The Internal Other: The Uncanny Stranger within and at Nation's Margin

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The followings are brief renditions of common parlance, sampling of contemporary discourse, or narrative of Nationalism. Nationalism is both "ideology (belief-system)"—cognitive awareness and psychological orientation, the sense of belonging to a social formation called a nation—and "movement," particular historical instantiations (appearances). Nationalism as ideology proclaims people's right to a nation and as movement it protects people's sovereignty. Nationalism comprehensively indicates such ideology and movement which seek to build a nation, protect it when it faces invasions, develop it further economically, politically, and culturally.[1] But Nationalism is paradoxical because it simultaneously

1) Hence, under the umbrella of nationalism, there could be politico-economic nationalism and cultural nationalism, depending upon the emphasis. The nature of Korean nationalism under Japanese colonization was "resistant nationalism", for instance, and the emphasis was on the political. While the candle light civil protests surrounding Misun-Hyosoon incident could be said as spurred by political nationalism, current candle light protests surrounding mad cow import policy could be said as cultural nationalism co- mingled with political nationalism. The 2002 World Cup red devil explosion could

unifies and splinters a nation: Nationalism incurs the “inclusion” of nation's citizens while spawning the “exclusion” of its foreigners. We can categorize the discourses, the narratives, of the nation roughly into two groups: one, essentialist, (or primordialist) and two, constructionist, or (modernist.). Whether 'essentialist' (“The nation is trans-historical organic entity”), or ‘constructionist’ (“The nation is retroactive construction, weaved through communal imaginary identification”), the basic premise of this paper is that both theory and practice of nationalism emphasize the importance of the “unity” of the political entity called nation, while ignoring its inherent problematic of such.

Could psychoanalysis, the psychoanalytical concept of the "uncanny" shed different light upon our understanding of the problematic of the nation-state and nationalism? In my reflection on modern nation-state and nationalism, I want to focus on the juncture between the social and the psychic, through the trace of the figure of the foreigner, our internal other, not only among ourselves but also lurking within ourselves The figure of the foreigner is the excluded from the national boundary in order to constitute imaginary unity of a nation. Along with such exploration, then, the possibility of the conjunctions of the political and the ethical will be suggested,

The Figure of the Foreigner

> Foreigner: a choked up rage deep down in my throat, a black angel clouding transparency, opaque, unfathomable spur. The image of hatred and of the other, a foreigner is neither the romantic victim of our clannish indolence nor the intruder responsible for all the ills of the polis. Neither the apocalypse on the move nor the instant adversary to be eliminated for the sake of appeasing the group. Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the

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be said as cultural nationalism but further exploration will reveal its political roots.

time in which understanding and affinity founder. By recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself. A symptom that precisely turns "we" into a problem, perhaps makes it impossible, the foreigner comes in when the consciousness of my difference arises, and he disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners, unnameable to bonds and communities.

Can the "foreigner," who was the "enemy" in primitive societies, disappear from modern societies? Let us recall a few moments in Western history when foreigners were conceived, welcomed, or rejected, but when the possibility of a society without foreigners could also have been imagined on the horizon of a religion or an ethics. As a still and perhaps ever utopic matter, the question is again before us today as we confront an economic and political integration on the scale of the planet: shall we be intimately and subjectively, able to live with the others, to live as others, without ostracism but also without leveling? The modification in the status of foreigners that in imperative today leads one to reflect on our ability to accept new modalities of otherness. No "Nationality Code" would be practicable without having that question slowly mature within each of us and for each of us.

While in the most savage human groups the foreigner was an enemy to be destroyed, he has become, within the scope of religious and ethical constructs, a different human being who, provided he espouses them may be assimilated into the fraternities of the "wise," the "just," or the "native." In Stoicism, Judaism, Christianity, and even in the humanism of the Enlightenment, the patterns of such acceptance varied, but in spite of its limitations and shortcomings, it remained a genuine rampart against xenophobia. The violence of the problem set by the foreigner tt is probably due to the crises undergone by religious and ethical constructs. This si especially so as th absorption of otherness proposed by our societies turns out to be inacceptable by the contemporary individual, jealous of his difference—one that is no only national and ethical but essentially subjective, unsurmountable. Stemming from the bourgeois revolution, nationalism has become a symptom—romantic at first, then totalitarian—or the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Now, while it does go against universality tendencies (be they religious or rationalist) and tends to isolate

> or even hunt down the foreigner, nationalism nevertheless ends up, on the other hand, with the particularistic, demanding individualism of contemporary man. But it is perhaps on the basis of that contemporary individualism's subversion, beginning with the moment when the citizen-individual ceases to consider himself as unitary and glorious but discovers his incoherences and abysses, in short his "strangeness"—that the question arises again: no longer that of welcoming the foreigner with a system that obliterates him but of promoting the togetherness of those foreigners that we all recognize ourselves to be.
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> The difficulty engendered by the matter of foreigners would be completely contained in the deadlock caused by the distinction that sets the citizen apart from man . . . The process means . . . that one can be more or less a man to the extent that one is more or less a citizen, that he who is not a citizen is not fully a man. Between the man and a citizen there is a scar: the foreigner (Kristeva, *Stranger to Ourselves*, 1-3, 97-98).

In *Etrangers à nous-mêmes*, translated into English as *Strangers to Ourselves*, Bulgarian-born French psychoanalyst and linguist Julia Kristeva reflects upon the status of the foreigner/stranger in relation to the emergence of the modern nation-state. She argues that “With the establishment of nation-states we come to the only modern definition of foreignness: the foreigner is the one who does not belong to the state in which we are, the one who does not have the same nationality” (ST,96). As an empirical entity, the foreigner lurks as shadow under the apparent unified vision of a nation supported by nationalism whose vision is to seek “national unity, national identity, and national autonomy on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute a ‘nation’” (Smith 149-150). The figure of the foreigner. therefore, provides the best exemplification of the political logic of the nation-state and its limitation, its abberations. We could say that the figure of the foreigner is “the supplementary double of the Enlightenment's political rationality” undergirding the birth of nation and market economy and it fractures the imagined unity of the national body. This recognition of the presence of the figure of the foreigner is what the deteriorated form

of nationalism—the totalizing nationalism, the chauvinistic nationalism—ignores in its accolade for unity and collective identity. When we think about the ambivalent existence and status of the figure of the foreigner in the political and psychical arenas, we can reconsider social affiliations and solidarity at work in modern nation-states from the "margin."

As national unity is threatened by the presence of the foreigner, the unity of self, the individual identity is threatened by the presence of the foreignness within. Meanwhile, in its location of the invisibility and ambivalence and its function of splintering the coherence and unity of a whole, the figure of the foreigner in the political arena is analogous to the ambivalence in affects, the logic of the uncanny in psychical arena. More important than the acknowledgment of the foreigner's emergence and his/her location at the margins of the modern nation-state mentioned above is the recognition of the deeper symptom provoked by the appearance of the foreigner. "the prickly passions aroused by the intrusion of the other in the homogeneity of . .a group" (ST, 41).

Along with Kristeva, Homi K. Bhabha, the Indian-born postcolonial theorist, also theorizes and interprets the narrative of the nation from the perspective of the nation's margin and the migrants' exile. For Bhabha, also, the figure of the foreigner as representative of the logic of the uncanny provides the occasion to reflect upon the split of the modern subject, split of the modern nation, as well as how to live with such splitting inside us, at the level of the private and public, at the level of subject and of the nation and the larger public sphere. Both Kristeva and Bhabha turn to Freud's discussion of the uncanny in order to underscore not only the duplicity and ambivalence of the margin but also the threat it poses to the homogeneity of the national identity. This emphasis on the liminality splintering the unity of the nation from within serves as a corrective to the discourses of nationality, which presuppose the imaginary unity of the people or "the sociological solidity of the national narrative" (DissemiNation, 305).

As Kristeva argues, "in that sense, the foreigner is a 'symptom' . . . : psychologically he signifies the difficulty we have of living as an other

and with others; politically, he underscores the limits of nation-states and of the national political conscience" (ST, 103). Posited in this double way touching both the psychical and the social, the figure of the foreigner in Kristeva's argument opens a space where politics is entwined with ethics. In the context of the ethics, the foreigner functions as the figure of otherness-as-such, alterity in inter-subjective and intra-subjective relations. Ethics in this sense signifies contemplation and practice of living-well-with-others, rather than following moral tenets. Thus Kristeva argues "the ethics of psychoanalysis implies a politics," because both are fundamentally concerned with the critique of violence and with the elaboration of different ways of being with others. Not dependent upon violent expulsion or peaceful absorption of others into a common social body as in "assimilation" psychoanalysis, sets **the difference within us in its most bewildering shape and presents it as the ultimate condition of our being with others**" *(ST, 192).*

The Uncanny

In addition to the original etymological meaning of the strange, eerie, "uncanny" is the English translation of the German, *Unheimlich*, which Bhabha translates as "unhomly," as used in "the *heimlich* pleasures of the hearth, the *unheimlich* terror of the space or race of the Other (Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* 2). The logic of the uncanny, first of all, means its condition of the ambivalence, invisible but existent, material and immaterial, ghostly. The logic of the uncanny, then, indicates the chiasmic meeting of the two opposite terms and conditions. The familiar and homly will turn into the unfamiliar and unhomly and vice versa. the uncanny has to be understood not only the underside of the modern subject but also the underside of the modern nation.

The Freudian uncanny emerges as the underside of the modern subject and its scientific reason (internal split of the subject by the unconscious). The most important argument of Kristeva is that Freud's concept of the

uncanny paradoxically creates the discursive space of the non-violent social imaginary, a national formation without xenophobia. Kristeva's contribution here is her application of the uncanny to the political arena. On the basis of the explicit parallel between the political feelings of xenophobia and the affect of the uncanny, Kristeva argues that the condition of non-violent being with others lies in the renunciation of the imaginary subjective unity and in the subsequent acceptance of alterity within the self: “Freud does not speak of foreigners; he teaches un how to detect foreignness in ourselves. That is perhaps the only way not to hound it outside us.” (ST, 192) Since we harbor the uncanny—the strange, the eerie— is within us at the subjective register, we do not turn the horror of encountering the external uncanny, the foreigner at nation's margin for us, into violent xenophobia. That is how the logic of the uncanny functions ethically and politically for a subject and for a nation.

Nation as Imagined Community, Sublime Object of Nationalism

In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism,* one of the ground-breaking contributions to the theory of modern nation states and nationalism, Benedict Anderson argues that the formation of modern nation states is grounded upon **the imaginary logic of identification.** According to Anderson, the nation state is constituted as a political community because the members of the nation “imagine” themselves as “belonging together” as a group of comrades, transcending the material inequality and exploitation, the geographical dispersion. And he supports his theory of nation as imaginary community by exploring the social institutions and practices which enabled the rise and spread of nationalism, the merger of emergent capitalism and print technology, the spread of the reading public, the modern conception of empty historical time. As with Etienne Balibar and many other contemporary theorists, I acknowledge the importance of Anderson's theory of nation as imagined, What concerns me here, however, is the important

"missing-link" in Anderson's argument, which he leaves unexplored and rarely discussed in the arena of political theory and practices.

In his analysis of culture and social practices underlying the birth of the nation, Anderson leaves the crucial role of **affect** (psychical energy, "emotion", cathexes) in the formation of national consciousness unexplained. He does not offer explanations as to why the nation, the imaginary social formation, inspires such strong emotional responses, strong love among its members, fierce enough to sacrifice their lives for the nation. Moreover, the analysis of social and cultural practices do not offer explanations as to the thornier question underlying nationalism: Why does such affect of love inspired by the nation—patriotism—come with the affect of hatred of the other—the racism, xenophobia? Anderson writes: "It is doubtful whether either social change or transformed consciousness, in themselves, do much to explain the attachment that peoples feel for the inventions of their imaginations . . . it is useful to remind ourselves that nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love" (Anderson, 181). Through the mediation of the affect, the national affiliation, the nation as an organic unity, is formed out of empty signs, traversing through empty time and language. Thus, the arbitrary signs are endowed with significance and become emblems causing affects—empathy, sympathy, love.

It is cultural critic Slavoj Zizek with Lacanian psychoanalytic theoretic framework who provides necessary intervention into Anderson's theory of nation. Zizek emphasizes the ambivalent role of affects—emotions, psychical energy, attachment—in the process of national identification. Zizek argues that "enjoyment" (jouissance) of the shared substance, which he calls the "national Thing" fills in the symbolic emptiness (empty signifiers) and bestows the national affiliation with the necessary bond and solidarity. Zizek's contribution here as a social theorist is to extend the use of the concept "the Thing" (Das Ding), which Lacan uses in the *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* following Kant, to the arenas of the political. According to Zizek, this "national Thing" is uniquely embodied in the particular way of particular national life and as **the sublime object,**

the object cause of desire. This "sublime object" of nationalism fills the void on several levels. While on the political level, it fills the void created by democracy after the Sovereign power, the monarchy, has been overthrown, on the moral level, it fills the void of the Supreme Good created by Kant's formal conception of the categorical imperative. And finally on the linguistic level, the sublime object of nationalism, the imaginary identification with the nation, fills the void created by the arbitrary character of the sign (Zizek, 222). As Kantian transcendental illusion has a direct access to the sublime object, the Thing, nationalism has the function of directly accessing the "national Thing" which supposedly fills the empty place left by the Supreme Good (God), Sovereign Power (King) and the arbitrariness of the language. As collective "fantasy," the notion of modern Nationalism is filling out the empty space of the Supreme Good. In order to transform the empty symbols of the social into the Andersonian imaginary community of the nation, the supplementary functioning of affect is needed.

The Uncanny in the National Imaginary

Freud's notion of the "Uncanny" can provide important intervention into the Anderson's theory of nation also. Perpetually threatened by the eruption of the irreducible difference within the imagined communal unity, the national bond is inseparable from the negativity of the uncanny. The uncanny and the figure of the foreigner disrupt the unity of the nation as the imagined community. The communal desire to "invalidate the arbitrariness of signs"—the semiology of the uncanny-and to reify them "as psychic contents" does not generate the feeling of belonging but its opposite, a threatening experience of strangeness (ST, 186). Likewise, as the primary reminder of the ghostly character of the imaginary identification, the figure of the foreigner disorients the judgment about belonging to the common world and reveals the glaring gaps and discontinuities beneath the national affiliation, instead. Using

Freud's theory of the “uncanny,” by juxtaposing the ideal of political love with the uncanniness of the “ghostly national imaginings,” Kristeva strives for a conceptualization of belonging together, different from the Anderson's “imagined unity,” in which mutual affective identification is undercut by the very gaps and discontinuities of language.

Kristeva's discussion of the uncanny elaborates further upon the discussion of Zizek emphasizing the affects. Kristeva emphasizes the ambiguity of such a supplement of the affects, the psychical mechanism of the imaginary identification that fills the linguistic void turning into a source of threat. She emphasizes the fact that temporal and linguistic void not only undercuts the process of positive affective identification but also changes the very nature of affectivity at work in the formation of nationality. Perpetually threatened by the eruption of the irreducible difference within the imagined communal unity, the national bond is inseparable from the negativity of the uncanny. Anderson's own choice of the cultural icon, “the tomb of the Unknown Soldier” provides a good example illustrating uncanniness of the national imagination. Instead of producing the fantasy of organic unity, the void of the tomb turns the national imagination into something ghostly. As Anderson writes, “Void as these tombs are of identifiable mortal remains or immortal souls, they are nonetheless saturated with ghostly national imaginings” (Anderson, 9). While the arbitrariness of the sign opens a space for the secular national identification, it at the same time prevents the transformation of this void into organic solidity.

“Psychoanalysis is then experienced as a journey into the strangeness of the other and of oneself, toward an ethics of respect for the irreconcilable” (ST, 182). If Kristeva's analysis reveals an ambivalent role of affectivity in the formation of social relations, the turn to ethics requires the transformation of this affect—of the political love haunted by the hatred of the other—into respect for alterity. The experience of the uncanny is different from the Levinasian encounter with the irreducible alterity of the other person, such face-to-face encounter. The encounter with the uncanny as mentioned earlier brings an unsettling

recognition of the subject's own strangeness. With the Freudian notion of the unconscious, the involution of the strange in the psyche integrates within the assumed unity of human beings an otherness that is both biological and symbolic and becomes an integral part of the same" (ST, 181). And this difficult recognition of the irreconcilable alterity within the self—the internal other— is precisely what enables a non-violent relation to the other outside. In other words, the ethical encounter with the external other in the political arena— with the foreigner and the stranger—is inconceivable without the acknowledgement of alterity inscribed already within the most intimate interiority of the self. Although the uncanny is not equivalent to ethics, therefore, in so far as it reconciles us with the irreconcilable within ourselves, it opens the possibility of ethics, ethical being with the other. The first part of Kristeva's argument reveals defensive projections at the high price of a radical disintegration of the subject. The paradoxical disintegration of the self remains for Kristeva a necessary condition for the acknowledgement of the radical exteriority of the other. In Levinas, the absolute alterity simply presents itself as face-to-face encounter and the singular 'face' of the Other demands responsibility. Thus, the “Rights of Man” is the “Rights of the Other Man” in Levinas, and the ethics mean to responding to the call of the other's face. Man's inherent orientation toward 'saintliness' will lead men to take up such responsibility. Levinasian ethics, however, can not offer explanation to the violent rejection— instead of responsibility—of the face of the other. Psychoanalysis, however, does not assume such one-sided ‘saintliness’ in human psyche. Instead, it rigorously analyzes the split in psyche. **In Kristeva's approach to ethics, the encounter with irreducible alterity can emerge only at the end of a rigorous analysis of the way the other constitutes and is in turn constituted within the subjective experience.** By confronting us with the difficulty we have in relation to the other the experience of the uncanny reveals the rejection of the other at the very center of the imaginary constitution of self. Only when the “I” acknowledge its irreconcilable, uncanny, duplicity, the possibility of opening the space for the other

emerges.

While the other may function as a destination of identification of the 'not-I,' the place of the unnameable otherness of the abject turns the fragile position of an I into a permanent exile. Abjection, the abjected, the uncanny refused other, can be described as a perpetual displacement and disrupts even a temporary crystallization of identity. In order to overcome such a violent rejection of the other, the I has to give up the fantasy of the proper self. The proper self "no longer exists ever since Freud and shows itself to be a strange land of borders and othernesses ceaselessly constructed and deconstructed" (ST, 191). While the uncanny shatters the imaginary integrity of the self, therefore, such an opening toward the new and the incongruous constitutes precisely an ethics of respect for the irreconcilable: "Strange is the experience of the abyss separating me from the other who shocks me" (ST, 187).

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❖ ABSTRACT

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The encounter with the uncanny brings an unsettling recognition of the subject's own strangeness. With the Freudian notion of the unconscious, the involution of the strange in the psyche integrates within the assumed unity of human beings an otherness that is both biological and symbolic and becomes an integral part of the same. And this difficult recognition of the irreconcilable alterity within the self--the internal other--is precisely what enables a non-violent relation to the other outside. In other words, the ethical encounter with the external other in the political arena--with the foreigner and the stranger--is inconceivable without the acknowledgement of alterity inscribed already within the most intimate interiority of the self. Although the uncanny is not equivalent to ethics, therefore, in so far as it reconciles us with the irreconcilable within ourselves, it opens the possibility of ethics, ethical being with the other.

Key Words

nationalism, the foreigner, the uncanny, the ethics of the other

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