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Nationalism: the idiocy of intimacy*

ABSTRACT

Historically speaking democracy, understood as the representation of interests, is intimately linked to nationalism, understood as the representation of identities. In the wake of the French Revolution, 'rule by the people' came to be understood as rule by *our* people, people who are like us. Yet the two principles do not logically imply each other, and can indeed be regarded as antithetical. While democracy understood as the satisfaction of interests should pay no attention to the identity of a politician, identity is all that many nationalists care about. If this is the case, we have a puzzle which requires an explanation: how did democracy come to be related to nationalism? As I argue, the connection must be understood as a result of the transformation of the concept of the person which took place in the course of the eighteenth century, and which brought about a new conception of the public sphere. What modern men and women wanted was to have their unique qualities acknowledged and to be listened to as individuals. That is, they wanted their preferences to matter in collective decision making – hence democracy – but also that the public sphere be populated by people like themselves with whom they could speak on free and intimate terms – hence nationalism. Only once public relations came to be interpreted in intimate terms did the character of our leaders, not just his or her policies, become a paramount concern, and democracy connected to nationalism.

KEYWORDS: Nationalism; democracy; public sphere; intimacy; metaphor

There is a close relationship between nationalism and democracy. The breakthrough, if not the actual origin, of nationalism is often associated with the French Revolution, and a broadening of the franchise is often associated with the political transformations that the French Revolution set in motion. In the nineteenth century, the liberal demand for popular rule was soon translated into a nationalist demand for self-determination: if the people is to rule itself, it must get rid of both kings and foreigners. In more analytical terms, we could say that the principle of nationality served to delineate the boundaries of the *demos*. If democracy means 'rule by the people,' the question is which people the principle should apply to. On a practical level this question was settled as 'rule by the people' came to be interpreted as 'rule by *our* people,' that is, rule by people *who are like us*,

people of our nationality (Connor 1981: 208–9; Dahl 1986: 122–6). Conversely, a political order came to be seen as illegitimate to the extent that it entailed rule by people who are unlike us, people of a different nationality.

There is consequently a historical link between the two principles, yet the connection is *not* a logical one. Democracy does not entail nationalism, and nationalism can certainly exist without democracy. In fact, it could be said that the two principles are contradictory. In a democracy, the only thing that should matter is how responsive political leaders are to the will of the people, yet who these political leaders are should be irrelevant. According to a nationalist doctrine, the opposite holds. A true nationalist would prefer to be ruled by co-nationals even in cases where these co-nationals were less than representative of the people's views.

If the two principles are logically independent, even antithetical, why have they been so closely related? The hunch which I will explore in this article is that the two came to be related through a radical transformation of the public sphere, most dramatically illustrated in the French Revolution. While politics in the *anciens régimes* had been understood in conventional and theatrical terms, the French revolutionaries demanded, among other things, that politics be made more authentic. The public sphere was to be transformed into a setting for the personal interactions between real human beings. The public sphere, and relations between rulers and ruled, were to be make more intimate. Behind this 'intimization' of politics we find a new conception of what it means to be a human being. While man of the *anciens régimes* was an actor on a stage, eighteenth century philosophers conceived of man as an *individual*, a unique person with an interior life which was exclusively his, or her, own. What these new men and women wanted above all was to have their unique qualities acknowledged and to be listened to as individuals. That is, they wanted their preferences to matter in collective decision making – hence democracy – *and* that there should be people around with whom they could speak on free and intimate terms – hence nationalism since nationalism guarantees a public sphere populated with people similar to ourselves. It was through this new conception of man, and this new conception of the public sphere, that nationalism came to be linked to democracy.

THE PROBLEM OF REPRESENTATION

Let me begin by making a sharp distinction between two principles of representation (cf. Pizzorno 1986; Taylor 1992: 25–73). According to the principle of interest-representation, it is the voters' *interests* that should be represented in political decision-making bodies. The representatives of the people should, ideally, have the same views, policies and goals as the people who elect them. According to the principle of identity representation, on the other hand, not people's interests but their *identities* is what should be

represented. People vote for politicians who are similar to themselves in one respect or another. To the extent that the two principles of representation are satisfied, they will give legitimacy to a regime. A politician is more legitimate the better he or she is at representing the interests, or, alternatively, the identities, of the voters.

The two principles often will, but do not necessarily, coincide. We could quite easily imagine that people who are like us rule against our interest. This is after all the case of many a 'man of the people' who, despite a folksy image and popular appeal, rules in the benefit of the upper class. On the other hand, we could imagine cases where political leaders, very different from the people they govern, are nevertheless ruling in these people's interest. Middle-aged, white males exercise most of the political power in our societies, but this fact alone does not mean that they rule against the interests of those who are older or younger, differently pigmented or gendered. Male, white, middle-class rule *may* of course have these effects, but whether this is so is an empirical question.

For both principles, there is a problem regarding the correspondence between representer and represented. In the case of interest representation, the problem is that people's short-term and long-term interests may differ. Today it may be in one's interest to consume, but in order to be able to consume also tomorrow, it may be better to save today. Or even more starkly: one generation of voters may have a different interest than another, perhaps yet unborn, generation of voters. Since this may be the case, politicians are often advised to look away from temporary electoral gains and to represent also the interests of the people of the future. Unfortunately the two sets of interests may be radically different. A politician who takes the interests of future generations into account may have to disregard the interests of the people of today, and perhaps to suffer electoral losses as a result.

In the case of the principle of identity representation the problem is to figure out which particular aspect of a person that is to be represented. Identity of what? Since all people are similar in some respects and different in other respects, the answer to this question will never be obvious. The fact is, of course, that rulers never are particularly similar to the people they rule. This was obviously the case in the days of the *anciens régimes* when royal houses typically consisted of foreigners, but it is still the case under representative democracy where political leaders tend to be richer, better educated, and more verbally gifted than the national average. This, at least in part, is why they are leaders. Since people always have many different identities, we may wonder why one of them – ethnic belonging – would come to be regarded as more important than the others – social class, for example, or gender, or linguistic group.

If all we wanted was democracy, let us stipulate, interest representation would have been enough. From a democratic point of view, narrowly so defined, the identity of the people who rule us does not matter, only what kinds of policies they pursue. It is the policies of the political leaders, not

who they are, which should be our concern. If democracy thus is based on the principle of interest representation, nationalism is based on the principle of identity representation. To a nationalist, the correspondence between the identities of leaders and people matters more than the correspondence between political preferences.[1] While democrats are blind to the colour of someone's skin, skin colour is precisely what nationalists look at. If there is no logical connection between the two principles – if the two even can be said to be antithetical – we have a problem which requires an empirical answer. Why did 'rule in the interests of the people' come to be interpreted as 'rule by people who are like us'? In order to answer this question, let us begin by looking at the problem of representation.

RE-PRESENTING POLITICAL COMMUNITIES

Etymologically speaking, to represent is to 're-present,' that is, to make something 'present again'; to make that which is not in our place or time appear here and now (Pitkin 1967; Pitkin 1989: 132–54). We re-present something to ourselves when we think about it; we picture something in our minds, and as a result the thing becomes *present* to us (Arendt 1977: 75–6). Similarly, a group re-presents, or conceptualizes, itself to itself in the minds of the individuals who make it up. Thus, although not every member of a group can know more than a handful of the other members, he or she can make the others present by conceiving of them in a certain manner. In this sense all communities are, and must be, imagined (Anderson 1983: 14–16).

How we think about ourselves as a community is intimately linked to how we think about ourselves as individuals. The influence seems to be reciprocal: our communities are re-presented in such a way that they fit our re-presentations of ourselves; our selves are re-presented in such a way that they fit our re-presentations of our communities. The conception of a community makes a certain kind of person possible, and the conception of a person makes a certain kind of community possible. How we re-represent our community also determines who can represent it in the sense of 'standing for it,' 'speaking in its name.' Each re-presentation will make certain kinds of political representation possible and others impossible. Thus, depending on how we see our community, the allegiance we owe our rulers will be understood quite differently. A representative is legitimate when he/she fits with the re-presentations made of a community, and the community is legitimate when it fits with the re-presentations made of individual human beings.

Let me illustrate this argument with the help of three brief historical vignettes illustrating three traditional ways in which the relations between man, community and political leaders have been conceptualized.

Men of The Polis

The Athenian city-state was a democracy, meaning a community whose members governed themselves. It was also a *polis*, or a republic, meaning a community of citizens, or free men, who all were equal, and all potentially active in the running of their common affairs. Classical Greece had no conception of political representation, and in Athens the citizens instead took turns in government, the person temporarily in charge being designated by lot (Dahl 1989: 14–23; Davies 1978). The fact that Athens was relatively small, and relatively homogenous, and the fact that many citizens knew – or at least had heard of – each other, no doubt helped to legitimize this form of rule.

  The concept of the person embraced by the Greeks was fundamentally connected with the sharp distinction drawn between that which was public and that which was private (Aristotle 1986 book I-II; Arendt 1958: 30). The private realm of the household was the sphere of necessity; it was here that people's needs for food, shelter, sex and security were satisfied. The household was intimate, non-confrontational and hierarchical. The public realm of the *polis*, on the other hand, was the sphere of freedom. Here life was free because the public realm was not concerned with the material conditions of life, but also because every man in the realm of the *polis* was an equal. Man was free to the extent that he neither exclusively ruled himself nor was exclusively ruled by others (Aristotle 1986:1325a24). Since both freedom and equality were necessary in order for man to fully reach his potential, the public realm was the only place where a truly human life could be lived. Only in the city square, the *agora*, was man really a man (Bakhtin, 1975/ 1991: 136–7). By contrast, privacy literally meant a state of 'being deprived'. According to the classical Greek conception, to be deprived of the chance to develop the highest, quintessentially human, of man's capacities. A private man, a man confined to the domestic realm of necessity, was not fully human. A life spent outside the world of the common, in the privacy of 'one's own,' *idion*, was 'idiotic' by definition (Arendt 1958: 38; cf. Kumar 1997: 212–14).

Members of The Body Politics

In the Middle Ages, political communities were typically re-presented through organic metaphors like that of the body or the family. Both images had an obvious religious background: the Church was the 'body' of which Christ was the 'head'; the Christian community was the 'family' of which God was the 'father'. Relying on the same language, but adjusting it to serve the purposes of the new temporal rulers, the medieval political community was thought of as a 'body politic' with the king as its 'head' and with the people as 'organs,' or 'members,' of different functions and dignity (Kantorowitz 1957: 193–232). Alternatively, the state was a 'family' with the king as its 'father' – *pater patriæ* – and with the subjects as his 'children' (Walzer

1965: 183–98). Although slightly different in their applications, both metaphors combined mutual dependence between constituent parts with a hierarchical principle of organization. Just as one member of the body, or the family, was intrinsically linked to all others, some members were unquestionably more important than others.

This re-presentation of the community was intrinsically linked with the way in which individual human beings were re-presented (Gurevich 1995: 196–99). An individual was always a part of the organic whole which was the family or the body. As a result, the question of what an individual was 'as such' was simply impossible to answer. A man 'as such' was nothing, or perhaps an outlaw, someone ex-communicated, or ostracized. The way in which man and community were re-presented allowed only a very specific form of political representation. Families and bodies could be represented only by the father or by the head of the body politic. Families, or bodies, could speak only with one voice, since as organic units they could not be against themselves. The medieval notion of representation was thus fundamentally *a-*, or even *anti-*, political. The peace of the family required that every family member deferred to paternal authority; the health of the body politic required that everyone accepted the directives of the head.[2]

Actors on a Stage

Political life in the Absolutist era was often thought of in terms of a 'stage' or a 'theatre'.[3] Sometimes this metaphor was relied on in order to describe the general, melancholic, condition of human life – the world was a stage where 'men are merely players,' etc. (Frye 1990: 196–211). More concretely, however, the theatre metaphor was invoked in order to describe life at the princely court. The court was a stage where young men and women had to perform before they could establish themselves in society; the courtiers were actors who played their roles according to the intricate etiquette of *la courtoisie* (Greenblatt 1973; Elias 1985: 63–114). As a drama, political life in the Absolutist state was highly formalized; the roles were sharply separated, the cast divided according to privilege, and the play itself utterly predictable. Man's public *persona* – from the Latin for theatre mask – had very little, or nothing, to do with who he or she was in private life, off-stage. Yet this discrepancy between public and private was not a source of frustration since the self really only came to exist to the extent that it was publicly recognized (Sennett 1977/1986:64; Elias 1987/1991: 161–2). The self was not something which each individual 'had' – it was not an individual possession – but instead something that each individual created for him or herself through interaction with others. It was never a question of 'expressing oneself' in public, but instead a question of creating a public self which was expressive.

As far as the political concept of representation was concerned, it was always intimately linked to the theatre. To make something, or someone, 'present again' is of course precisely what actors do when they act. In fact

a 'representative' was originally just another word for an actor. Not surprisingly, in the Absolutist era political representation was always understood as a role to be performed, and the best performer of this role was the king (Baker 1990: 224–51). It was the king who represented the state to its people rather than the other way around. The state was represented when the king presented himself 'in state' – when he gave 'audiences' to his subjects seated, in full regalia, on his throne.

   Although these examples no doubt need to be expanded before they can qualify as proper historical descriptions, they do demonstrate the need for a congruence between the way in which individuals and communities are re-presented. How we conceptualize an individual depends on how we conceptualize our community, and vice versa. An Athenian was only fully a human being when participating in the political community where he was regarded as an equal; medieval man was a member of a body, or a family, outside of which he could not be imagined; the ruling elite of the Absolutist era were actors who acted with each other on the stage of the court. And as we hypothesized, the way in which individuals and communities are re-presented have set the terms for the kinds of political representation which can be considered legitimate. Thus the free citizens of the *polis* had a political right to speak and act which could not be alienated to any representative institution; the members of the body, or the family, were given a voice only through the head or through the father; the Absolutist state was represented in the person of the king when he appeared as an actor before the audience of his subjects.

THE POLITICS OF INTIMACY

With modernity a number of changes took place which radically altered the way in which both individuals and communities were re-presented. As a result, also political representation came to be thought of, and expressed, in a different manner. The representatives became the representatives of the people; they became *our* representatives; that is, the representatives of people like us. Let me briefly discuss what I take to be the most important aspects of this transformation.

   There was, first of all, a radical change in the way in which individuals were conceptualized. In the Renaissance, man came for the first time to be talked about *as such*, as a being isolated from the context of an organic whole (Gurevich 1995: 231–36; cf. Burckhardt 1860/1958: 143). According to seventeenth century science, man was a creature of reason. That is, a being who could distance himself from the world as it was given to the senses, but also disengage from the passions, feelings and inclinations which the world engendered in him (Taylor 1989: 143–76; Marejko 1989: 58–76). Due to this ability to distance himself, man could look at the world objectively, and due to his powers of disengagement, he had more control over the world than it had over him. According to this reconceptualization,

in other words, the self was neither in the world nor in the sensations which the world aroused, but instead in that transcendental faculty which made disengagement, objectification, and reform possible.

For subsequent writers, it was a very short step to associate this conception of the self with 'inwardness,' and inwardness in turn with truth (Taylor 1989: 185–98). The inside man came to be thought of as the true man, while the outside man was his false copy. A number of metaphors were – and continue to this day to be – invoked in order to describe this radical separation: there is a 'wall' between ourselves and the world which divides that which is in our minds from that which is in society; we have a 'core' at the centre of our being; there are 'depths' to our selves which contain much more than we can ever express (Elias 1939/1978: 258). In the eighteenth century – in a development well chartered by the new art form of the novel – these interior spaces and depths were filled with emotions and 'sentiments' (Watt 1957: 174–207).

The new interior man did, however, also have an external life. The social settings best suited to him were the clubs and secret societies of the *ancien régime* (Koselleck 1959/1988: 86–97; Habermas 1962/1982). In sharp contrast to the play-acting and formalism which characterized interaction in official public life, these meeting-places were informal and egalitarian. Here people gathered to discuss politics or the latest news, or in order to pursue some common hobby, and ranks and forms were typically disregarded for the duration of the interaction. For this reason alone – and also of course because of what actually might be said during the conversations – civil associations were regarded as threats by the royal regime. Yet the institutions of civil society were not easy to control. Associations like the Masonic lodges were protected through the secrecy of their proceedings and through their esoterica; clubs formed around the pursuit of common interests were protected by the utter innocuousness of their activities.

From our perspective, the point is that these civil associations provided experiences which allowed people to re-present the form of their collective interaction in radically new ways. The civil alternative was 'republican' not primarily in the sense of being anti-monarchical – often it was not – but above all in the sense of presenting a picture of an alternative society, a society where all members were citizens, equal and free. When the old order finally was abolished, this republican re-presentation became the model for a radical reconceptualization also of the official public sphere. The French revolutionaries killed the king – they killed the 'father' – and as a result they all became 'brothers,' and fraternity, together with equality and freedom, became the battle cry of the new regime. Alternatively, the king's head – the 'head' of the body politic – was cut off, and the organism of the state was transformed into an 'organization' of which men were members on an individual and voluntary basis (Sewell 1980: 145, 210–16; cf. Sieyès 1970).

While they thus relied on the metaphors of republican antiquity, the concept of the person embraced by the eighteenth century revolutionaries was radically different. Man as he really was was no longer the public man

of the *agora*, but instead the private man hidden away in the recesses of his own interior. The difference between this, real, man and his public, formal, and histrionic appearance opened up a gap which quickly distanced the king from his subjects. The theatrical quality of public life in the *ancien régime* came in the end to be regarded as nothing but pretentious make-believe and just another form of royal oppression. Here too, civil associations provided a contrast. In the club or the lodge, the new man could be who he really was: an autonomous individual, a creature of scientific reason, but also of emotions and sentiments. Here men could 'open up' and reveal their 'real selves' to others, and forge links based on intimacy and trust.[4] Not surprisingly, the aim of the French Revolution was not only to change the political order, but also to remake society in the image of the civil association. Society was to become more democratic and more egalitarian, but also – and perhaps more importantly – the kind of society in which men and women could live authentic lives. The distinction between the public and the private had to be erased, and the public sphere had to become as intimate and true as the interaction taking place in a company of friends.

   This intimization of the public sphere led to a new conception of politics. Public life became a sphere were politicians could be assessed not only on the basis of their policies, but also on the basis of their personal qualities, and the personal qualities of the political leaders became especially important once the Revolution was radicalized. With aristocrats posing as citizens, and citizens secretly working for the *emigrés*, it was never easy to tell people apart. In order to gain legitimacy you had to prove that you could be trusted, and the proof was given as the leaders revealed their character in public. Anyone can embrace a popular policy, but only an honest man can be trusted. In modern politics, the measure of your legitimacy is, ultimately, who you are as a person.

INTIMACY AND NATIONALISM

Many of the threats to the Revolution were imaginary, but not all of them were. Believing they could capitalize on France's internal weakness, and prodded on by counter-revolutionary *emigrés*, England and Prussia went to war in the spring of 1792. After a disasterous first encounter with the monarchical alliance, the war turned decisively in France's favour in 1793 when, with the *levée en masse*, the political rights of every citizen was translated into the obligation of every citizen to carry arms. The result was an army of unprecedented size and a reformulation of the relation between politics and warfare. In theory everyone was now a soldier.

   This war was different also in its rationale. While kings had been accused of going to war for personal or imperialistic reasons, the revolutionaries claimed to fight only in order to spread equality, fraternity, and freedom to the peoples of the world. This cosmopolitanism was reflected in the French state, which was the state not of Frenchmen alone, but of anyone anywhere

who opposed monarchy and oppression (Nora 1988: 807). Under the pressures of war, however, this cosmopolitanism quickly dissipated, and foreigners increasingly came to be viewed with suspicion. Through a dynamic similar to that which had weeded out the internal enemies of the people, external enemies – foreign spies, returned *emigrés*, citizens working for the enemy – had to be identified. It was never possible to tell who was a friend and who an enemy, except by judging a person's character. Loyalty to the Revolution came to be the seen as same thing as loyalty to the French nation, and the only people in a position to prove their loyalty were those who were members of the intimate sphere of all French citizens. Thus the brotherhood of man became the brotherhood of one people, and the first internationalist state was transformed into the first nationalist one (cf. Brubaker 1992: 43–8).

Through the impact of Napoleon's successes, *anciens régimes* all over Europe were forced to reflect upon themselves and the cause of their defeat. In some places the response was cultural, in others it was political or military, but everywhere it was a question of unifying the community and strengthening it against foreign threats. Although the French eventually were defeated and the world restored, the regimes which were returned to power were quite different from their pre-revolutionary versions. The Revolution and the wars had taught the rulers that the people, somehow or another, had to be included in the running of the state. The state had to acknowledge the new, modern, conception of man, and the public sphere had, as a result, to be made more intimate. Only in this way could the autocratic regimes gain legitimacy for themselves and only in this way could they field an army of sufficient strength (Schulze 1991: 48–55).[5]

The way in which this problem was solved in central and eastern Europe would be quite different from the solution provided in France. Here civil associations were never strong enough to constitute a civic counter-culture, and for that reason no republican transformation of the public sphere took place (cf. Eley 1982: 285–6). Instead the response to the challenges of the French Revolution and the wars was formulated with the help of the conceptual resources at each regime's disposal. The result was a transformation, but never a replacement of, the traditional metaphors of the body, the family and the theatre. Also in central and eastern Europe public life was intimicized, but intimacy was here understood in the kinds of terms which these three metaphors allowed.

The family metaphor turned out to be particularly useful for rallying popular support. The community described in this manner was still hierarchical and still organic, but the family in question was now the nineteenth century bourgeois family and not the family of the feudal age. Compared with earlier families, the bourgeois family was smaller, it lived more privately, and relations between its members were more intimate (Ariès 1973: 365–404 ; Hareven 1991). Once political relations began to be thought of in this manner, the distinction between the public and the private was erased, but through a different logic than in republican France. Perhaps we

could think of this development as the rise of 'the social' (Arendt, 1958: 46l; Sewell 1980: 222–3). The category of the social came to be associated with all the qualities of the bourgeois family, but applied to relations obtaining between men in the public sphere. As a result, the life sustaining activities of the private realm were turned into public concerns, and political relations became *domesticized* – from *domus*, the Latin for 'household' – domestic politics, domestic affairs, domestic news (Villa 1992:718). The public sphere became a super-family and politics a gigantic, nation-wide, administration of housekeeping. How people should be lodged, fed, employed and clothed, were no longer just incidental concerns of a statesman, but instead the very definition of what politics was about. This is the 'welfare state,' *Volkswirtschaft,* or the *folkhem,* in its various Germanic, or north European, incarnations. The best representative of the family was still of course the father, but from now on he could only gain legitimacy to the extent that he was able to prove that he cared about the welfare of his family members. Hence paternalism in its conservative, Bismarckian, or Social Democratic, versions (Lakoff 1996; Bowen 1947).

The body metaphor underwent a similar intimization. The old guilds and estates of the *Ständestaat* were abolished, but in their place came organizations which represented one or another of the interests of some portion of the people. These organizations, or 'corporations,' rather than individual human beings, were the units out of which the new body politic was fashioned. Most notorious, perhaps, were the corporatist arrangements in Fascist Germany, Italy, Spain or Latin America. A nation conceived of in this manner was still organic and still hierarchical, but now also understood in intimate terms. As a result, nationalism based on this metaphor took on quite a different character than nationalism in the republican West (Kohn 1945: 329–31; Sugar 1969: 46–54; Biryukov and Sergeev 1994: 182–98). The body was of one blood, one race and one will; it could allow no foreign contamination, no impurities or mixes (Arendt 1951: 158–84). The best, and only, representative of the body was still the head – the *caput* or *Führer* – but his position was not, as in the Middle Ages, defended on formal, physiological, grounds. What mattered was instead that the head represented the essence and the true will of the nation.

At the same time, however, public life retained much of its theatrical quality. Public life was a stage – most clearly so at the mass rally, the party conference, or the major sports event – where the leader still played the role of the nation, and still represented the nation to itself. People were treated to a spectacle which was larger than life (Garcelon 1997: 309–10). What the audience was about to witness, Hitler, Stalin or Moussolini proclaimed, was nothing less than 'the end of history,' a 'classless society,' or a 'millenian *Reich*'. Compared with the conventional and formalized stage productions put on during the *ancien régime,* the theatrical politics of the twentieth century was based on emotionalism and individual submission. No other plot structures were allowed than those which corresponded to the official drama on the official stage. In this way everyone came to

participate in everyone else's life (Havel 1987/1991: 338; Kundera 1984). The result was also here an intimacy in social relations – the forced intimacy of the *Hitler Jugends*, or of the comrades of the Communist Party cell.

CONCLUSION

Democracy and nationalism are closely related through a shared intellectual heritage with its roots in the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. They are also related since nationalism gave the most convincing, practical, answer to the problem of how a certain *demos* was to be delineated. If the people are to rule, they can be ruled neither by kings nor by foreigners. Yet, as I argued, the two principles are not logically connected, and can even be understood as antithetical. While the principle of democracy makes those political leaders legitimate who represent what the people wants, the principle of nationalism makes those political leaders legitimate who represent what the people is. Since the two sources of legitimacy are independent of each other, a nationalist regime can in principle disregard the interests of the people, and a democratic regime can in principle be impersonal. Yet our modern conception of man, and our modern conception of the public sphere, would not permit such a radical separation. During the last two hundred years, no political system has been considered legitimate unless it has been re-presented in terms which have allowed a place for modern individuals as they have come to be understood. Modern man was the interior man, and interior man could only reveal himself if public relations also were intimate relations. This intimate political community was called a nation, and the nation soon came to be seen as the only political entity which really could command our allegiance. What modern men and women wanted was to have their unique qualities acknowledged and to be listened to as individuals. That is, they wanted their preferences to matter in collective decision making – hence democracy – but also that the public sphere be populated by people like themselves with whom they could speak on free and inimate terms – hence nationalism.

   This transformation changed relations not only between members of the same state, but also relations between states. If intimacy is the standard by which public life is to be measured, then intimacy is possible only between some. There can be no 'we' among strangers since it is difficult to identify with people very different from ourselves; the only people we really trust tend to be people who in one way or another are like ourselves. We do not trust a politician who we do not know as a person, and consequently we are interested not only in his or her policies, but also in his or her private life (Elshtain 1996: 25). Since politics no longer takes place in an impersonal sphere, communities based on common interests – international working-class movements, for example – have become much more difficult to form. Compared to the Greeks, we are now all living in 'our own', *idion*, and for this reason we are all living lives which have become 'idiotic.'

Our views may differ on how to evaluate this shift. On the one hand, things intimate have very positive connotations in our societies (Giddens 1992a: 184–204; Giddens 1992b; 169–71, 174–5). Intimacy comes clustered with a whole range of related metaphors denoting closeness, warmth, truth and authenticity. These are things that we cherish, and their opposites – coldness, distance, falsity and inauthenticity – are things we abhor. Official intimacy, we could argue, allows us to be who we really are, not only in private, but also in public life. Intimacy allows us to be more relaxed, more natural, and more whole; it allows us to live without hypocrisy or double-standards. Intimacy can also be regarded as more democratic. Among intimates no one is afraid to speak out since intimates are equals. A friendly relation between electorate and political representatives makes it easier to reach politicians with proposals, and easier also to control them. If the public realm is one where friendships can be formed, we can hope for more honesty and less corruption.

The opposite view sees intimacy as an unmitigated evil.[6] Intimacy in public is the end of politics, the end of ideology, and the end of 'public man' (Sennett 1977/1986). According to this view, politics is fundamentally about confrontation, real clashes between real interests, while the intimate sphere is non-confrontational and forgiving; all emotion and no motion. If we let feelings take the place of analyses, we can no longer protect our interests, and the same old class, gender and race differences will persist.

Contemporary views of nations and nationalism tends to vary very much in the same fashion. According to its advocates, the nation gives us a sense of belonging; we feel secure among people who can recognize us as one of them and help us keep our identities stable over time. We know who we are since we know who we are like. According to the contrary view, the nation is a prison which never allows us to escape from ourselves. Wherever we go we see only what we already know; we encounter nothing but ourselves infinitely replicated. A nationalist is deprived of a chance to *make himself*, a chance to change and grow by encountering the unknown and unexpected. A nationalist will not experience '[t]hese jolts [which] are necessary to a human being to give him that sense of tentativeness about his own beliefs which every civilized person must have' (Sennett 1977/1986: 296). If we cannot step out of ourselves, we cannot question ourselves, and we cannot question our societies.

Yet even if we on balance would conclude that there are dangers associated with too much intimacy in public life, it is far from clear what to do about it. Some may perhaps dream of an end to intimacy and a new kind of republicanism (Arendt 1958: 320–5). According to these neo-classicists, our aim must be to resurrect impersonal relations in the public sphere; to make a life possible where we are not overburdened by others, and where we do not always have to discuss matters pertaining to the material necessities of life. It seems doubtful, however, whether such a solution is available given that our modern conception of the self is vastly different from the ancient Greek. Given our contemporary re-presentations of ourselves,

we are not likely to accept a public realm which we would regard as impersonal and cold.

Some – we could call them post-modern critics – would instead see the hope in a radical reconceptualization of our modern selves (Foucault 1966/1973: 387). According to this view, we should stop demanding truth from our public life since there are no truths to be found. We should not aim to discover ourselves, but instead simply express ourselves; not probe inwardly, but act outwardly. As such a person we would not be threatened by people different from ourselves since we no longer would believe in the authentic. We would not mind being other than ourselves since we would know that other ultimately is what we all are (Kristeva 1988: 284). Such a post-modern transformation is, however, even more unlikely than a republican revival and much more difficult to conceptualize. It is not easy to imagine what it would be like to be a human being of an utterly different kind.

Perhaps the best we can hope for is instead that public intimacy itself comes to be universally expressed through metaphors which do as little damage as possible. Historically speaking, the intimacy of citizens has been less prejudiced, and less exclusionary, than the intimacy of the national family or the national body, and also far less genocidal than the theatrical intimacy conjured up between leader and masses in the modern totalitarian state. If intimacy in public life is here to stay – if it even is a feature of our societies which we should cherish – a politics based on the intimacy of citizens may be our best hope.

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NOTES

* I am grateful to John Charvet, Jobst Koehler, Brendan O'Leary and the participants in the Political Philosophy Research Seminar at the London School of Economics for comments on an earlier version of this article.

1. Both democracy and nationalism may of course mean more than this under more extensive definitions. Democracy may, for example, be defined in such as way as to require the active participation of the members of a certain political community, and nationalism may be defined so as to require certain kinds of substantive policies. In this way the two concepts would be conflated. In order to distinguish them – and in order to be able to make a distinction between regimes that are nationalistic without being democratic, or democratic without being nationalistic – we need a minimal definition.

2. This is of course not to imply that this official interpretation always prevailed. Other metaphors would be put in their place by rebellious groups; or, as Walzer shows, the official metaphors could be given subversive reinterpretations. See Walzer 1965: 148–98.

3. The countries that come closest to the 'absolutist' ideal-type typically made more use of this metaphor. This discussion thus corresponds better to France than to, say, England. For a discussion of the origins of English nationalism see, for example, Newman 1987 or Colley 1992.

4. 'Intimate' from the Latin *intimus*, the superlative of *interior*, meaning 'that which is most inside, in the bottom.'

5. This account does not amount to a theory of the origin of nationalism. A multifaceted phenomena like nationalism is likely to have many different causes which are impossible to capture in one theory or explanatory framework. What we have is instead an explanation of the conceptual forms through which the notion of a nation have been interpreted and the ways in which nationalism has been used to obtain legitimacy for a regime. My claim is that the way in which a nation has been re-presented can go a long way in explaining the logic of the interaction both between leaders and led and between different states. For a classical account of the origin of nationalism see Gellner 1983. For an evaluation of Gellner's work in the light of subsequent critique, see O'Leary 1996.

6. See Arendt's work quoted above as well as that of students of her thought.

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