

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

0363

Affect, Methodological Nationalism and Global HE

Riyad Shahjahan¹, Adam Grimm²

¹Michigan State University, Lansing, Michigan, The United States of America ²Michigan State University, Lansing, The United States of America

Research Domain: International contexts and perspectives (ICP)

Abstract: Drawing on affect theories, this conceptual article aims to undermine the legitimacy of the “nation-state” construct pervading globalisation of higher education (HE). Based on three real-life examples in/about South Asian HE, we demonstrate how the “nation-state” comes into being (becomes ‘sticky’) through the experienced and imagined encounters among: a) individuals (a Bengali Muslim’s faculty mobility narratives), b) national policy (India’s recent “Internationalization at Home” (IaH) efforts), and c) transnational actors (commercial rankers responses to India’s performance in university rankings). An affect lens illuminates how methodological nationalism is perpetuated as the nation-state becomes a naturalised container for (potential) encounters in the enactments of HE globalisation.

Paper:

Affect, methodological nationalism and global HE

Using an affect lens, our purpose in this conceptual article is to undermine the legitimacy of the “nation-state” construct itself, and question its control over people’s movements, identities and allegiances (Sutherland, 2020), pervading globalization of higher education. *We probe: How does methodological nationalism (MN) get reproduced via affect? How are nations brought to being among various mobility encounters?* MN refers to the assumption that the natural category or unit of analysis for society is defined by national boundaries (Shahjahan & Kezar, 2013).

We use the term ‘affect’ to mean emotions, responses, reactions and feelings that are relational and transpersonal and not solely located in the interior individual subject (Ahmed, 2004). Affects emerge from the interactions between bodies (individual or collective), and are therefore always social in nature. Furthermore, we emphasise the *becoming* properties of affect. Affect brings objects (i.e. nation-state) *into being*, by making them ‘sticky’ with emotions through an encounter with other objects, e.g. rankings, other national actors, or individual anxieties and aspirations. We view the “nation-state” as an object that is sticky, attracting various forms of affect (Ahmed, 2004). The nation-state acts like velcro that helps to attach itself with various forms of affect.

We draw on real-life examples in the form of three events in the South Asian HE context to explore how an affective lens can offer important insights into how MN is reproduced in the globalization of HE. We demonstrate how the “nation-state” category *comes into being (and becomes ‘sticky’)*

through the experienced and imagined encounters among: a) individuals (e.g. Bangladeshi faculty mobility narratives), b) national policy (e.g. India's HE recent "Internationalization at Home" policy), and transnational actors (e.g. commercial rankers responses to India's performance in university rankings). We argue that an affect lens illuminates how the nation-state (nation, nationalism, state, country) is brought to being by real and imagined global encounters, thus perpetuating MN in the enactments of globalization of HE.

Overview of empirical argument:

Drawing from the mobility narratives of Borhan (pseudonym), a full professor of the social sciences in a public university in Bangladesh, we first reveal the way one's global education encounters brings the nation-state to being as a category of meaning whereby one can evaluate the *worthiness* of one's encounters. In this case, we demonstrate how the nation-state comes into being, as spatial signifiers for study abroad destinations, thereby shaping mobility aspirations and behaviors.

Exploring the Indian policy discourses around internationalization of HE (MHRD, 2020) we next demonstrate how policy documents affectively render the nation-state as a personified spatial container with affective sensibilities, such as anxieties about 'falling behind' and/or aspirations for self-actualization (realizing its potential). The nation-state, an affectively sticky entity, is imbued with affective sensibilities, as it is assumed to be the necessary spatial signifier for global encounters.

Drawing from commercial university rankers staff quotes (e.g. *Times Higher Education* and [Quacquarelli Symonds](#)) within Indian national media, we finally demonstrate how rankers, bring the nation-state into being, ensuring its continued relevance as a category for understanding and undertaking global/international encounters. Although rankers purport to provide an unbiased comparison among higher education institutions, the analyzed texts demonstrate the ways that ranker's narration of competition bring the nation-state into being as a container for these institutions, personified with affective sensibilities, such as "potential" for "becoming a leader."

Concluding Remarks

By utilizing an affect lens, we reveal the multiple ways that the nation-state category comes into being to interpret, assess the value of, and direct connections and mobilities enacted through 'global' practices and indeed the very purpose, shape, and direction of these activities. In doing so, we explore how our impulses to move and connect through global HE are not value or geographically neutral. Yet given the prevalence of MN, what ostensibly might be a universal social good (global education and research dedicated to addressing shared problems) often reproduces epistemological and ontological hierarchies mediated by nation-state categories.

To overcome MN in practice, we need to interrogate our affective attachments to particular categories and contemplate how we might redirect our desires otherwise (Andreotti et al. 2018). The affect lens utilised here highlights the challenge that detaching from the nation-state is not simply a rational or material exercise, but involves (re)imagining how we understand ourselves within and enact global education processes. Therefore, to move beyond MN, is not simply a discursive exercise,

but requires an ontological shift.

References: Ahmed, S. (2004). Affective economies. *Social text*, 22(2), 117-139.

Cantwell, B., & Maldonado-Maldonado, A. (2009). Four stories: Confronting contemporary ideas about globalisation and internationalisation in higher education. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 7(3), 289-306.

Chernilo, D. (2008). *A social theory of the nation-state: The political forms of modernity beyond methodological nationalism*. Routledge.

Closs Stephens, A. (2016). The affective atmospheres of nationalism. *Cultural geographies*, 23(2), 181-198.

Davidson, J., & Milligan, C. (2004). Embodying emotion sensing space: Introducing emotional geographies. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 5(4), 523-532.

Kenway, J., & Fahey, J. (2011). Getting emotional about 'brain mobility'. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 4(3), 187-194.

Marginson, S., & Rhoades, G. (2002). Beyond national states, markets, and systems of higher education: A glonacal agency heuristic. *Higher education*, 43(3), 281-309.

Shahjahan, R. A., & Kezar, A. J. (2013). Beyond the "national container" addressing methodological nationalism in higher education research. *Educational researcher*, 42(1), 20-29.

Sutherland, C. (2019). Stop the clock! taking the nation out of linear time and bounded space. *Time & Society*, 29(3), 727-749. doi:10.1177/0961463x19873792