly, nationalism