

Nationalism: Threat or Opportunity to Critical Intercultural Communication?

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‘Critical’ intercultural communication research is commonly presented as an alternative to the positivist tradition of Hofstede and Gudykunst that reduces the concept of ‘national culture’ to a small set of static and homogenising categories. Although the positivist tradition did not seek to establish cultural divisions across nation states, critical interculturalists rightfully pointed out that such research may harden already sedimented belief systems that are based on potentially damaging stereotypes. To counter this approach, critical researchers have relied on postmodernist and poststructuralist thinking, foregrounding a polyphony of complementary and decentred ‘small’ cultures (Holliday/Amadasi 2020, Holliday 2011). Such pluralism reflects the intellectual climate of the 1990s when globalisation theorists, such as Appadurai, Hannerz and Bhabha, suggested that a social reality of flows, connections and ‘in-betweenness’ had superseded a world order composed of nation states. As a result, interculturalists became eager to distance themselves from the ‘methodological nationalism’ of past generations, adopting an understanding inspired by ideas of ‘cosmopolitanism’ and ‘intercultural/global citizenship’ (eg. Holliday/Amadasi 2020, Byram 2014). Indeed, Bardhan and Sobre-Denton (2013) and others present ‘cosmopolitanism’ as the single most important ‘philosophy’ in intercultural communication research, foregrounding the importance of interconnectivity as a pedagogic idea that establishes a transnational world characterised by humanity, mobility, and empathy.

In 2020, it has become clear that the ‘nation’, as an organising concept, has not disappeared, and that different forms of ‘nationalism’ have in fact become a mobilising force in countries, such as the United States, China, Great Britain, Hungary, The Netherlands and Denmark. Nationalism can appear in many guises, ranging from processes of cultural and social imagining (eg. Anderson 1991, Billig 1995) to the political discourses of neo-nationalism and welfare nationalism. Common to all is the representation of ‘the nation’ as the single most important source of identification. The rise of nationalism in recent years strains the cosmopolitan vision of a world interconnected and interdependent. Recent examples of cultural and political nationalism straining cosmopolitanism are found in several contexts, including international higher education (eg. Tange/Jæger 2021) and migrant communities (eg. Jenks/Bhatia 2020).

While scholars have examined nationalism in specific contexts, continued efforts by politicians to push nation-first policies in different parts of the world require the intercultural communication field to take stock of its theoretical and methodological apparatus. Yet, interculturalists have yet to engage collectively with nationalism in a theoretical and methodological sense.

To fill this gap in the literature, the editors of this special issue propose a 'return to the nation', asking: What are the implications of contemporary cultural and political nationalism for research in intercultural communication?

When submitting proposals, contributors may want to consider engaging with the questions listed below or propose topics of their own.

- What should be the principal focus of intercultural communication research: the local, national or international community – and is it necessary to make a choice?
- To what extent are marginalised communities taken into consideration when discourses of nationalism are circulated and promoted within nation states?
- How are discourses of nationalism and cosmopolitanism expressed in different multilingual communities and groups, such as migrants from varied socioeconomic and ethnic groups?
- How has foreign language education been used to express or debate political and cultural nationalism?
- Are nationalisms always exclusive, or can varieties be found that construct 'the nation' as an inclusive, 'third space'?
- To what extent has research on international Higher Education been shaped by 'methodological nationalism', building on native/non-native distinctions?
- How does citizenship education contribute to imagining the nation, and can models be found that acknowledge interconnectivity and interdependence?
- To what extent can notions of nationalism and cosmopolitanism be viewed through, or seen as organising factors in, regional categories and dichotomies, such as West-East and Global-North and Global South?
- Is it possible to foster cosmopolitan aspirations and tendencies through policies that are founded on nationalism?

TIMELINE:

1 February 2022

Proposals Due (circa 500 words)

1 April 2022

Notification of decisions on proposals

1 September 2022

First Drafts Due (circa 7,000 words)

30 November 2022

Reviewer Feedback Sent

1 January 2023

Final Drafts Due

June 2023

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