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Coming into the Country: An Arendtian Analysis of Nationalism and Narrative

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Abstract: This article is about nationalism from unlikely perspective: Hannah Arendt. Though Arendt is famously no supporter of nationalism, I argue that her writing on narrative provides an illuminative way of examining the phenomenon. In the first section, I build upon Arendt's narrative theory—and Leah Bradshaw's analysis of it—to develop a distinction between narratively true stories and false ones, or reveries. I argue that while Arendt's work on the matter often pertain to the tales of individuals, the thought is transferable to the stories of nations. In the latter half of the paper, I turn these two questions on to instances of contemporary nationalism. Section two is on England, and section three is on Israel. I do not suggest that my conclusion about these case studies are definitive, but I do hope that their inclusion in this paper helps to demonstrate how Arendt's philosophic analysis could be turned on the world.

Keywords: nationalism, narrative, Israel, England, reverie, myth

Introduction

Facts have been one of the most contentious matters in the past couple of years. During the second presidential debate in 2016, Hillary Clinton suggested that if those in her corner went out and told their neighbors about 'the facts,' the scales would fall from the eyes of her opponent's supporters. Though of course we know how things turned out for her, talk of facts, alternative or otherwise, has only increased in the years since. Such conflict almost inevitably leads observers to despair: If the facts are objective, or at

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least as objective as anything can be, why is it that certain narratives, ones seemingly unworried by many of the facts, acquire such devoted followers? Many of these narratives are nationalistic ones. The Trump-led movement to which Clinton was referring is generally considered to be nationalistic. And factlessness is a charge often levied at other nationalist movements, including Brexit supporters and Scottish separatists. Yet if nationalism is so often devoid of fact—so far apart from *the truth*—why is it that such movements are often broadly successful? My concern here is firstly about the appeal of nationalism. More importantly, though, I wonder how nationalisms can be distinguished from each other. What is the difference between a dangerous or desirable one? This question is more philosophical than it is empirical, and so it seems appropriate to turn to philosophers in our efforts to resolve it. One intimately familiar with the perils of nationalism is Hannah Arendt, a German Jew forced to flee her homeland in the wake of Nazism's rise. In this paper, I use Arendt's thought to present a novel narrative theory of nationalism—one that allows for distinctions between genuine narratives and reveries. I conclude the first part, on Arendt's thought, by identifying two key questions which can be asked of nationalisms. In the paper's final sections, I use two examples to sketch how such a theory could be used to assess the narratives of nationalisms today, though I leave any substantial analysis of the two cases (England and Israel) to experts of those respective areas.

1

Though Arendt's work is typically associated with analysis of tyranny and totalitarianism, much of her writing centers upon the ways by which people organize themselves in political communities and find meaning in these groupings. Narratives are a fundamental part of this for her. In an essay on the writer Isak Dinesen[1] Arendt (1955, 104), highlights Dinesen's claim that "all sorrows can be borne if you can put them into a story or tell a story about them." Arendt argues that the sort of story that Dinesen references, "reveals the meaning of what would otherwise remain an unbearable sequence of sheer happenings" (1955, 104). The importance of narrativity to meaning also crops up at multiple points of Arendt's book *The Human Condition.* She writes that the most powerful elements of our private lives—the heart, the mind, the senses—are indeterminate and shadowy until they acquire a shape fit for public appearance. "The most current of such transformations occurs," she tells us, "in storytelling" (Arendt 1958, 50). Elsewhere in that same book, she says that the primary element of a human life is that "it is itself always full of events which ultimately can be told as a story, establish a biography" (Arendt 1958, 97).

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[1] Isak Dinesen is the pen name of Karen Blixen, whose most famous novel *Out of Africa* was turned into a film in 1985. Arendt repeated this line of Dinesen in many places, including as the epigraph to a chapter of *The Human Condition.*

It is important to note that Arendt's idea of storytelling is not the same as Friedrich Nietzsche's.[2] For Nietzsche, as exposited by Alexander Nehemas in *Life as Literature* (1985), one becomes the author of one's own story, and in doing so has the potential for producing a great work of art and becoming a great individual. A Nietzschean narrative is an act of the will, but for Arendt this is resolutely not the case.[3] In *The Human Condition*, she argues that, "Although everybody started his [narrative] life by inserting himself into the human world through action and speech, nobody is the author or producer of his own life story. In other words, the stories, the results of action and speech, reveal an agent, but this agent is not an author or producer" (Villa 1995, 184). One of the core distinctions that Arendt draws in *The Human Condition* is between labor, work, and action. Labor is comprised of the elements of life that are biologically required for existence, whereas work corresponds to specific acts beyond mere necessity—things that are built by humans with a lasting permanence in mind. Works can be finished; labor is interminable unto death. And action is what is done in the political realm of speech and activity. For Nietzsche, perhaps, narrative is action that appears as a work. But for Arendt storytelling as action seems almost closer to labor; something that must be continually done without hope of completion because it is *necessary* if we have any hope at all of transforming mere facts into a tale that is "humanly comprehensible."[4] Her concept of continual storytelling calls to mind Penelope from Homer's *Odyssey*, endlessly weaving and unweaving the burial shroud for Odysseus's father so as to delay her own suitors. Or perhaps more directly we might think of Scheherazade from *One Thousand*

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[2] I make a distinction here from Nietzsche to articulate what Arendt is *not* doing. Works that hold a conception of narrative akin to Arendt's include Alisdair MacIntyre's book *After Virtue* (1981) and Eileen Hunt Botting's 2016 article in the *Journal of International Political Theory.* Though Botting has a disagreement with MacIntyre on rights, her narrative account of women's rights (illustrated with *The Wizard of Oz*) draws from MacIntyre's own narrative theory in *After Virtue.*

[3] For an excellent comparison of Nietzsche and Arendt, see the chapter on the matter in Dana Villa's book *Arendt and Heidegger.* Villa concludes, accurately I think, that Arendt is at once more Nietzschean than her Habermasian readers would like to believe, and less Nietzschean than her more post-modern fans would have.

[4] Doubtlessly, classifying narrative as akin to Arendt's understanding of labor poses numerous problems. Clearly Arendt thinks labor involves true biological necessities, and storytelling is not the same thing as eating. In acknowledging this, my analogy is made somewhat facetious. Nevertheless, because Arendt seems to argue that narrative understanding converts events from the incomprehensible to the comprehensible—and comprehensibility is a prerequisite for living—there seems to something *a priori* necessary about it, even if this necessity is not the same as the biological ones.

and One Nights, who must recount a new story every night to her captor, the king, so that she may live another day.

As a fiction writer Dinesen is concerned with the sorrows of individuals, and Arendt's concern often seems to be with discrete people too. But at other moments the political theorist within her emerges, and she focuses on the ways in which sorrows, grievances, and experiences, are woven by groups into narratives that allow life to be lived. In *The Human Condition*, she speculates that political community began as a form of "organized remembrance" (Arendt 1958, 198). This organized remembrance seems to be, for Arendt, the most important element of political collectivities. She repeats the famous Greek phrase, "Wherever you go, you will be a *polis*," to draw attention to the way these organized remembrances can be instantiated in a group's memory. "Not historically, of course, but speaking metaphorically and theoretically, it is as though the men who returned from the Trojan War had wished to make permanent the space of action which had arisen from their deeds and sufferings," she writes (Arendt 1958, 198). The metaphorical and theoretical force of Rome's origin story—the legacy of Aeneas—is something that Arendt praises repeatedly in *On Revolution*, positing that Virgil's epic describes a "thread of continuity never broken" (Arendt 2006, 201). In her essay 'Truth and Politics,' she writes that, "every claim in the sphere of human affairs to an absolute truth whose validity needs no support from the side of opinion, strikes at the very roots of all politics and all government" (Arendt 1967). The Arendtian scholar Leah Bradshaw offers insightful analysis on these words of Arendt, writing that "politics, at least consensual politics in democratic societies, depends upon the support of public opinion," or in other words upon the public buying into the political story (2007, 12). What Bradshaw refers to as 'politics' is ostensibly a particular political ideal, and Arendt is arguing that these political ideals are, in effect, founded on stories to which adherents subscribe.

It is not hard to see how Arendt's thought on narrative foundings applies to nationalism. Historic nations and modern states alike speak of founding stories, from the American Revolution to the Aztecs' eagle eating a snake atop a cactus. But if we are to use the work of Arendt and Bradshaw to evaluate nationalistic movements, and to attempt to determine why some are more philosophically valid than others, it is also necessary to understand what it is the two mean by stories. "Reality is always more than an assemblage of facts," Bradshaw says (2007, 13), responding to Arendt's assertion that, "Who says what is always tells a story, and in this story the particular facts lose their contingency and acquire some humanly comprehensible meaning." Bradshaw's position is one akin to Marina Calloni's, as Calloni writes that "Fairy tales tell the truth, albeit under camouflaged 'bodies'" (2016, 67). To Arendt, that the factual truths are arranged in a certain manner says nothing to the virtue of that arrangement. Many philosophical accounts repress our views of reality, but they may also simultaneously work virtuously. "To the extent that the teller of truth is also a storyteller, he brings about that 'reconciliation with reality'" (Bradshaw 2007, 13). Bradshaw offers us a moving anecdote about one such reconciliation, the story of her friend Jack Veffer, a Holocaust orphan. For most of his life Veffer repressed his vague memories of wartime Europe and committed himself entirely to his new life in Canada. But in old age, he has become pre-occupied with stories of his past, taking part in a therapy group with other Jewish Holocaust orphans and writing down what he remembers of his parents, taken away to the death camps when he was just a toddler. "Jack tells me that this writing of his story has been a great catharsis for him," recounts Bradshaw. "As he chronicles his life and forces himself to resurrect painful memories, he only now feels that he is becoming an integrated person" (Bradshaw 2007, 9). Integration and reconciliation: for Veffer, these come not from historical facts but from a storytelling of his own life.[5]

Arendt and Bradshaw are far from the only ones to have written on the phenomenon of realities deeper than facts. Mark Juergensmeyer (2010, 266–267) alludes to a similar concept and places it in the context of nationalism:

> Religion, like secular nationalism, is the glue that holds together broad communities. Members of these communities, secular or religious, share a tradition, a particular world view, in which the essential conflict between appearance and deeper reality is described in specific and characteristically cultural terms. This deeper reality has a degree of permanence and order quite unobtainable by ordinary means.

The "ordinary means" can be understood to be the viewing of facts without a certain context—the absence of a coherent narrative like the ones provided by religion and secular nationalism. The foundational text on this, of course, is Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* ([1983] 2006). Anderson examines the rise of nationalism in the past several centuries in the light of religion's concomitant decline. (Though he does not allege causality.) Nationalism, Anderson asserts, was a "secular transformation of fatality into continuity, [and] contingency into meaning" (Anderson 2006, 11). For Anderson, this is closely connected to languages, the most important element of which is their capacity to generate "imagined communities, building *in effect particular solidarities*" (2006, 133). But languages are only how things are said; there must still be things said in these mediums. In a chapter added to later editions of the book, Anderson writes of the way that "pedagogical industries" work to shape narratives in the minds of citizens, with new consciousnesses and narratives (201–204). Narratives, in the work of Juergensmeyer, Anderson, and Arendt alike are those assemblages of the facts, or certain facts, in ways that provide a "deeper reality" than mere nihilistic randomness. But narratives are not all equal in their capacities to reconcile with reality, and not all forms of nationalist stories are either. We know this intuitively to be true: some nationalisms exist relatively benevolently and are capable of coexisting with other ideologies, while others reach violent apotheoses and self-destruct. Arendt's thought on narrative writ large provides consideration of how such an important distinction could be made.

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[5] Bradshaw's use of Veffer is illustrative here in illuminating the difference between Arendtian narratives and Nietzschean ones. There is no self-glorification or exercising of the will in Veffer's case. His storytelling has a purpose only of reconciling his present self with events of his past.

Though many scholars have written on Arendt's use of narrativity, including Allen Speight (2011) and Julia Kristeva (2001), it is Bradshaw whose thought truly permits a judging between narratively true and false stories. She writes that "A great danger in narrative is that it will lose its reference to the world and sink into a radical subjectivity," amounting to a "flight into the interior self . . . What we get in this turn into the self is not a story but a reverie . . . Reverie flees from the harshness of the world" (Bradshaw 2007, 15). Arendt's own words are appropriate here too. In her book on Rahel Varnhagen, a Jewish woman who lived in the nineteenth century, Arendt writes at length about the dangers of becoming a "pariah." A pariah hunkers down into a sort of solipsistic vacuum, a place of "pure subjectivity" that seeks to bear "a world within itself" (Arendt 2000, 173). For Arendt, this vacuum is doomed. "The inner world is never able to replace what is merely given to human beings. . . . One cannot sit in a cell with one's inner world," nor can one "produce the outer world by thinking to oneself by 'inner' processes" (Arendt 2000, 173). A pariah is a political non-entity in Arendt's mind, and exists in a state of unreality. Bradshaw (2018, 102) thinks that one of Arendt's key praises of Varnhagen is that she eventually abandoned this solipsism and accepted the limits that the outer world put upon her life. "No human being can isolate himself completely; he will always be thrown back upon the world again if he has any hopes at all for the things that only the world can give" (Arendt 1974, 14). This complete isolation is characteristic of reverie. To live in communication with the rest of the world is to acknowledge the ways in which existence is restricted by it.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* is Arendt's primary example of this sort of reverie. "He succeeded in getting the best of memory . . . he converted it in a truly ingenious fashion into the most dependable guard against the outside world . . . the present itself is instantly converted into a 'sentimental' past," writes Arendt of Rousseau in *Varnhagen* (1974, 11). Rousseau has left himself with nothing but memories of the feelings he experienced at various points in his past. Bradshaw highlights the important difference between this and what Arendt is talking about with true narratives. The reveries of Rousseau are "different because of the radical flight from the world, and from the effort for reconciliation," of which there is none. "Storytelling is hard and unsentimental and embraces the world. Reverie flees from the harshness of the world" (Bradshaw 2007, 15). Bradshaw explains that there is no attempt made by Rousseau to integrate his own feelings and memories with the lives and things around him: he speaks only of what he thinks and wants, and he finds these to be sufficient qualities for authenticity. Arendt's opposition to Rousseau's politics of authenticity is mentioned also by Dana Villa in his book *Arendt and Heidegger*. He observes a connection between her opposition to Rousseau and to Heidegger's "turn to the self," which Villa similarly terms a retreat. "Arendt combats the modern 'flight from the world to the self' by asserting that individuation occurs in the context of plurality," Villa explains (1995, 140). Arendt's hostility to this part of Heidegger's thought is borne out in her general position on existentialism.

In an essay on precisely this topic, Arendt writes that existence by its nature is never isolated. "It exists only in communication and in awareness of others' existence" (Arendt 2005, 186). There are for Arendt only two types of people whose stories cannot engage with the world and thus find no political affirmation. They are neither narrative truths nor reveries. She calls these the two "the doer of good works and the criminal" (1958, 180). The criminal and the good-doer are lonesome figures, for they "remain outside the pale of human intercourse and are, politically marginal figures" (1958, 180). There is really only one specific instances in which Arendt endorses pariahdom: dark times. This is the premise of Arendt's book profiling pariahs, *Men in Dark Times*—that there are some moments in history so bleak that external validation for narratives is impossible. "The path of the pariah, for Arendt, was not a preferred way of living," explains Bradshaw. "But it may be the best one in 'dark times' where fitting into the world around one is a morally compromising choice" (2018, 117). Arendt's "Dark Times" are more or less totalitarian ones, and outside of these moments pariahs sunk in reveries are not endorsed in her thought.

Arendt, in many of her passages on narrative and reverie, is referring specifically to the individual's retreat into the self. But her thought is not exclusive in this regard, and it can be readily transferred to thinking about nations. In a letter to her old friend Gershom Scholem, Arendt describes her opposition to a suggestion from a socialist Israeli with whom she had a discussion. The Israeli had told Arendt that she no longer believed in God, but in the Jewish people alone. Arendt tells Scholem that, "the greatness of [the Jewish] people was once that it believed in God, and believed in Him in such a way that its trust and love towards Him was greater than its fear. And now this people believes only in itself? What good can come out of that?" (2008, 467).

Her comments to Scholem indicate the presence of the same problem of solipsism in a people as Arendt identified in an individual in *Varnhagen*. The "only" is the part that stands out to me—Varnhagen's solipsism is to be lost in an inner world, while an Israeli solipsism is to believe "only in itself." Just like an individual, no nation can isolate itself completely from the world. Nations and states must interact with other nations and states, and so nationalistic movements that do not seek or receive affirmation from the outside world cannot become narrative truths or bring about a "reconciliation with reality." For all of her laudable attention to Arendt's works on Dinesen and Varnhagen, Bradshaw's essay neglects a broader context of Arendt's thought on the matter that appears in *The Human Condition.* I am not faulting Bradshaw for this omission, since her endeavor is to address storytelling at the individual level, and there is plenty of material in the two works of Arendt on which Bradshaw focuses. But since my aim is to establish a connection between Arendt's thoughts on narrative, and nationalism, *The Human Condition*'s content on this subject is important. Arendt writes, in the first section of that book, that the realm of human affairs "depends for its reality and its continued existence, first, upon the presence of others who have seen and heard and will remember" (1958, 95). For a nationalistic political narrative to be true, and not a reverie, it must necessarily find affirmation—and thus permanence—in the world. Nationalist narratives surely also depend on this affirmation for their reality and continued existence. "A home that my neighbor does not recognize and respect is not a home," writes Arendt, referring to Israel's conflicts with surrounding Arab countries (2008, 235).[6] Here, we see her emphasize the importance of a nation's political engagement, and the profound inadequacy of a decision to retreat into pariahdom.

Foundings are indeed a vitally important narrative phenomenon for Arendt, and in her book *On Revolution* she devotes substantial space to discussing them, a discussion which I think can deepen our understanding of what narratively true stories for nations might consist. Oddly enough Arendt first suggests that, while foundings are important to *politics*, the events themselves are not *political.* This is because the political realm encompasses action and speech, which are communicative and mutable, but foundings are often violent or deal with absolutes. Violence, for Arendt, occurs outside of the political realm because "it is incapable of speech" (Arendt 2006, 9). She seems even to allow that "whatever political organization men may have achieved has its origins in crime," referring specifically to Cain's murder of Abel in *Genesis* and Romulus's murder of Remus in a founding myth of Rome, saying that these are instances of "cogent metaphors or universally applicable tales" (2006, 10). All of this apparent Arendtian enthusiasm for an initial murder is slightly alarming if considered in isolation. The point she is driving at, though, becomes clearer later in the book when she addresses the role of foundings in Machiavelli's thought. Machiavelli's insistence on violent beginnings, she claims, is a result of the founding's connection to lawgiving. In the absence of a divine source for laws, Machiavelli seeks to devise and impose "upon men a new authority . . . which had to be designed in such a way that it would fit and step into the shoes of the old absolute that derived from God-given authority" (2006, 29). Without a supra-human divine absolute on which to ground politics, a supra-political concept must fill the void. Once this new founding has occurred, Arendt argues, it is the responsibility of the polis to instantiate it in a narrative. She speaks repeatedly of a conservative care required to shield this story through the centuries. And though she concedes that there is an arbitrariness in all beginnings, what saves a beginning from its own arbitrariness is that it carries with itself "its own principle." Here we can think of Arendt in a sort of anachronistic dialogue with Anderson: like him, she thinks that national narratives are based upon contingent and arbitrary grounds—but this does not stop her from conceiving of a way in which this contingency may be broken through a "carrying-with-itself."

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[6] This is a good place to mention that Arendt was hostile to nationalism as a general force. My claim here is not that Arendt would endorse narratively true nationalisms, merely that her thought provides a descriptive (not normative) account of them.

This carrying-with-itself, and the accompanying escape from arbitrariness, is intimately related to storytelling. Arendt argues further that "experiences and even the stories which grow out of what men do and endure . . . sink back into the futility inherent in the living word and the living deed unless they are talked about over and over again." What is needed, she writes, are "guideposts for future remembrances" (2006, 212). Indeed her belief in the importance of the narratives of beginnings is so strong that she thinks that even the strongest origins can be hijacked if the narrative is not appropriately cared for. Following the American Revolution, she laments, the founding spirit of "public happiness" was abandoned for mere private happiness, an abandonment she thinks has resulted in the persistence of a much more individualistic narrative about America's founding. I make mention of Arendt's thoughts on the retaining of narratives about a polis's founding not to enter into debate about her arguments on the specific cases addressed in *On Revolution*, but to highlight the fact that narratives of beginnings and foundings are deeply associated to the identities of political communities.

Her thoughts on foundings are also pertinent in trying to identify nationalisms that are more narratively truthful and ones that are reveristic, criteria for which is my main aim from all of this analysis of Arendt and Bradshaw. The distinction between a genuine narrative truth—a coherent story—and a reverie, both in the abstract and as it relates to nationalism, may seem arbitrary and even indecipherable. But implicit in the work of

Arendt and Bradshaw are two questions that may be used to assess various instances of nationalism.

1. Is the content of the nationalism consistent with the nation's founding story—the narrative truth fundamental to its identity?
2. Is the nation capable of interacting with the world (ie. other states, nations), or does it become lost in myths of its own creation? Is its narrative truth affirmed by its interaction with the world in such a manner that its continued existence becomes possible?

These two measures provide texture to the philosophy and allow it to do more than discern a phenomenon. The first addresses whether a nationalism is actually maintaining a story or narrative. The second addresses whether it is sustained by its political interactions, an affirmation essential to distinguishing narrative truth from solipsistic reverie. They offer a way by which we may uncover the functional differences between the narratively true elements of nationalism, and those of reverie. To do so I will focus on two specific cases, Israel and England, trying to identify parts that are reveries and parts that are narratively true. I do this recognizing that I am an expert on neither of these places, but in the hopes that a preliminary exploration coupled with the Arendtian narrative theory will constitute a foundation for more specific future investigation by scholars more qualified to assess specific nationalisms.

2

Stories shape nations. Myth binds us in a way that is at once self-evidently self-evident and blindingly nebulous. It is self-evident because, for example, every American knows or is instructed to know that virtuous revolutionaries led a rebellion in 1776; it is nebulous because it is hard to say just why this matters—or how this has any effect on the policies or popular sentiment in the American nation-state. Indeed, much the same can be said for every other nation-state as well. And of course, any established chronicle can have its veracity challenged. In *The Sense of an Ending*, novelist Julian Barnes does well to remind readers that history may be understood to be "the lies of the victors," just as "long as we remember it is also the self-delusions of the defeated" (2011, 16). Barnes's characters are speaking of history in general, but they could just as well be talking of the histories and stories of nations—the narrative truths Arendt argues are so instrumental (and also the opposite of narrative truth, reverie) to the existence of people both individually and in community. This observation alone is not one inherently helpful when trying to evaluate various nationalisms, and thus it is here that the criteria earlier decanted from the work of Bradshaw and Arendt will be put to work. I first turn these questions on English nationalism in the United Kingdom.

Here, I will sketch out a partial historical narrative of a current English nationalism, and then use Arendt's theory to assess its parts. I make no claim that this sketch is comprehensive or without fault; my aim is to demonstrate how one could apply Arendtian thought to a contemporary real-world example.

Discussion of a British nationalism, or the identification of a vein of agreed upon narrative, is invariably complicated. The fact that England is a part of a state of four different nations further complicates this matter. While there are certainly characteristics associated with 'Englishness' of which they are proud—and we can think here of rigid lips and flinty resolve during times of war—there is general scholastic agreement that English nationalism is one far more difficult to define than is customary. In *The Making of English Identity*, Krishan Kumar (2003, 13) elaborates on this difficulty of identification, referring to an "anxiety of absence," writing that "the absence of a tradition of reflection on such questions as national self-definition, the 'blankness of the English tradition on just this matter of English national identity." Historically, the question of national identity has not been seriously pursued by the English, likely resultant from the fact that English identity was largely one and the same as a nationalism of "Great Britain."

J. G. A. Pocock argues that the significance of the association between England and Britain is clear historically, writing that it "cannot be written as the memory of a single state or nation or as the process by which one came into existence. It must be a plural history, tracing the processes by which a diversity of societies, nationalities, and political structures came into being" (1982, 320). Pocock is not as explicit as he could have been, but his point is clear enough. Britain did not develop in an inward manner; its gaze was always directed outwards, that is to say that British nationalism found its grist in an expansionary and proactive—not cloistered and reactionary—vision of itself. Kumar emphasizes this same point: "The British had also taken themselves and their culture overseas. They had crossed the Atlantic to colonize the lands that later became the republic of the United States and the Dominion of Canada. . . . However different they became, these societies were, at the outset, British" (2003, 15). There were doubtlessly a myriad of reasons for this attention outwards, but it seems certain that much of it was economic-minded, as Kumar describes "its springs in the culture of 'gentlemanly capitalism' operating at the heart of the British economy" (2003, 15). As Pierre Manent argues in *A World Beyond Politics*, post-enlightenment ideas of commerce led to greatly increased homogenization of populations across Europe, in ways that had not been previously seen. And Manent, quoting Nietzsche, says that such modern ideas are "English ideas" (2006, 163). The social significance of the idea of the British empire and its contributions to the sense of pride is well summed up by Raphael Samuel (1989, xii–xiii) when he writes that Britishness "is a political identity which derives its legitimacy from the expansion of the nation-state. Its associations are diplomatic and military rather than literary, imperial rather than, or as well as, domestic." With this in mind, and thinking back to Kumar's initial assertion regarding the "anxiety of absence," it is understandable why English nationalism has been said not to exist. The idea of 'England' is so intrinsically tied to the idea of "Britain" that it is probable most people living outside the Isles are under the impression that the two terms are interchangeable.

If we accept that the English and British identities are closely woven into the same tapestry, Nairn's analysis of *British* character acquires greater significance. The narrative of Britain is, as Nairn says, one of "expansion," an incessant outward push to acquire ever more territory and resources. Necessary to the philosophy of imperial expansion is the notion that Britain—and thereby England—was not an idea bounded by the waters around its Atlantic archipelago. People born in India or Canada were not necessarily British citizens (especially if they were not ethnically British) but they were "subjects" and still part of Great Britain in some palpable way, a palpability perhaps best measured during the First World War, when four million "subjects" participated in the war (Das 2011). This image of Britain as the thrumming hub to a world empire is the core element of its narrative of nationalism, the pride that for so many years was experienced by its citizens. And as Kumar (2003, 15) argues, "only at the end of the twentieth century have the English been forced to ask themselves the kinds of questions that other nations have engaged in for a long time." Englishness was for so long inseparable from Britishness, and now that the two have seemingly begun to diverge (as evidenced by the conservative nature of the Brexit vote) it will become clear that the English nationalism now emerging is radically contradictory to that of old Britain.

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The circumstances surrounding the Brexit vote are by now well-documented. Former Prime Minister David Cameron, having won a surprise majority government and facing a seemingly weak Labour leader, decided to deal with his right flank by arranging for a referendum on the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union. Cameron and the Remain side expected an easy victory, but the late momentum of Leave, a campaign which used primarily nationalistic rhetoric, propelled it to a narrow victory. The result was a shock because of its literal implications, but it also surprised many people in that it revealed the extent to which this nationalism existed. While the referendum's results indicate that the entire UK will leave the EU, it is important to consider that only England and Wales voted to leave; considering Wales's small population, this was, for all intents and purposes, an English decision, arising at least in part from an English nationalism. In the years leading up to Brexit, and certainly in the months after it, there has been an effort by scholars to identify of what this nationalism consists.

The most pervasive factor present in nearly all assessments of Brexit is a fierce opposition to cosmopolitan elitism. This cosmopolitanism elitism is nearly indistinguishable from globalization, a process that many have argued has been "felt more keenly in England than elsewhere" (Aughey 2010, 508), with Roger Scruton (2000, 246) claiming that "it has induced in the English the sense that they are really living nowhere." Arthur Aughey (2010, 509) explains that the villains in this perspective, are "exactly as you would expect in this very English rendering of Main Street against Wall Street. . . . They are the large supermarkets and Tesco in particular; the big brewers; multinational chain stores; the corporate property developers; the Common Agricultural Policy; and last, but certainly not least, governments both Conservative and Labour which have acted as the agents of these forces of soulless 'modernization.'" The nationalistic opposition to globalization found in the EU an ideal target, as "Euroscepticism was broad enough to accommodate the opinions of those who resented bureaucratic regulation, open borders and foreign erosion of the UK's sovereignty—all understood as 'national decline'" (Wellings 2010, 498).

Scholarship since the Brexit vote has used similar analyses to evaluate the outcome. Craig Calhoun is not subtle in titling his post-Brexit piece "Brexit Is a Mutiny Against the Cosmopolitan Elite." Calhoun (2016, 51) writes that "England couldn't vote to withdraw from London or neoliberalism or globalization. But the problems many wanted to fix were rooted in these at least as much as the EU." A more empirical study identified much the same link between English nationalism and Brexit: "In Wales and Scotland, national identity (British or Scottish/Welsh) does not appear to structure attitudes on EU membership consistently. England is very different. The more strongly or exclusively English their sense of national identity, the more likely respondents were to think EU membership a bad thing and to want to leave the EU" (Henderson and Jeffrey et al. 2016, 195). To subscribers of this nationalism it surely constitutes a narrative truth, but the criteria of Arendt and Bradshaw lead us to a different conclusion: contemporary English nationalism is a reverie of radical subjectivity.

Its failure of the first criterion is likely the more obvious of the two; the inconsistency between the foundation of Britain's historic narrative, that of itself as the hub of the global economy, and English nationalism's rejection of modern capitalism is striking. As Nairn writes, Great Britain—and thereby England—was explicitly expansionary in nature. Its authority and identity were derived directly from its interactions with the world, primarily through trade and exploration. Thus, when Aughey articulates the intense opposition of English nationalism to "big brewers, multinational chain stores, and corporate property developers" (ie. globalism), it is as if

English nationalists are opposing themselves. Great Britain was *the original* globalist—the nation who took materials from around the world in great quantities, produced products at home, and then shipped them back out to be sold in colonies and foreign states alike. This imperial ideal was the propulsive force behind Britain's domination. By the standards of Arendt and Bradshaw, the imperial ideal is a narrative truth as it provided a story by which the British (and thereby the English) could understand their existence as the purveyor and benefactor of international commerce. But contemporary English nationalism founds itself on a narrative that is the exact antithesis of England's historical identity. It seeks to reverse the forces of globalization and internationalism, of immigration and limitless trade, the very forces that made it into a dominant nation-state.

The inconsistency between English nationalism and its historical narrative makes obvious its violation of the first criterion, and implicitly results in its violation of the second. Affirmation from outside does not mean that there must be support for the movement, but it does mean that in relationships with other states, there must be an acknowledgement of the substance of the nationalism's narrative. The perception of England abroad is that it is a nation committed to being a vanguard of international cooperation, committed to liberal institutions seeking greater collaboration between countries. This perception is not a subjective one—it comes from the fact that Great Britain has long been a strong proponent of liberalism. This was demonstrated by the actions of the Empire and more recently by Britain's commitment to the alliances of Europe during the First World War, and its opposition to threats to this collaborative world order, during the Second World War and the Cold War. There are certainly Euroskeptic minorities in other EU states, but after the Brexit vote polls found that support for the EU was at 81 percent in Germany, and 67 percent in France (Reuters 2016). Around the world, too, governments were bemused by Brexit. Stock markets were surprised, and most dropped considerably in the days after the vote (Durando 2016). This was not the England the world thought it knew; it was not the narrative of England they could affirm by their experience and interactions with it. This is a concept different than mere disagreement. States disagree with the legitimacy of one another's policies with great frequency, and even when this disagreement is severe (the United States and China is an apt example) they typically are not surprised by the other's actions and acknowledge the interest in which the other is acting. English nationalism today does not have this affirmation from outside of England, and this phenomenon would, by our stated standards, indicate that it has characteristics of reverie.

Arendt and Bradshaw are both philosophers uninterested in ascribing absolute truth, and that English nationalism appears to have qualities of reverie is not a definitive diagnosis. Perhaps it is the case that the English have deliberately turned away from their own expansionary liberalism because this type of modernity has abjectly failed its society. And maybe other countries cannot affirm this English nationalism because it is against their own interests. But these possibilities are not mutually exclusive with a reverie. Arendt's view of reverie is that it descends into a radical subjectivity, not that it can never contain broader verities about the world. It is the narrative truth as much as factual that seems to be lacking in English nationalism, and it is for this reason that it leans toward reverie, a fever dream at odds with both its own foundational history and the world around it.

3

Many cultural observers suggested that there have been enough stories of the Holocaust, and that creative capital would be better spent on atrocities less exhaustively documented. But so too is it the case that now is a timely moment to speak of the Holocaust because these are the last few years that the event will remain in living memory, and books and films can immortalize access to vivid stories that will shortly be forever inaccessible personally. The origins of the state of Israel mirror closely the timeline of the Holocaust, and so it is unsurprising that the country itself must grapple with a similar problem to that of artists. In September 2016, the last of Israel's founding fathers, Shimon Peres, died, and the median age of the Israeli population is thirty—fifteen years younger than that of France, Germany, and Japan (Chamie 2015). Yet, even as Israel moves generationally away from the Holocaust, and its problems become more geopolitical than simply "us vs. the world," nationalism in Israel remains very strong. The point here is that Israeli nationalism is not one solely felt by those who escaped the genocide of the 1940s—it consists of a narrative. Here I will briefly examine this narrative with the standards of Arendt and Bradshaw. At least to some degree, these standards suggest that Israeli nationalism has aspects of narrative truthfulness.

Bradshaw herself makes reference to the story of the Jewish people while trying to identify what exactly a narrative truth is, citing Canadian writer Barry Callaghan, who in his short essay *True Stories* is "interested in the power of stories to create truth" (Bradshaw 2007, 15). Callaghan writes that the "the memory of passing out of bondage is central to the being of all Jews. They did not know who they were until they had got their story straight" (Bradshaw 2007, 15). In describing the Jews' escape from bondage, Callaghan has tapped into an important element of Jewish narrative, and, by extension, the narrative of Israeli nationalism. It is very similar to the territory explored by S. Ilan Troen in a more rigorously academic appraisal of the matter. Troen begins the narrative of the Jewish people—and its connection to the land of Israel—in the first five books of the Old Testament that are included in the Torah. In Genesis, God affirms to Abraham his commitment to the Jewish people, saying "I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will make you exceedingly numerous . . . as an everlasting covenant throughout the ages, to be God to you and your offspring to come. I assign the land you sojourn in to you and your offspring to come, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting holding" (Genesis 17:7–8). This Biblical passage, the founding story to the Jewish people, is relevant because it is one affirmed by the content of Israeli nationalism. This is to say that it satisfies the first criterion; Israeli nationalism *is* consistent with this founding tenant of Jewish identity. Troen elaborates on this in his article, specifically referencing the Israeli Declaration of Independence (2013, 101). "For millennia, Jews have understood themselves as belonging to a people whose origins are described in the Bible. The chapters of Genesis that focus on the forefathers—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—narrate the origins and foretell the creation of a people that will persist throughout history." It has been a pillar of Judaism for thousands of years that Israel is its rightful, God-given homeland, and unsurprisingly so, since that is what is written in the founding text of Judaism. The consistency of this aspect of Israeli nationalism is a major factor in categorizing it as a narrative truth and distinguishing it from reverie. This distinction becomes even more apparent when compared to the previously discussed English nationalism—one that rejects the liberal internationalism that was foundational to the nation of England and the state of the United Kingdom. This aspect of English nationalism is a reverie for that very reason: it is unconsciously rejecting its own narrative, while Israeli nationalism is affirming that which Jewish doctrine has claimed to be true for over two millennia.

Troen further seeks to differentiate Israeli nationalism from the civic identities of various European states, echoing Anderson's description of these societies as "imagined communities." The essential point that Troen is making about "imagined communities" is that they are predominantly based on positivist thinking; they are states that have organized their identities around a system of constructed laws and centrally-enforced linguistic consistency. This argument is particularly convincing if we think of Eugen Weber's book, *Peasants into Frenchmen* (1976), which details the very bureaucratic process by which the French were taught to be French, and if we keep in mind that most states of Europe were once—and continue to be—a jumble of ethnicities and languages. The point may seem superficially baseless, since it leans heavily upon the Israeli resuscitation of Hebrew, a language now spoken by eight million had no native speakers a century ago. It leads to a question: How was turning Russians into Israelis any different than turning Normans into French, or Cornish into English? But this misses the importance of the normative aspect of Israeli nationalism, and the actions of the government. All citizens are to learn Hebrew because it is the natural native language of the Jewish people (even though it had no native speakers at Israel's inception) and they are living in their own natural territory. While the Cornish and Normans were transmogrified into a new people, Polish, Italian, French, and Dutch Jews were being returned to their original selves, their true state of being, one guaranteed in the Bible, and provided by the state of Israel. Immigration to Israel from the diaspora is termed *aliyah*, a Hebrew word which means, quite simply, "ascent."

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The first criterion of Bradshaw and Arendt is satisfied by the historical link between the story of Genesis and Israel's right to its land—the core tenet of Israeli nationalism—but when considering the second criterion, it is important to note several things. For one, Zionism, as Israeli nationalism is typically called, was not always, or even often, a religious ideology. That is to say that while the story of the Bible may have been and continues to be significant to Israeli nationalists, it is not the sole component of Israeli nationalism's narrative. Laura Wharton (2015, 75) argues that "The founders of modern Zionism and the state of Israel had no intention of creating a religious state. Zionism was essentially a secular movement created to a large extent as an alternative to religious identity," and she cites Theodor Herzl, typically considered the founder of modern Zionism, to defend her case. Herzl considered the "Jewish question" to be a "national question," since the Jews "are a people." Herzl also drew influence from the movements of nationalization occurring in Europe in the nineteenth century, and Shlmo Avineri (1981, 13) insists that "Pious reiterations of the links of Jews to Palestine do not suffice to explain the emergence of Zionism when it did. . . . It is the quest for self-determination and liberation under the modern conditions of secularization and liberalism." This unenthusiastic commitment to the territory of Israel/Palestine perhaps explains the initial receptiveness of Herzl's "World Zionist Organization" to proposals of a Jewish homeland elsewhere than Israel. The most notable alternatives were those suggested in Uganda and Kenya, and though they were eventually rejected for various reasons, there was not, among Zionists, an unshakeable conviction that the Jewish state need be in the Middle East.[7]

The secular element of Israeli nationalism is important when thinking of the second criterion, because acknowledgement of Israeli identity from outside—the interaction with the world, and the "affirmation" from it of which Bradshaw and Arendt speak—also contributes mightily to the parts of narrative truth in Israeli nationalism. There is certainly a part of international support for Israel, and particularly in the United States, that *is* religious in nature, that *is* directly linked to the text of the Bible. Orthodox evangelical Christians find "repeated affirmations for their own theological views that the ingathering of Jews in the Promised Land was the necessary precursor to the inevitable end of days" (Mart 2013, 1163). This sentiment exists in a non-insignificant way in the United States, but it does not adequately explain the entirety of American support for Israeli nationalism, nor does it explain support in Europe. The foundation of this support is typically attributed to the Holocaust, or as Israel's former state archivist Evytar Friesel writes: "shocked by the horror of the Jewish tragedy the nations of the world became convinced that the Jews were entitled to a state of their own and thus contributed decisively to the setting up of Israel" (2008, 446). This would seem to be the narrative allows for the affirmation of Israeli nationalism from outside. The horrors of the Holocaust so widely discussed and depicted, such as in films like *Son of Saul*, have convinced much of the world that the Jewish people must be protected in their own state, and justify the billions given in military aid to Israel every year. (Aid that is intended to help Israel defend itself from attacks, including those intercepted by the "Iron Dome" initiative.)

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[7] In 1825, there was even a plan to establish a Jewish homeland, called Ararat, on Grand Island, NY.

But Friesel (2008, 461) contends that this is a misreading of facts, that the creation of a Jewish state was going to occur beforehand.

> the White Paper of 1939, that set in motion the course leading, even forcing, the Zionists towards the political goal of their movement—the creation of a Jewish state. In a broader sense, the wheels moving towards the emergence of Israel-the-state reflected developments going back a century at least. . . . The extermination of European Jewry happened decades after these long-term forces in Jewish history had been set in motion.

Even though Friesel argues that Israel was not a product of the Holocaust, and rather "a myth that has no basis in the historical evidence," this does not take away from its pertinence to the narrative. This is exactly what Bradshaw (2007, 13) means when she says that "Reality is always more than an assemblage of facts," and what Arendt is getting at in writing that "Who says what is always tells a story, and in this story the particular facts lose their contingency and acquire some humanly comprehensible meaning" (Bradshaw 2007, 13). Evytar Friesel should not be inveighed for carrying out commendable research, but what he concludes is "myth" is simultaneously narrative truth; it has led to all but a handful of the world's states recognizing the state of Israel and many of them actively supporting the efforts of Israeli nationalism to strengthen its position. This affirmation from the international community demonstrates the "living in plurality" that Villa poses as Arendt's antipode to the flight into the self.

So too can we think of the difference between English and Israeli nationalism in terms of Arendt's thought on foundings. England, notoriously, has no written constitution and a myriad of imbricated founding stories. Israel, meanwhile, has two clear narratives that serve as Arendtian pre-political foundings. The Jewish belief that the land was given to them in a covenant with God is one such pre-political narrative, since it is quite literally done on divine authority. And while this foundation may be less convincing to those outside of the Jewish tradition, the Holocaust provides an alternative, more contemporary founding narrative—a pre-political act that spurned the founding of the Jewish nation-state. It is a factually false story that has a narrative truthfulness.

Conclusion

Comparing England and Israel inevitably raises the spectre of the question of citizen homogeneity. Even as there are many non-Jewish citizens of Israel—about 25 percent of the country—it is understood that Israel is primarily the homeland of the Jewish people. Immigrating between states is typically an arduous process, but Israel more or less welcomes any diaspora Jews interested in re-locating. England, meanwhile, is thought by few to be a homeland just for the English. Israel's clear founding story—the pre-political violence that European Jews were subject to—makes the emphasis on ethnic or religious homogeneity a more acceptable element of Israeli nationalism. It also raises the question as to whether narratively truthful nationalist narratives require some element of resurgence from past trauma. It is tempting to say that it does, because this provides a certain moral justification for the harsh xenophobia often employed by nationalisms.

It is also possible, however, to mine both the work of Bradshaw and Arendt to find certain nationalist narratives that do not require such a trauma. Recently, Bradshaw has turned her attention to the questions of citizenship and belonging that have roiled the world in debates over migration. Much of her thinking centers upon her own country, Canada, and the work of the political theorist George Grant, who was a fierce Canadian nationalist. For Grant, Canada's distinctiveness was primarily expressed in a narrative that compared it to the United States. The American story, for Grant, is overwhelmingly one of Jeffersonian individual interest (he would have surely shared Arendt's dismay at the transformation of "public happiness" to mere "happiness") while the main commitments of a Canadian nationalism are order, restraint, and public good. This made Grant, Bradshaw explains, into a sort of Red Tory, with a sense of rootedness that made him a conservative *and* a devotion to commonality that belied socialist tendencies (2019). And while Bradshaw is skeptical of a pre-political claim to national identities, enmeshed as she is in one of the most diverse countries on the planet, she concedes that a sort of exclusionary citizenship can exist based on a narrative of public goods in so far as the rights and privileges that accompany Canadian citizenship would be lost if they were to be universalized.

In this position, Bradshaw follows Arendt. In *Origins*, Arendt writes of the cataclysms that occurred when individuals did not have citizenship to guarantee their rights. She speaks of the "time-honored and necessary distinctions between nationals and foreigners, and the sovereign right of states in matters of nationality and expulsion" (1973, 286). From her study of the twentieth century, Arendt concludes that it is paradoxically the case that the "well-meaning idealists" who seek to universalize human rights without national instantiation can "produce barbarians from [their] own midst by forcing millions of people into conditions which, despite all appearances, are the conditions of savages" (1973, 279, 302). All of this is, I think, connected to the question of whether there are grounds on which a nationalism may be narratively truthful when it is not the nationalism of a homogenous group of persecuted peoples. While this sort of resurgence makes a nationalism's narrative more convincing to the world, the role of sovereignty in protecting political rights for Arendt and Bradshaw suggests that there are indeed other narratives that could make a nationalism narratively truthful. These are likely the only ones, in the framework I have delineated, to which the multicultural (and at least aspiring) cosmopolitan countries of the west have access. A hope at narrative truthfulness, for their nationalisms (or potential nationalisms) runs through a narrative of political rights.

One of the biggest differences between narrative truth and factual accuracy is that narrative does not possess the same immutability as factuality claims to. The parts of English nationalism I have examined here seem at present contradictory to its history and have difficulty finding broader affirmation in the rest of the world largely because of this reason. As it is built on sturdier ground, it is more difficult to imagine Israel's narrative being punctured and deflating into reverie, but it remains, as all narrative, a relatively fragile formulation. My point in these case studies is not to say definitively that English nationalism is a reverie and that Israeli nationalism is a narrative truth. I use these two cases—and focus on specific parts of them—to show how Arendt's thought could be applied to real places. Her thoughts on the reverie/narrative truth divide are no doubt delicate, as shown by her tepid endorsement of pariahdom in certain cases in *Men in Dark Times*, suggesting that even reveries are the only option when living in lightless moments.

Nationalism is a difficult web to decipher, and it is easy to dismiss its permutations as expressions of pure subjectivity. As scholars however, it is important to acknowledge nationalism's complexity. My effort to distinguish between the veracity of narratives with the philosophy of Arendt and Bradshaw, is exploratory and cautious in its conclusions, it is an acknowledgement of nuance, and an attempt to parse significance from it. If this appears perilously close to fulfilling the dictum that "an appeal to complexity is the last refuge of the intellectual coward" (Gopnik 2011, 127), there is solace in Julian Barnes's (2016) appraisal of cowardice, and perhaps academia, in *The Noise* *of Time*: “To be a hero, you only had to be brave for a moment. . . . But to be a coward was to embark on a career that lasted a lifetime,” requiring a “pertinacity, persistence, a refusal to change—which made it, in a way, a kind of courage.”

Even as Arendt’s thought offers us a framework by which nationalisms can be distinguished, so too must we always remember that she is the theorist of *natality*, and that no nationalist narrative ought to be thought of as permanent. When we conceive of nations in this vein, following Anderson in thinking of them as imagined communities and not primordial beings, we see that nationalist narratives are always slippery and capable of change. When Arendt discusses foundings, she remarks that humans are collectively capable of new beginnings because they themselves are new beginnings. She poignantly closes *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, a big book on a bleak subject, by quoting from Augustine: “that a beginning be made man was created” (Arendt, 1973, 478). Surely the same is true for the nation, even among ones with more narratively true positions.

Finally, I conclude by noting that nationalists are not forced to care about the two criteria I have found in Arendt. Just as individuals can choose solipsism, so too can states. Certainly, North Korea has done so. But, as Arendt says, all humans—indeed all nations—will be thrown back upon the world if they “have any hopes at all for the things that only the world can give.” And living with no hopes at all for the world seems to me a sorry way to be.

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