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**NATIONS AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN URBAN
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NATIONS AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN URBAN LATIN AMERICA: THE CASE OF BUENOS AIRES

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Abstract

The literature has long argued that the nation is a community, either “imagined”, “invented”, or of “sentiment”. The existence of such a “national community” has strongly relied upon the assumption that members share –or feel/believe that they share-- something/s in common. It stands to reason that members of the national community, therefore, should have some degree of consciousness as to what unites them as a nation. Theoretically, they ought to somewhat concur in identifying the features that characterize their nations and differentiates them from others. Very seldom, however, has literature asked members of the nation what the nation means to them. In this paper I do and thereby I question well-known arguments in current literature on the nation., I seek to establish to what degree, if at all, the nation exists as a construct in the popular imaginary. I attempt to identify the concepts and images that members of the nation associate with their national identity

Why worry about the nation and nationalism? For one, unlike what was predicted in the early 1990s, issues connected to national identity and the conceptualization of nations have not faded away. In fact, in the last decades they have guided international and domestic policy making. Second, national identity, nationalism, and the sovereignty of nations have become policies central to the functioning of states and the global system. More than ever in recorded history collective national identities are linked to individual identities to the point in which people around the globe believe that their personal well-being depends on the well-being of their nations. The writing of national histories and the defense of national values, customs, cultures and ways of life has not only been taken up by intellectuals and grass roots organizations but also by villages, cities, counties, regional governments, and national states. Nations are not just intellectual, cultural, and ethnic constructs. They materialize political and institutional practices that create a concrete day-to-day reality ingrained in the social and economic life of countries. Nations indeed are no longer an “exception” to world history.¹ In our world they provide, in fact, the stuff of history.

The centrality of nations, national identity, and nationalism is self-evident in the fact that most of today’s wars are either fought by nations that want to have their own state or by ethnic and religious groups that aspire to become independent nations within the same state. Andreas Wimmer has just published an illuminating book in which, among other things, gives exact figures as to the current ethno-nationalization of war and the progressive warring nature of the modern nation-state.² Terrorism and unabashed conflict in the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere express internal, regional, and external wars connected to the distribution of resources. Yet at the same time these kinds of conflict are also fueled by clashes between different notions of *the national* and/or communal loyalties based on ethnicity, religion, and politics. The complexity associated with the definition, study and development of “the nation” and “*national identity*” is not only of theoretical and academic importance. It connects, rather, with practical issues of governance.

Whether or not people believe that they actually belong to a “national community” or feel an “attachment” to one another through a unifying “national identity have, historically, been essential for ruling elites and the state. To those in power this is important because they usually claim to rule in

¹ Whether one can still consider nations an “exception” surely depends upon the historical timeline under scrutiny. On the exceptionality of nations see McNeill, William H. (1986) Polyethnicity and National Unity in World History, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, pp 28-30.

² Wimmer, Andreas. 2013. Waves of War: Nationalism, State Formation, and Ethnic Exclusion in the Modern World. Cambridge University Press, see especially figure 1.2 and pp 3-5.

the interests of “the nation”. To the state and its bureaucratic apparatus this is vital, especially in democracies, because institutions are supposed to regulate and structure transactions among members of a “national community” and defend the “national interest”. At least since the sixteenth century, and in the belief that this facilitates governability, rulers have eagerly created and encouraged a sense of unifying identity. It is not a surprise, therefore, that theories about nation making have long been associated with theories of the state, problems of centralization of authority, and legitimacy.

Despite abundant and fascinating historical and comparative work on the nation, nationalism, and national identity, however, we have almost no empirical data as to whether the nation, as literature has conceived it, occupies a place in the popular imaginary. Do members of a particular nation picture the *nation* of which they are supposed to be a part? What type of nations do they conceive or imagine? How does “the nation” connect with other collective imaginaries? Have members of the nation really incorporated what the state, public officials and those who write national history understand by “the nation” into their collective imaginary? If, as literature has argued, nations are to be understood as special kinds of communities, it stands to reason that these “communities” need to be perceived as such by its members.

This remains, however, a half resolved problem. In order to suggest possible answers, I probe into the popular imaginary of the nation by using opinion polls in major Latin American cities. In this paper, my focus is on the case of Buenos Aires.³ These polls are part of a larger project that also includes the cities of Montevideo, Bogota, Madrid, Washington, and Rome.⁴ The paper also borrows data from poll samples on related subjects that I conducted in the same Latin American cities during 2005-2007.⁵

³ The Program of Public Opinion of the Universidad de la Matanza, Buenos Aires, Argentina, carried out the survey that provides the main database for this paper. Raul Aragon, Director of that Program, deserves special recognition for his contribution not only in terms of the questionnaire used in this survey but also to the ideas that guided this paper. Samples were constructed as follows: Universo: Residentes mayores de 18 años en el AMBA. Tipo de Muestra: Aleatoria simple con reposicion, ponderada luego por Género, NSE y Rango de Edad. Tamaño muestral: 1300 casos efectivos en Buenos Aires. Margen de error muestral para Buenos Aires: +/- 2.8%; (para P = 0.50). Questionnaire: Structured, closed and open.

⁴ I cannot dwell here into the logic behind case selection in the larger project; I will limit the methodological discussion to the two cities explored in this paper.

⁵ These polls served as part of the primary data for Fernando Lopez-Alves' “Uncertainty, the Construction of the Future, and the Divorce Between Citizens and the State in Latin America”, in F. Lopez-Alves and Diane Johnson (ed.), Globalization and Uncertainty in Latin America, Palgrave/McMillan, 2007

Why cities? First, urban imageries of the nation –although scarcely explored—are one of the most important chapters of the industrial revolution and modernization. Most research has shown that, at least in the West, cities provide the center of gravity of modernization, the initial phases in the expansion of the secular state and the first stages of development of an encompassing national identity. In the case of Latin America cities also supply an excellent opportunity to explore fascinating combinations of modern and post-colonial conceptualizations of the nation. Second, urban public opinion in Latin America captures the collective imaginary of a very significant part of the national population. The region stands as one of the most urbanized in the world and in most countries the majority of the population lives in cities, especially in capital cities. One expects imaginaries of the nation in rural areas and smaller towns to differ from those of cosmopolitan urban centers. I take that assumption as valid but I do not explore rural or smaller cities. Rather, I am interested in large urban conglomerates where sizeable percentages of the population reside. Finally, cities also offer promising grounds to test arguments about globalization, ethnicity, multiculturalism, and migration in relation to national identity.

I. Nations in the Popular Imaginary

Do people really “imagine” or “feel” that they are part of a nation? Do they feel Argentinean, American, Chilean, or Spaniard? Do they think or imagine that they have something in common with others who belong to the same “nation”? A sizeable body of literature has, among other things, assumed that they do and there is evidence that supports that claim.⁶ Nevertheless, the data analyzed below show that members of the nation

⁶ Among many other solid contributions see, for instance, Hobsbawam, Eric J. Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality. Cambridge, University Press, 1990; Hill, Christopher L. National History and the World of Nations: Capital, State and the Rhetoric of History in Japan, France, and the United States, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2008; Greenfeld Liah, Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity, Harvard University Press, 1992, and The Spirit of Capitalism: Nationalism and Economic Growth, Harvard University Press, 2003; Guibernau, Montserrat, Nationalisms: The Nation-State and Nationalism in the Twentieth Century, Cambridge, Polity Press; Anderson, Benedict R. Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. London: Verso, 1983, and Under Three Flags: Anarchism and Anti-Colonial Imagination. London: Verso, 2005; Bell, David, The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800, Cambridge, University Press, 2003, and Jusdanis Gregory, The Necessary Nation, Princeton University Press, 2001, and most of the contributors to Hutchinson, John and Anthony Smith (eds) Nationalism, Oxford, University Press, 1994.

widely differ as to what their nations mean to them or what they think they share in regards to other members of the nation. In other words, the urban imaginary of the nation is fragmented and does not always reflect accepted definitions coined by existing literature.

I suggest that we need to rethink at least four basic notions that have permeated work on the nation and nationalism:

1) That the nation can be best described as a *community* where members are united by similar imaginaries, feelings, and conceptualizations of their particular nations. The data gathered here challenge the idea that members of the nation conceived their nations in a consensual way.

2) That ethnicity, language, migration, religion, and race are major variables that explain the character of nations and national identity. It has been argued that only smaller nations united by a common ethnicity would represent the ideal (and at times the only) incarnation of nations.⁷

3) That culture is the major determinant of identity.⁸ Claims have been made that the multicultural character of nations is an obstacle for their very existence. Some multicultural arguments have gone as far as stressing that because all nations are diverse not fully unifying national identity can ever exist. Today's nations, however, are clearly multicultural and since the pre-modern era this has been an essential and unavoidable ingredient of national communities. What makes it even more apparent today is unprecedented migration and the increasing expansion of communication networks. Buenos Aires has not been an exception, and despite a rather homogenous population in comparison to other Latin American cities, it reflects this marked tendency to multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity.

4) That the nation is primarily associated with humans and their communal life. The data below shows that at least in the minds of its urban members the nation is also strongly associated with geographical location. This means, among other things, that the central role that current literature has assigned to shared values, horizontal solidarity, and the physical characteristics of the human population in defining the nation loses terrain in

⁷ Connor, Walker, (1987) "Ethnonationalism" in Myron Weiner and Samuel Huntington (ed.) Understanding Political Development, HarperCollins, pp 196-221; see also his 1994 book Ethnonationalism, New Jersey, Princeton University Press.

⁸ Kramer, Lloyd, (211) Nationalism in Europe and America: Politics, Cultures, and Identities since 1775, Chapel Hill, the University of North Carolina Press

favor of location and territory, concepts usually associated with “patria” and homeland.

Why public opinion surveys about the nation? I submit that the way nationals conceive their nations appear crucial for the very existence of this entity. Levels of consciousness about the nation and identity constitute the building blocks of these two concepts. I take, therefore, a “from the bottom-up” approach to the study of the nation. The existence of nations and the actuality of national identity depend, to a large extent, upon what members make of them both. I do not, however, examine how grass roots organizations or social movements depict or define the nation. Rather, I am interested in the way common citizens view theirs. I thus explore the nation as the resulting aggregate of the conceptualizing and imagining of its individual members.

Discussing nationalism Hobsbawm has long argued that if we were to figure out the “sentiments” of the majority toward the nation –especially, according to him, the illiterate— we would run into insurmountable difficulties.⁹ This and other similar claims have encouraged a top heavy approach in which popular beliefs have hardly found a place in the analysis. I argue that they should. Historically speaking Hobsbawm is basically right; for the most part, when it comes to the allegiances and beliefs of the larger part of the population the historical record is poor. Nonetheless, we can inquire about these loyalties and opinions at the present time and construct an argument including this missing piece.

Finally, the overall project of which Buenos Aires is a case intends to overcome a somewhat common methodological shortcoming that has more often than not weakened studies using public opinion: the lack of an appropriate historical and social context. Usually, the transformations of particular imaginaries overtime are measured by comparing prior surveys on similar subject matters. Indeed, many times this becomes the most important backdrop against which results are interpreted. Public opinion, however, reflects transformations that often take place in the larger social context, the economy, or even the international system. While in this paper I cannot provide a full account of the contextual variables that may have shaped the obtained results, in the conclusions I do suggest a few avenues of interpretation that connect the survey data I present here with larger

⁹ Hobsbawm, Eric J. Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality. Cambridge, University Press, 1990, p. 48

historical trajectories. A brief detour into concept definition is needed before analyzing the data in some detail. This includes a brief discussion about the concepts of nation, national identity, and nationalism.

II. Associated Concepts and Debates

Governments, the educational system, writers, and scholars have promoted certain definitions of the nation and most of the times encourage nationalist ideology. Have they succeeded? People mobilize in response to nationalist discourse, rally around flag and country, fiercely defend “the nation” and are willing to make sacrifices to guard what appears to be “theirs” as opposed to what they perceive as threatening and “alien”.¹⁰ Most evidence indicates that urban dwellers in Buenos Aires are rather nationalistic. The nation and nationalism, however, are not one and the same.

Nationalism –the defense of the nation— may defend an entity not really installed in the minds and hearts of its nationals. Nationalism usually expresses a structured ideology, a call for collective action, a social movement or even a political party. The nation, contrastingly, is what this collective action is supposed to be about. Nationalism and the nation have obviously been historically connected and most evidence confirms their shared origins and roots. Yet analytical distinctions are needed. Connor has long posed a useful differentiation between nationalism, the state, and the nation: “...nationalism emerges as an identification with, and loyalty to, the nation, not with or the state”.¹¹ One can say that the love of nation (nationalism) stands separate from the entity—“the nation”— that is the object of its love. This is an important but often forgotten point.

Overall, the nation has been associated with the *existence* –rather than the defense— of a *human community* whose members would share some sense of identity. The imaginary of the nation that I analyzed below confirms this argument. While strongly nationalistic, the urban population of Buenos Aires and surrounding areas are nonetheless splintered as to what the nation means to them and therefore as to what nationalism defends.

¹⁰ See this discussion in Luckacs, John. Democracy and Populism: Fear and Hatred. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2005, pp 33-50

¹¹ Walker Connor, “The Dawning of Nations”, in Ichijo and Uzelac, Ichijo and Uzelac, (eds). When is the Nation? Routledge, 2005, p 40

Literature has offered blurred conceptual distinctions between nation and nationalism. In Hans Kohn's 1939 classic work the concepts of nation, nationalism (and also the state) overlapped.¹² Kohn's work makes a worthy reading because he developed crucial insights that directly tie with current debates about the nation. For one, he very much anticipated Benedict Anderson's popular conceptualization of the nation as *a community* where members do not get to know one another face to face but still "imagine" that they belong to a larger group. Second, like Max Weber, he defined "the nation" as a "sentiment", stressing that nationalism was a special kind of love for a "larger unknown community". Kohn almost equates nationalism with the nation: "(nationalism is) ... a highly complex and originally abstract feeling which gains the emotional warmth of concreteness only through the effects of an historical development which by education, economic interdependence, and corresponding political and social institutions, brings about the integration of the masses and their identification with a body far too great for any concrete experience. Nationalism –our identification with the lives and aspirations of uncounted millions whom we shall never know, within a territory which we shall never visit in its entirety, is qualitatively different from the love of family or of home surroundings."¹³

These blurred conceptual boundaries separating the nation and nationalism have survived. Anthony Marx, for instance, in an interesting comparative book on nationalism and the state does not depict nations and nationalism as distinct, neither historically or theoretically.¹ Recently, Andreas Winner has argued that the history of the last five centuries is a history driven by the joint forces of nationalism and the nation, yet he draws no major conceptual line between the two.¹⁴ Hobsbawm and others had long written on nationalism and the nation in a similar way. Cultural arguments about the nation have also failed to provide sharp distinctions between nation and nationalism.¹⁵

¹² Kohn, Hans, "The Nature of Nationalism", The American Political Science Review, V. 33, no. 6, 1939 pp 1001-1021.

¹³ Kohn, Hans, *ibid.*, p. 1006.

¹⁴ Marx, W. Anthony, Faith in Nation: Exclusionary Origins of Nationalism, Oxford University Press, 2003. See Wimmer, Andreas. 2013. Waves of War: Nationalism, State Formation, and Ethnic Exclusion in the Modern World. Cambridge University Press

¹⁵ Judd, Gregory (2001) The Necessary Nation Princeton University Press.

Rather than academic stubbornness this reflects the complexities of almost two centuries of debate. The relations between states and nations adds to this confusion. Weber had indeed argued that the nation can “...adequately manifest itself in a state of its own; hence a nation is a community which normally tends to produce a state of its own”.¹⁶ The connections between states and nations have been a favorite of much literature; John Breuilly, Charles Tilly, Michael Mann, Miguel A. Centeno, and Lopez-Alves’ contributions, among many others, spring to mind. In addition, economists, historians, and philosophers have written about the rise and decline of “nations”. They connect the idea of nation to the state and its institutions, too.¹⁷ While all agree that nations and states are different and distinct, there is, however, confusion as to how they relate to each other.

The most venerable precedent usually cited in terms of a specific definition of the nation is Ernest Renan. For him, the nation was a community defined by love. The “love of the nation” was “spontaneous” and “voluntary” and emerged “naturally among the members of a given community”. What is important to note in light of the public opinion data analyzed below is that Renan came to this conclusion by discarding a number of other factors – common language, religion, ethnicity, and culture—that were, in his time and in ours, believed to provide the needed ingredients to glue members of nations with a larger whole. Since he found too many exceptions he concluded that these variables were “insufficient” as binding factors that could explain the nation’s communal character. The survey data below confirms this claim. A good indicator of the complexity of the matter—and of his frustration in the search for a comprehensive definition—was that Renan settled for an explanation based on the “spontaneous” love of the nation.

Renan concluded that one could talk about a “spontaneous” love of country, motherland, territory, fellow compatriots, and so forth. This really means, in other words, that the specific *love of the nation* still eludes us. Second, and more importantly from my perspective in light of the survey

¹⁶ Weber, “The Nation” as reproduced in John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith, Nationalism, Oxford University Press, 1994, pp 25.

¹⁷ Nations have usually been understood as a complex concept that includes the state, institutions of government, and identity all in one. For recent literature from a political economy perspective, see for instance Landes, David, (1999) The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are Rich and Some So Poor, New York, W.W. Norton and Company, and Acemoglu, Daron and James A. Robinson, (2012) Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty. New York. Random House

evidence shown below, Renan advanced a depiction that did not really *defined* the nation. Rather, it stressed people's shared feelings about an entity assumed to exist in their minds and hearts. Some of the inhabitants of Buenos Aires did associated different kinds of "love" or "sentiments" with the nation existing in the minds; yet, they did so in rather dissimilar ways. One, indeed, could talk about different "loves of nation" that conspire against the nation's required sense of consensus and unity.

Variables stressed by existing literature, therefore, point to "feelings" "love" and "attachment". Most literature also speaks of the connection to a community called the national community. This takes us back to Max Weber who defined the nation as a "community of sentiment". The words "sentiment" or "love of nation" –as coined by Renan and Weber when defining the national community — have also been used in characterizations of nationalism, national identity, and patriotism. Yet there are good reasons why the nation, in particular, has been defined as a "community". Christopher Hill, for instance, in an interesting analysis of the modern character of nations and the writing of national history as an instrument that creates national consciousness finds, as many others, that the notion of *community* occupies a central place in the writing of national history. And he is not alone.¹⁸ In the surveys below, however, those who thought of the nation as a "community" remained a minority.

Much work on the nation has, as do I, stressed a cognitive and conscious dimension and claimed that the nation exists basically in the minds of members. Montserrat Guibernau, for instance, defines the nation thus: "By nation I refer to a human group conscious of forming a community, sharing a common culture, attached to a clearly demarcated territory, having a common past and a common project for the future and claiming the right to rule itself".¹⁹ The importance that Guibernau attributes to "consciousness"

¹⁸ Hill, Christopher L. National History and the World of Nations: Capital, State and the Rhetoric of History in Japan, France, and the United States, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2008. He reminds us of the newness of nations: "...the nation, as a form of community that assumes the congruence of state, people, and territory, is a recent phenomenon and the exception in word history" p 14. See as well Jusdanis, Gregory (2001) The Necessary Nation Princeton University Press and Hughes, Michael. Nationalism and Society: Germany 1800-1945. London, Edward Arnold, 1988.

¹⁹ Guibernau, Montserrat, Nationalisms: The Nation-State and Nationalism in the Twentieth Century, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1996, pg 47.

in this definition points in the right direction.²⁰ In a similar line of thinking, many have spoken of the nation as a community that lives in the minds of members rather than as a real entity. Benedict Anderson, for instance, has characterized the nation as an “imagined community” of solidarity that unites its members in a similar “imagining”.²¹ We do not know, however, whether different members of the nation imagine the same or at least a similar nation. And we do not know either what degree of consciousness about the nation is supposed to be needed to generate national identity or a conceptualization of the nation itself. The surveys below make a contribution in that direction.

Finally, definitions of the nation connect to the concept of “*national identity*”, which is arguably associated to certain degree of self-consciousness upon the existence of that special kind of community called “nation”. As much good literature has claimed, it is the nation, however defined, that has in fact sustained such identity. Liah Greenfeld writes that national identity “...is an identity which derives from membership in a ‘people’, the fundamental characteristic of which is that it is defined as a ‘nation’.”²² “Every member of the ‘people’ thus interpreted partakes in its superior, elite quality, and it is in consequence that a stratified national population is perceived as essentially homogeneous and the lines of status and class superficial”.²³ Greenfeld’s comparative historical argument, thus, speaks of nations both as historical and cognitive categories. She connects national identity to people’s consciousness about the existence of a human community sharing a sense of equality. Even if only the upper echelons of this community would partake in these sentiments one could still assume a trickledown effect that would install similar sentiments in the rest. In The Spirit of Capitalism... Greenfeld claims that members create nations and that nations reflect their members’ “qualities”: “...the idea of society as an association of individuals, is combined with the civil concept of nationality. It is because the individuals who

²⁰ Other aspects of the definition, however, do not seem to agree with the data presented below.

²¹ Anderson, Benedict R. Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. London: Verso, 1983. For additional nuances on this argument, see as well his Under Three Flags: Anarchism and Anti-Colonial Imagination. London: Verso, 2005.

²² Greenfeld’s correct emphasis on the nation as a community stems from her distinction between the nation and nationalism. Like for many others back to Ernest Renan and Max Weber, she associates the nation with a “community” that stands as an independent entity.

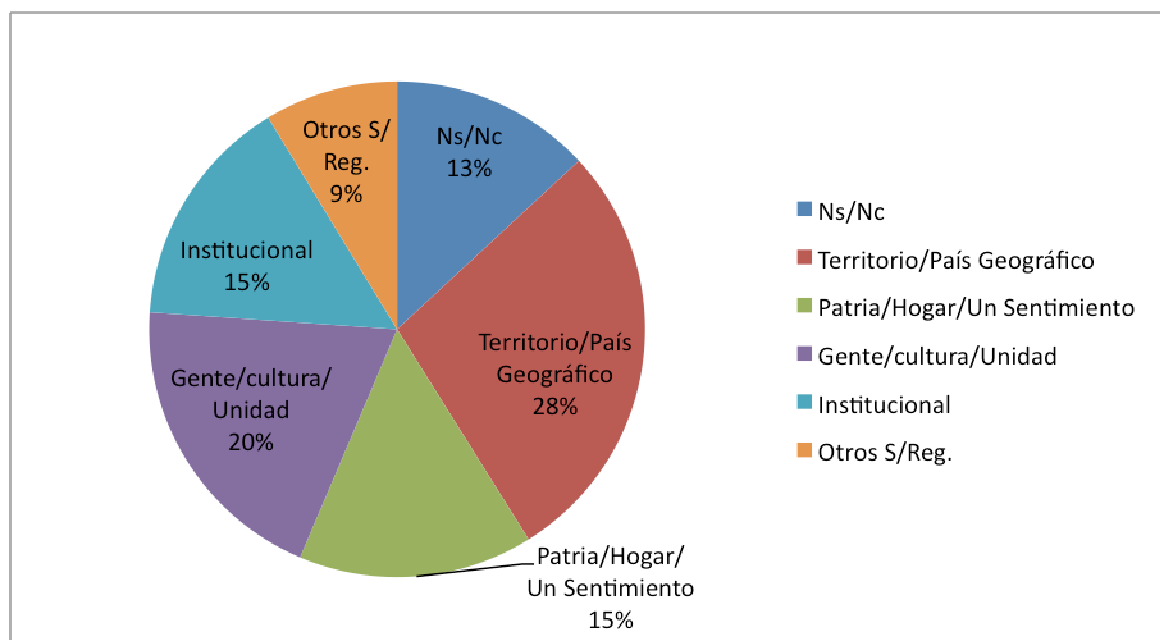
²³ Greenfeld, Liah, Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity, Harvard University Press, 1992, pp 14-17

composed the nation are regarded as equal and free that the nation is considered sovereign; its reflects the qualities of its members.”²⁴
 From these and other authors one can conclude, therefore, that searching from the nation in the imaginary and feelings of members is a step in the right direction. What results from the imaginaries studied below, however, is different from conventional definitions of the nation favored by most literature.

III. Urban Imaginaries of the Nation in the City of Buenos Aires

Question no. 1: *En dos o tres palabras, que quiere decir para usted la palabra “nacion”?* (In two or three words, what does the word nation mean to you?)

Figure 1 charts the respondents’ answers. Opinions were highly dissimilar and therefore they had to be clustered into fewer categories of meaning.



Literature tends to assume that the communal character of the nation is bound to produce some form of shared collective consciousness, yet

²⁴ Greenfeld, Liah, *The Spirit of Capitalism: Nationalism and Economic Growth*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001, pp 73-74

Buenos Aires shows differently. In this first question respondents were asked to express, in their own words, what the concept “nation” meant to them. As Figure 1 shows, 13 % of respondents declared not to know what the nation meant and 9% (grouped under the label of “other”) said not to be sure or to know “more or less” what it meant. If we merge these two categories we reach the 22% of the total sample. This alone would indicate that for almost a quarter of the sample “the nation” did not elicit any concrete meaning. The 78% who provided answers expressed divided opinions. Observe that only 20% of those who answered in the positive identified the nation with “people” and “culture”, categories that are at the center of current definitions of the nation in current literature. This means that roughly half of those 78% who answer in the positive did not identify the nation with a human community sharing in a common culture.

Place of birth, geography, homeland, and territory, emerged as popular answers. *Territorio, pais geografico* was the chosen answer of 28% of those responding to the question. Others (15%) indicated that the nation meant *patria, hogar, un sentimiento* (connected to land). Within this 15% group, 7% connected nation to “our beloved country”, “my dear home” or *un sentimiento*. Therefore, both Max Weber’s definition of the nation as a “community of sentiment” and Renan’s definition of the nation as a community united by a “spontaneous” kind of love, found somehow confirmation only in 7% out of a universe of 78% respondents who provided some answer to the question.

In addition, *sentiment* was frequently connected to location and geography rather than to “community”. Among those 15% that answered *patria* and *hogar* we found frequent associations to territory. If we add respondents who made explicit references to territory and geography in these two groups, then we find that 43% related nation in a first or second instance to territory or geographical location. Scholarly literature has of course acknowledged the importance of territory when defining identity but it has also for the most part associated geography and territory with “patria” or “country”. I will come back to this very important association of *nation* with *territory* shortly below.

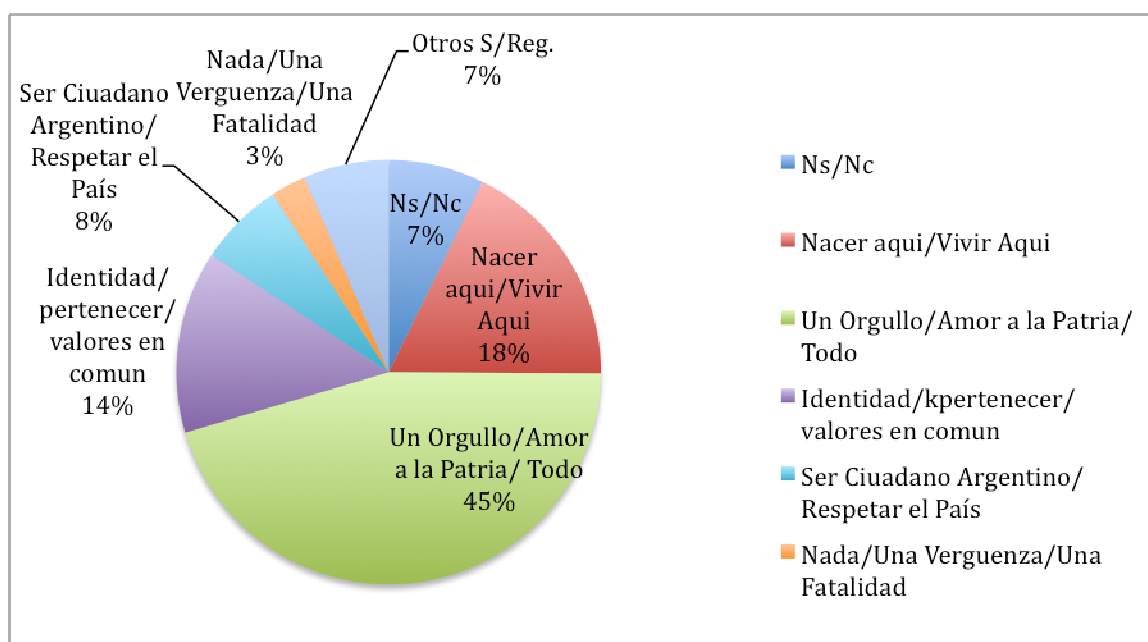
It is also interesting to note that only 15 % of respondents associated nation with institutions, which for the majority meant public institutions. This makes one wonder whether in the popular imaginary of the nation the state (incarnated in its bureaucracies) was perceived as a representation of the nation or not. I suspect a very weak association in light of similar findings that

I detected in the same survey I conducted in Lima and Montevideo (not analyzed in this paper) and based upon answers given to the following question (question 2).

One could argue that question no. 1 was too hard and maybe misleading. People do not talk about the meaning of the word “nation” on a daily basis or are seldom asked to describe it in their own words. Surely the word “nation” is widely used in public discourse but very seldom people are interrogated as to its meaning. To sort this problem out, the rest of the questioner posed basically the same type of question but in lesser abstract ways. Question number two (2) intended to use a more familiar terminology. It asked about the meaning of “being Argentinean”.

Question Number 2: *Qué es para usted ser argentino?* (What does being Argentinean mean to you?)

Figure 2



Argentino/a is very commonly used word closely associated with national identity. At what point after independence did Argentineans start to call themselves “Argentineans”? The question is significant because national identity tends to be linked to that moment in which a group of people starts defining themselves as a larger community. As Timothy Anna has argued for

Mexico, at some point in the history of the country people began to refer to themselves as “Mexicans”; that, according to Anna, marked the beginning of Mexican national identity.²⁵ One can argue likewise for most of Latin America. My point is that the terms Mexican, Argentinean, Peruvian, Uruguayan, etc. can be taken to mean expressions of identity. Yet, what does this label really mean for the members of a particular nation? Figure two (2) charts their responses in the case of Buenos Aires.

As can be seen in Figure 2, this question elicited more responses. 7.3% of the sample, however, declared not to know what it meant, and if one adds to this the 2.7% of the sample that answered “nothing” we reach 10% of the total sample. In the category “others” (6.5%) we cluster responses that did not belong to any of our categories; a large percentage within this category responded that being Argentinian was “meaningless”. In sum, while this question elicited more responses than question 1, still a rough 16% did not provide a clear answer or did not respond altogether.

Among those who gave a concrete response, definitions of “being Argentinean” differed. Only 14 % of the sample associated being Argentinean with culture or values, a favorite of the literature while 18% related being Argentinean with geography and location. The majority answered things like “love of country” and “pride”, reaching a 45% of the total of positive answers. Some used the words “sentiment” and “allegiance”, but sentiments and allegiances toward different aspects of “being Argentinean” or things not exclusively associated with the Argentine community.

Within the majority group of 45% who choose things like “pride” or “love of country”, 17% made specific references to territory, which means that if we add these responses the 18% who favored “*nacer aqui, vivir aqui*” we reach the 35% of the total sample. Popular definitions of the nation in the literature such as “tradition”, “culture”, “a way of being”, etc. characterized 25% of responses among the 45% group. These figures cast some doubts as to whether in large cities such as Buenos Aires people invariably associate “culture”, “people” and “tradition” with their national identity. Maybe urban dwellers perceive that a shared cultural component is not that essential in order to belong to the nation.

Let us go back again to institutions; only a 6.5% of interviewees associated “being Argentinean” with “respecting the laws of the nation” or with “institutions” in general. This is consistent with the responses we

²⁵ Anna, Timothy, Forging Mexico, University of Nebraska Press, 1998, pp 14-16.

obtained in question 1. It means that despite the efforts of the state and public institutions to create a national identity that associates the nation to the state and its bureaucracies people still make a weak connection between “nation” and “being Argentinean” with public institutions.

Can this weak association between being argentinean and nation with institutions tell us anything about the connection of national identity with citizenship? Studying nationalism and citizenship Habermas, affirmed that in Europe the meaning of the term *nation* “...has changed from designating a pre-political entity to something that was supposed to play a constitutive role in defining the political identity of the citizens within a democratic polity.”²⁶

At least since the French Revolution nations have usually been conceived as nations of citizens and therefore attached to republican institutions. For most theorists, as for Habermas, “The nation of citizens does not derive its identity from some common ethnic and cultural properties, but rather from the praxis of citizens who actively exercise their civil rights.”²⁷ One wonders whether this divorce between national identity and institutions in Buenos Aires meant that urban citizens felt that their civil rights are not part of their identity. One wonders, too, whether the roots of their responses are to be found in the unsuccessful efforts of successive governments to tie citizens to the state. By the late 1990s and especially in the early 2000s, the relations between citizens and government in Argentina were problematic, and at the time of writing there is no indication that they have substantially improved.²⁸

Does the fragmentation that emerges in these responses and the confusion that surround the conceptualization of the nation mean that the inhabitants of Buenos Aires are not nationalistic? Not at all. Nationalist fervor has emerged at times of conflict (in the case of Argentina the Malvinas war comes to mind) and/or during periods of increasing global pressure. Nationalism usually requires intense political action by political parties,

²⁶ Habermas, Jurgen, “Citizenship and National Identity: Some Reflections on the Future of Europe”, in Dahbour, Omar, and Micheline Ishay, The Nationalism Reader, Humanities Press, New Jersey, 1995, p 334

²⁷ Habermas, *ibid.*

²⁸ Prior work on Buenos Aires and other Latin American cities that I have done in the mid 2000 tends to confirm that both governments and state institutions have failed at strengthening these linkages, especially in Buenos Aires. See my “Uncertainty, the Construction of the Future, and the Divorce Between Citizens and the State in Latin America”, in F. Lopez-Alves and Diane Johnson (ed.), Globalization and Uncertainty in Latin America, Palgrave/Mcmillan, 2007

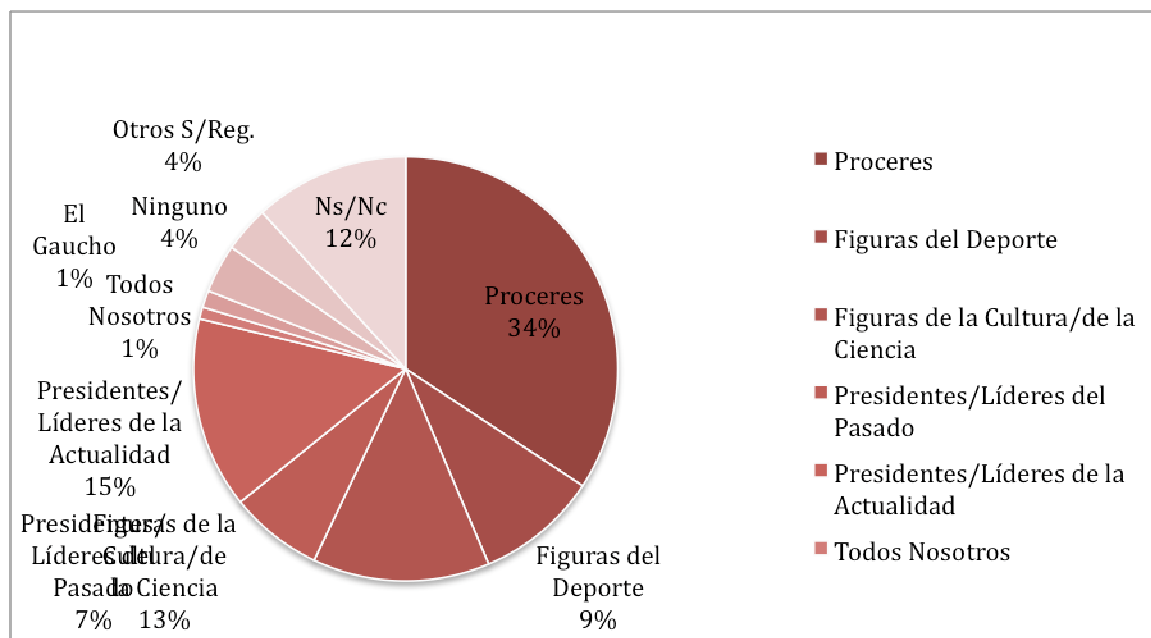
religious organizations, social movements and so forth; most countries in the region have experience intense activity in that respect. The Argentine government has indeed instigated and promoted nationalist fervor as well. David Bell has rightly pointed out that “...even the nationalists most convinced of their nation’s immemorial rights still acknowledge that large scale political action is necessary to complete and perfect the national entity so as to forge a truly cohesive body. Relevant measures have included education, the strengthening of common symbols and loyalties, the rectification of political borders, and the suppression and exclusion of minorities within those borders”.²⁹ Nevertheless, given the fragmentation of the popular imaginary revealed by this survey, one is left to wonder about the real effectiveness of nationalist action upon the imaginary of the nation.

Question no 3 encouraged even more concreteness by asking respondents to connect “being Argentinean” with specific groups of people and/or individuals. The question elicits linkages between an abstract concept (being Argentinean) and concrete human beings who, in the popular imaginary, symbolize outstanding figures of the arts, sciences, sports, politics, and national history:

Question 3: *“Quien representaria para usted más fielmente el ser argentino?” (Who would more accurately represent, for you, being Argentinean?)*

Figure 3 charts their responses.

²⁹ The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800, Harvard University Press, 2003, p. 17.



Like in prior charts, a significant percentage of the sample (11.8 %) declared not to be able to make a positive connection between any particular icon or popular personage related to sports, music, culture, science, or national history with “being Argentinean”. We can add to this group those who said “nobody” (3.7%) and thus increase this number to 15.5% of the total sample. Perhaps because the poll was taken in Buenos Aires the *Gaucha*, a popular figure associated with Argentine national history ranked quite low (1.3%).

Popular but very diverse social and cultural icons representing “our culture” or “our heritage” were picked by 13.5% of respondents. This is consistent with the prior charts in which culture and heritage were not favorite responses. Figure 3 also shows that, unlike many observations that have been made about the importance of sports as definers of national identity and pride--especially soccer— only 9.3% of the sample associated sport stars with being Argentinean. One could assume that in special occasions such as world championships or similar events, this sentiment could vary. However, it seems safer to presuppose that, despite possible ups and downs, the association between sport icons or sport activities with “being Argentinean” would not widely vary in the long run.

Historical figures and founding fathers were the choice of 34.3% among respondents who make positive connections. This obviously shows that policies targeted at associating identity with historical figures have

somewhat succeeded. The writing and teaching of national history has definitely shaped national consciousness and, as has been suggested, it remains one of the very key elements of modern nation building.³⁰ Some authors have argued that elementary schooling shapes national identity in Latin America and in Argentina in particular.³¹ In light of our surveys, however, and in terms of the effectiveness of this nation-making tool, one can only talk about a relative rate of success (34.3% of those who pick historical founding fathers and icons). Respondents made a relatively weak connection between being Argentinean and the current leadership (14.6%); presidents and political leaders of the past ranked even lower at 7.1%. A surprising result in this chart is that only 0.9% related being Argentinean with “all of us”, “everyone”, or “the people” in general. This adds to the weak relation that we already found in our prior questions between nation and “community” or “people” in general.

Let us go back now to the correlation between identity, community, and location. We tried to measure the importance of territory and geographical location in the imagining of the nation in question 4:

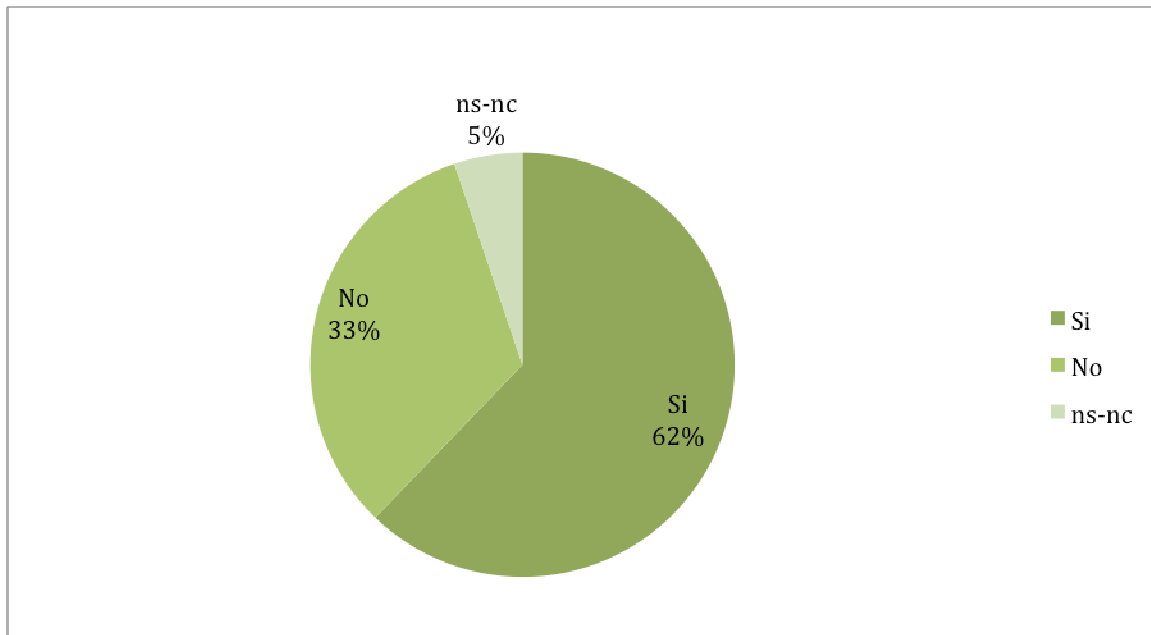
Question 4: *“Si todos los habitantes de la Argentina se mudaran a un nuevo territorio, ese territorio seria Argentina?” (“If all the inhabitants of Argentina were to move to another territory, would that new land be Argentina?”)*

I call this an “Exodus” question. In this question respondents were asked to think of Argentina as a new land that would embrace the entirety of its population, so that all Argentineans would live together but in a different territory. In other words, is Argentina wherever Argentineans reside? Could Argentineans transport “being Argentinean” to other geographical locations and bestow that quality to a new land? This is precisely what has been argued about immigrant communities and Diaspora populations around the globe. Yet what do members of the nation residing in Buenos Aires believe?

³⁰ There is plenty of literature on the subject. Among others, Hobsbawm, Eric J., “Inventing Tradition” in Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, The Invention of Tradition, Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp 1-14. On the writing of national history as a tool of nation making, see Hill, Christopher L. (2008) National History and the World of Nations: Capital, State and the Rhetoric of History in Japan, France, and the United States, Durham and London, Duke University Press.

³¹ Argentine scholars have traditionally adhered to this argument. Carlos Escude has offered a dissenting view. See his Patologia del Nacionalismo: el caso Argentino, and El Fracaso del Proyecto Argentino: Educacion e ideologia. Buenos Aires, Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, Editorial Tesis, 1990. For a comparative perspective, see Matthias Vom Hau, “Unpacking the School: Textbooks, Teachers, and the Construction of Nationhood in Mexico, Argentina, and Peru”, Latin American Research Review, 44: 3 (2009), pp. 127-154.

Figure no. 4



Unlike prior questions, only a small group (5.2%) responded not to know. Note that 32.6% responded in the negative, thus ranking territory higher than people; Argentina was therefore associated to the specific geographical territory in which respondents presently live. A majority of respondents (62.2%), however, responded that if all Argentineans were to move to a different location that new land would be Argentina, clearly associating national identity with people and, perhaps, community. In conclusion, in question no. 4 the nation, as defined by Weber, Anderson, and many others in part emerged, but competed with a sizable percentage of respondents who associated nation with territory. Moreover, we detected a split between those who associated the nation with people but not necessarily with community.

Conclusions

The short survey just discussed above poses, again, the quest for the major forces that shape the popular imaginary of the nation. Further research needs to be done to provide answers, but it is clear that without integrating the opinions and views of those who are the living members of the nation no study of the nation can be complete.

Renan long suggested that territory did not seem to be a defining variable of the nation; unity was based upon something different. Many nations, he argued, existed outside a given territory. Language and religion, therefore, appeared to keep the nation alive even when members did not reside together in a particular territory ruled by a particular state. Indeed, Hungarians, Jews, Germans, and so forth can furnish good examples.³² Indeed, arguments that have defined the nation as a “community of sentiment” have claimed that they can exist independently from geographical location. A sizable number of our respondents, however, associated nation and national identity with geographical location. These results might have been different if we were to interrogate members of the Argentine nation living in a foreign soil. My suspicion, however, is that territory would rank even higher.

Literature has also pointed to immigrants as a divisive factor. In immigrant societies like the United States, Canada, Australia, or Argentina, immigrant communities long maintained their loyalty to their original countries and governments. In Argentina, for instance, up until the late 1940s large numbers of them refused naturalization and continued to be emotionally and intellectually connected to the country of origin.³³ Yet the diversity of opinions that we find today and the fragmentation of the imaginary of the nation represented by charts 1, 2, and 3 cannot be connected to this type of explanation. By the early decades of the twentieth century, major immigrant waves ceased to affect the cultural and ethnical make up of the city of Buenos Aires. For almost a century, and despite recent immigration from Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Eastern Europe the population

³² On German national identity including Germans living out of Germany, see Mosse, George, The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich. New York, Howard Fertig, 1975.

³³ Solberg, Carl E. Immigration and Nationalism, Argentina and Chile, 1890–1914. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1970, makes precisely this argument. The copious immigrant waves arriving to Argentina after mid nineteenth century marked a difference between Argentinean and Chilean’s notions of nationalism and national identity. Italian and Spanish communities in Argentina continued to be faithful to their countries of origin; this has been well documented. See, for instance, Devoto, Fernando J. Historia de los Italianos en la Argentina. Buenos Aires, Editorial Biblos 2006, and Moya, Jose C. (1998) Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1930, University of California Press. See as well the interesting work of Bertoni, Ana, (2001) Patriotas, Cosmopolitas, y Nacionalistas. La Construcción de la Nacionalidad Argentina a fines del Siglo XIX, Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Economica

of Buenos Aires can be argued to have remained unaffected by significant immigrant waves.

Culture, for others, has been the major crafter of nations and what makes unity possible.³⁴ Ethnicity, in connection to culture, is another favorite factor when explaining identity and the nation. These factors do not seem to help explaining the fragmented image of the nation in the case of Buenos Aires either.³⁵ In Buenos Aires one finds a population roughly distributed along these categories: 88.9% whites, 7% “mixed”, 2% Asian, and 1% black. The category “white” includes peoples of Italian, Spanish, Polish, Croatian, English, Swedish, Russian, Hungarian, and Portuguese origins. Also Syrian and Lebanese communities have declared to be “white”. Uruguayan migrants have blended easily into the city since their culture, religion, and mannerisms are almost identical to the ones prevailing in Argentina.

As indicated, recent immigration includes Peruvians, Bolivians, and Paraguayans, but their numbers amount to less than 8% of the population of the city. The city also possesses a large Jewish population of various origins, usually subsumed under the “white” category as well, but this population has long historical roots in the city and constitutes part of its long established ethnical makeup.

These tentative conclusions will have to be supported or weakened by comparing Buenos Aires to other important urban centers in Latin America and elsewhere. As indicated above, this paper is part of a much larger comparative project and further data is still to be gathered. Also, in this preliminary paper I have not done specific factor analysis and explore our database in terms of the differences that can emerge when one crosses variables connected to gender, age, or levels of income and education.

³⁴ Among many others, Jusdanis, Gregory (2001) The Necessary Nation Princeton University Press; Karakasidou, Anastasia N. (1997) Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood: Passages to Nationhood in Greek Macedonia, 1870-1990. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, and Smith, Anthony, National Identity. University of Nevada Press, 1991

³⁵ Roshwald, Aviel (2001): Ethnic Nationalism & the Fall of Empires. Central Europe, Russia & the Middle East, 1914-1923. London: Routledge.