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Introduction

In the last decade, a number of far-right ethnic nationalist 'defence leagues' have emerged in Australia, as in many Western contexts.1 Among these, are the Australian Defence League (ADL), the United Patriots Front (UPF), Reclaim Australia, the True Blue Crew, and the Party for Freedom. Members of these groups typically depict themselves as *mandated* defenders of the nation, hence their self-described status as 'defence leagues'. Often, they portray themselves as 'paramilitary' organisations, with uniforms, rankings, hierarchies and insignia to this effect.2 The aim of this article is *not* to survey or account for these emerging nationalist defence leagues exhaustively; indeed, given the frequency with which they form, reform, disband and diverge, this could be a fruitless task.3 Instead, the aim of this article is to elucidate *one* salient characteristic of them, which I argue distinguishes *their* nationalism from that of those that preceded them. Given the way these groups portray themselves, I will refer to them as 'defence nationalists'; I will call the nationalism that underpins them, 'defence nationalism'.

1 These groups are too numerous to list, however prominent examples include the English Defence League and South East Alliance in the UK, the Soldiers of Odin in Finland, Norway and Sweden, and Pegida in Germany.

2 For extended discussions of this in relation to the English Defence League, upon which most of the Australian defence leagues are modelled, see: Copsey 2010; Goodwin 2013; Kassimeris & Jackson 2015; Oaten 2014; Treadwell 2011.

3 It is important to note that obtaining data regarding the exact size of these groups is difficult. This is partly due to the fact these groups often disband and reform under new names, or diverge into separate groups. The UPF, for example, was formed when influential members of Reclaim Australia defected due to factional differences. Another issue is that the websites and social media of these groups are often shut down or suspended before being recreated under new names. While these groups and their numbers are ever-changing, they have nevertheless risen to increased prominence and influence in recent years. For discussion, see Bligh, Moore & Lynch (2018).

This article first provides a brief account of the emergence of contemporary nationalistic defence leagues in Australia. I argue that the 'Cronulla Riots' of 2005 were narrativised in a way that articulates a model of national identification that members of defence leagues now seek to emulate. To demonstrate this, I provide a brief account of the Cronulla Riots and their aftermath. I then provide an analysis of the so-called 'Cronulla Memorial Day', which was a celebration of the Cronulla Riots held by a number of defence leagues, as well as an account of the 'race-riot' held by defence nationalists in Melbourne in 2019, which *they* dubbed "Cronulla 2.0".

After briefly outlining these events, I show that they *appear*, at first glance, to resonate with prominent existing analyses of nationalism, including those of Benedict Anderson (1991) and Anthony Smith (1999), as well as Ghassan Hage's (1999 & 2004) influential analyses of Australian nationalism, and Roberto Esposito's (2012) theory of the relationship between community and immunity. For example, it appears that for participants in these events, the "imaginary communion" of the nation had fractured, *à la* Anderson (1991), resulting in 'internal' conflict and a nationalistic race riot. So too, those involved ostensibly lapsed into what Hage calls "paranoid nationalism" (2004), which describes a situation where nationalists become so focused on protecting the nation, that their enjoyment of it becomes compromised through a constant fixation on the possibility that the nation is threatened. In this vein, the nationalists involved in these events also appear to reflect the fundamental contradiction Esposito theorises between "community" and "immunity", where concerted efforts to 'immunise' or defend a community from external threats, vulnerabilities and enemies ultimately compromises it through (re)productions of anxiety, resulting, effectively, in autoimmunity (2012).

While the above analyses of nationalism are incredibly useful, I nevertheless argue they are complicated and resisted by the emergence of contemporary defence leagues and defence nationalism. After briefly explicating the respective works (while providing some relatively minor qualifications in relation to defence nationalism), I then provide some more substantial re-conceptualisations that apply to defence nationalism. I argue that

although, as the respective works of Andeson, Smith, Hage, and Esposito would suggest, defence nationalists *do* appear to compromise the nation through their efforts to defend it—therefore compromising their enjoyment of the nation and *themselves* as well—that upon closer examination, these contradictions between community and immunity, preservation and anxiety, and defence and enjoyment do not hold for defence nationalists. I argue that these tensions and oppositions do not hold because unlike other nationalists, defence nationalists are not *primarily* concerned with realising their avowed political projects. Instead, they are primarily concerned with constructing and then enjoying *themselves* as the self-ordained defenders of the nation. That is, rather than defending the nation per se, defence nationalists are *most* concerned with constructing themselves as the privileged national subjects who get to *do* the nation's defending. To elucidate this, I turn to psychoanalytic theory and the work of Jacques Lacan. I argue that *through* their very attempts to 'defend' the nation, defence nationalists forge an communion *within* the imagined communion, an inner-communion of *defenders*, who, by virtue of their presumed status as defenders, imagine themselves as privileged, hyper-national subjects. As I elaborate, by enabling nationalists to portray themselves in this way, defence leagues can provide a sense of belonging and identity that is imagined as being *more* 'secure' than the nation itself; indeed, these privileged defenders of the nation are secure in this communion not *despite* the nation's perceived insecurity, *but because of it* (insofar as the nation's insecurity necessitates and privileges its defenders). Drawing on Lacan's formulations—specifically, his theory of identification and the registers of the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real—I claim that it is not the *nation* that defence nationalists seek to preserve per se, but instead, an image of the self that is likeable if not desirable to the self. This image, I contend, is an image of one's self as a defender of the nation. Thus, whereas for Hage and Esposito, one's attempts to defend one's position within a community can paradoxically compromise it, instead, for defence nationalists, one's position within the community is be maintained and enjoyed *precisely* through the paranoid discourses of immunology that compromise the nation itself.

While much of the ensuing argument hinges on events and factors that are particular to

the Australian context—including an analysis of the importance of the beach in the Australian cultural landscape—it is hoped that the *style* of this analysis will be useful for those who wish to conduct analyses of nationalism in other settings as well; that is, in addition to its specific interpretations, this article hopes also to make a general methodological contribution to the analysis of nationalism.

The Cronulla Riots: "When the Sands Ran Red"

On 11 December 2005, approximately 5000 people turned up to Cronulla Beach, a 'community' beach south-west of Sydney. The gathering, which culminated in the infamous Cronulla Riots, followed reports from the previous weekend of an assault against the patrolling life-savers by "persons of Middle-Eastern appearance" (NSW Police 2006, p.7). Both events were preceded by rumours of "threatening" behaviour by "Middle-Eastern youths" towards beach goers (NSW Police 2006, p.7).[4]

In response to the alleged assault on the life-savers, a call to arms was circulated by mass text-message:

> Aussies: This Sunday every fucking Aussie in the shire, get down to North Cronulla to help support Leb and Wog bashing day. Bring your mates down and let's show them that this is *our beach* and their [sic] never welcome back (Wilson 2005, my italics).

Anthropologists and sociologists have observed that the beach—which is invoked in this call—is heavily implicated in narratives about what it means to be an 'Australian' (Fiske 1983; Fiske et al. 1987; Bonner et al. 2001; Evers 2008; Ellison & Hawkes 2016). As such, the beach holds a privileged status in the Australian (cultural) landscape (Fiske 1983). National(ised) pastimes, such as surfing, swimming and tanning, are heavily associated with the beach and the Australian 'way of life' (Fiske 1983). Moreover, in Australian culture, life-savers are revered figures who are constructed as *emblematic* of these practices (Fiske 1983). "We all dream of the sand and the sea, in Australia", write Frances Bonner,

4 For a comprehensive account of the events of the Cronulla Riots, see Evers (2008) and Poynting (2006).

Susan McKay and Alan McKee (2001, p.269), who conclude that the beach holds a "secure place in the national identity" (2001, p.270). In light of this, it seems that for those who heeded the call to arms, the assault against life-savers had occurred deep within the symbolic national heartland of Australia.

The beach is central not only to contemporary Australian iconographies, but so too, its mythologies. The beach is cornerstone to the most culturally celebrated episode of Australian (military) history, the Battle of Gallipoli, which was fought by the Anzacs[5] on the shores of the Gallipoli Peninsula during World War I. This battle is often mythologised as the 'birth' of the 'Anzac spirit', a term that functions as a metonym for the so-called *Australian spirit* itself. It is during Gallipoli that the Anzacs are said to have first embodied what are now imagined as the quintessential 'Australian' values: courage, mateship and resistance. Accordingly, Gallipoli is often referred to as "the birth of the nation", and the beach, "the place where it all began" (Holbrook 2017). The Australian War Memorial website, for example, reads:

> The legend of Anzac was born on 25 April 1915, and was reaffirmed in eight months' fighting on Gallipoli. Although there was no military victory, the Australians displayed great courage, endurance, initiative, discipline, and mateship. Such qualities came to be seen as the Anzac spirit…Australians still invoke the Anzac spirit in times of conflict, danger and hardship (Australian War Memorial n.d.).

In the week before the riots, a second, widely shared racially charged text-message directly invoked this mythology. It read:

> Who said Gallipoli wouldn't happen again! . . . Rock up 2 Cronulla this Sunday were [sic] u can witness Aussies beatin Turks on the beach (Hayes & Kearney 2005).

5 The term "Anzacs" refers to and celebrates all members of the 'Australian and New Zealand Army Corps' (Australian War Memorial n.d.).

Through this invocation of a second Gallipoli, the attack against the life-savers of Cronulla was portrayed *not* as a mere assault against particular individuals, but instead, as an attack on *Australia* and its "way of life" (NSW Police 2006, p.6). Leading up to the riots, the alleged assault was editorialised by *The Daily Telegraph* (Australia) as "an attack on us all" (as cited in Hartley & Green 2006), while *The Guardian* (Australia) ran a front-page article titled "When the sands ran red", declaring: "the attack on the lifeguards, *the most iconic of Australian symbols*, went too far for many people" (O'Riordan 2005, my italics).

The above 'calls to arms' were (in)famously shared on talk-back radio by 'shock-jock' Alan Jones.[6] During his broadcast, Jones invited listeners to share their views on what had been "going on" at Cronulla Beach. One respondent opined:

> Alan, it's not just a few Middle Eastern bastards at the weekend, it's thousands. Cronulla is a very long beach and it's been taken over by this scum. It's not a few causing trouble, it's all of them (Marr 2005).

Another caller, 'John' phoned to say his local football club intended to go to the beach to police it: "If the police can't do the job, the next tier is us", he declared, to which Jones replied, "Good on you, John" (Marr 2005). Following these calls, Jones implored his listeners to participate in "a rally, a street march, call it what you will. A community show of force" (Marr 2005).

Bolstered by Jones' exhortations, the call proved portentous. Those who participated proclaimed their desire to "Save 'Nulla" (NSW Police 2006, p.8). They voiced a range of racially motivated chants as they rioted, including "Love 'Nulla-Fuck Allah", "Wog-free zone", "Lebs go home", "we grew here you flew here", and "Osama don't surf" (Evers 2008). In the violence that followed, it was reported by the New South Wales Police that although "Lebanese youths" had allegedly assaulted the life-savers, *all* persons of "ethnic

6 For comments made on his radio show, Jones was found guilty of "racial vilification" and "[stimulating] listeners to hatred" (Gardiner 2014).

appearance"[7] were attacked indiscriminately:

> Public disorder was realised when the predominantly Caucasian Australian crowd, fuelled by racial prejudice and excessive alcohol consumption became violent. People of ethnic appearance were attacked on sight (NSW Police 2006, p.7).

Those who answered the call to arms referenced the national iconographies and mythologies it invoked, comparing the 'heroism' of the life-savers to that of the Anzacs (NSW Police 2006, p.6). By doing so, they (re)invested "the values traditionally associated with the Aussie Digger[8]...in the lifesaver" (Evers 2008, p.418). So too, it seems, they (re)invested these qualities *in themselves*.

The Cronulla Riots left an indelible impression on far-right ethnic nationalist groups in Australia. Indeed, ten years on from the riots, another call went out in Cronulla. This time, it was not *explicit* violence that was called for, but a celebration: "Cronulla Memorial Day". This idea came from a number of far-right ethnic nationalist movements, who, as in much of the Western world, have risen to prominence in Australia in the past decade. Included among them were the ADL, the PFF, the UPF, and Reclaim Australia. Together, they devised Cronulla Memorial Day as a day to commemorate Australian *resistance*, and to celebrate those who "dug in" at Cronulla Beach—just as the Anzacs dug trenches—by making a "[stand] against years of physical, verbal and even sexual abuse perpetrated by Muslim gang members" (PFF 2015). Anzac mythology was again deployed. In advertising the event, the PFF claimed that "for many Australians, the Cronulla Riots represent a time

7 While this police report can be read sympathetically as a report that refers to the *logic/s* of those who rioted, it can also be read *symptomatically* as a report that reflects and re-articulates their racialised logics. The notion that "Lebanese youths" (or *anyone*) can be identified through visual and corporeal information alone is deeply problematic. The phrase "people of ethnic appearance" is also deeply problematic insofar as it is used (by the report and elsewhere) *only* to designate persons who are *not-white*. The report can therefore be read as reproducing a racial gaze that 'sees' non-white persons in terms of race and ethnicity, but depicts persons of white appearance as being both Australian and racially and ethnically 'neutral'. The complex, intersectional logics that underlie this gaze are explored and critiqued throughout this article.

8 'Digger' is a colloquial term used to refer to Australian soldiers. The term refers both to the digging of trenches, as well as the notion that Australian soldiers (the Anzacs) 'dug in' to 'make a stand', as one stubbornly digs in one's heels to resist, refusing to retreat or surrender.

'when Aussies stood their ground'" (PFF 2015).9 Similarly, Shermon Burgess, the then contemporary leader of Reclaim Australia, called upon all true "patriots" to attend and "spread the word and let everyone know that we are going to be standing for our rights in the very place where it all began" (Donelly & Hall 2015). Thus, just as in popular culture, Gallipoli stands as the 'place' where the Australian spirit began, so too, for Burgess, *something* worth celebrating began at Cronulla Beach.

Four years after the first Cronulla Memorial Day, the Cronulla Riots were again invoked following claims that St Kilda beach, a popular beach close to the Melbourne CBD, had been overrun by "African Gangs". In response, the UPF and the TBC called for "patriots" to reclaim and defend the beach by holding "a Cronulla-style race riot" (Molloy 2019), which they also described as "Cronulla 2.0" (Butler 2019). As the UPF's Facebook page declared, "Residents of Melbourne Stand Up and Unite. It's Time to Say No to Gangs Bashing Aussies. It's time to *reclaim our beaches* and make Australia Safe Again" (Butler 2019, my emphasis). On first impression, it appears that in each of these events, nationalists mobilised in response to the anxiety that an important part of the nation's (cultural) landscape—the Australian beach—was being taken over by an-other. Nationalists mobilised to *take back* and *defend* these spaces; in their words, they mobilised "to reclaim our beaches" (Butler 2019) and to "show *them* this is *our* beach" (Wilson 2005). By doing so, they constructed themselves as *defenders* of the nation whose role it was to "make Australia Safe Again" (Butler 2019).

In the coming sections, I will highlight how the initial interpretations above both articulate with but nevertheless resist and complicate prominent analyses of nationalism. I will focus, in particular, on the influential work of Benedict Anderson (1991) and Roberto Esposito (2012), as well as the most influential analysis of Australian nationalism, which is provided by Ghassan Hage (1999 & 2004).

9 This phrase not only invokes popular cultural imagery of the Anzacs digging their trenches into the beaches of Gallipoli, but also a cultural notion that is related to the Australian Coat of Arms, which features two of Australia's most iconic animals: the kangaroo and emu. As neither of these animals are able to walk backwards, it has become an Australian colloquialism to say that 'Australian's cannot take a backwards step', meaning that they do not back down or surrender; instead, they stand their ground, sometimes even 'making a stand'.

The Imagined Communion

Anderson writes that the nation is an "imagined political community":

> because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their imaginary communion (1991, p.6).

For Anderson, subjects of this communion *feel* as if their identities are, at least in part, captured and explained by their belonging to the nation, and that they are *bound* to one another in "a deep, horizontal comradeship" (1991, p.7).

For Anderson, the feeling of a shared, explanatory essence is substantiated materially through the quotidian workings of the nation, such that subjects are "continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life" (1991, p.35-36). When a subject picks up a daily newspaper—say, for example, the *national* news—the nation is reified insofar as newspaper both presupposes and perpetuates its own audience: the collection of subjects to whom it is addressed, and for whom its contents are imagined especially relevant. By reading the newspaper, one encounters a supposedly coherent narrative of what is happening in the nation '*today*'. These happenings, at least in principle, are common and relevant to members of the communion. This example illustrates how everyday experiences with/in the nation work to substantiate the "feeling" of a shared and explanatory national essence. In a circular dynamic, banal practices, habits and rituals are *nationalised*; in turn, these practices, habits and rituals come to reify and authenticate the existence of the nation *retroactively*.

For Anderson, the nation is not only reified in the present through daily practices, habits, and micro-events: rather, its essence also endures over time, connecting the nation's past, present and future horizons, and so too, those of its subjects (1991, p.35-36). To continue the above example, the newspaper not only reifies the nation by purporting to articulate what is happening in the nation *today*, so too, it reifies the nation by purporting to *chronicle*

what is happening in the nation over time as well. This account is typically archived, forming what is often imagined as a day-by-day account of the nation's history. When accessing this archive, one will often imagine oneself as accessing an account of what was happening *in exactly the same nation*, decades, if not centuries earlier. By doing so, one reifies the nation and reinforces the notion that its essence endures over time. This reification and imagined continuity applies to nationalism. For example, when those who participated in the Cronulla Riots constructed themselves as embodying the national spirit—by displaying national(ised) characteristics of 'heroism', 'mateship', 'courage' and 'selflessness'—they reified the nation and its supposed continuity by imagining themselves as embodying *the same* national spirit as did the Anzacs on the beaches of Gallipoli.

On my reading of Anderson, it is through the symbols and practices associated with the nation, which are encountered in everyday life, that subjects tangibly enact the ideological relations that are structured by the fiction of the nation. As these symbols and practices are wholly contingent, the cultural artefacts that 'evince' the nation serve merely to reify its initial conceptualisation. For example, that the Cronulla Riots were imagined a quasi re-enactment of Gallipoli is contingent on the way Gallipoli is mythologised in the first instance. This process appears cyclical: for example, now that defence nationalists have mythologised *the Cronulla Riots* as a display of nationalistic ideals, *they too* have entered the national mythologies from which nationalists seek to draw, commemorate and re-enact (such as through Cronulla Memorial Day and the 'race-riot' in Melbourne on 5 January 2019). The nationalistic function of such 're-enactments' can be elaborated in relation to another valourised episode of Australian military history: the battle of the 'Kokoda Trail', during which the Australian military are often said to have defended (colonial) Australia from a land invasion for the first time. In contemporary colonial Australia, travelling to hike the Kokoda Trail has come to function as a pilgrimage for nationalists. There, nationalists are offered the embodied experience of traversing the same terrain in the same heat and humidity as the Anzacs before them. Through this pilgrimage, nationalists are said to "follow the footsteps of the Anzacs" (Australian War Memorial n.d.). Through this experience then, nationalists are (pr)offered a haptic

connection with the most revered national figures in colonial Australia: the Anzacs. Just as pilgrims to the Kokoda Trail "follow in the footsteps" of the Anzacs and thereby feel a connection to them, so too, the rioters of Cronulla felt a bodily connection to the beach, its life-savers, and the Anzacs, and ultimately, to the nation and to one another as well.

What the above examples illustrate, is that just as for Louis Althusser, subjects relate the material conditions of their own existence to themselves *through* ideology (1971, p.165), that so too, nationalists relate their material conditions *to themselves* through discursive narratives about the nation (such as those regarding the Anzacs, Gallipoli, and the Kokoda Trail; the life-savers and the beach; and later, the Cronulla Riots themselves). These ideological narratives, although imagined, are nevertheless *felt* with/in the body: that is, they colour and give meaning to bodily sensations. For example, when a nationalist hikes the Kokoda Trail, pain is not *merely* pain, but *meaningful* pain: a nationalistic pain imagined comparable to that of the Anzacs in whose steps s/he supposedly follows. What this example illustrates, is that national narratives have the capacity not only to impact how nationalists narrate their own bodily experiences *to themselves*, but moreover, that they have the capacity to ensure the reification and continuity of the nation, albeit *retroactively*, insofar as the narrativisation of one's experiences in the present is predicated on the *prior* existence of the nation.

For Anderson, the banal workings of the nation are always tied to more overt, aggressive forms of nationalism because the very *idea* of the nation is predicated on necessary exclusion. As Anderson elaborates, the imagined community is "inherently limited" because even the largest nations have:

> finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself as coterminous with mankind…nationalists do not dream of a day when all the members of the human race will join their nation (1991, p.7).

If the nation is inherently exclusive, then it can be inferred that just as national subjects share an imagined communion among themselves, they must *also* share an imagined

departure from those who are *not of the nation*. This two-sided dynamic is evident among ethnic nationalists, for whom *both* belonging and not-belonging to the nation are determined, at least in part, in reference to fantasies of ethnicity. Ostensibly, these fantasies lead to aggression because if shared ethnicity facilitates the imagined communion, then immigration and multiculturalism could potentially disrupt if not fracture the nation. As Andrew Bolt, who is one of Australia's most widely read tabloid columnists put it: "multiculturalism and high immigration is succeeding in dividing us [Australia] into a nation of tribes" (2010). Although Anderson's formulations *imply* such imagined departures, he does not offer insight as to the potential psychic topography (or topographies) these might assume. What is needed, in short, is a theory of an imagined dis-union. To begin to articulate how this manifests for defence nationalists, I now turn to examine the work of Hage, who provides a useful conceptual framework towards this end.

The (Auto)Immunities of Paranoid Nationalism

Hage has interpreted the work of Anderson with specific reference to nationalism in Australia. Hage expands Anderson's idea by maintaining that the imagined communion functions as a causal cultural category, meaning that simply by virtue of being Australian, one imagines one shares the nation's imagined properties (2004, p.71-72). By identifying with signifiers that are associated with the nation, subjects are able to tap into the national "we"; by doing so, they can acquire the fantasy that the nation reflects *their own* individual qualities. As Hage elucidates, the ability to utter the national "we" allows the subject to account for the self *through* the nation by enabling "the 'I' of the nationalist to do things it can never hope to be able to do as an individual 'I'" (2004, p.13). For example, when nationalists say "'we' are a sporting nation", they claim a share of the national essence, irrespective of their own, individual sporting proficiencies (Hage 2004, p.13). By tapping into the national "we", subjects claim *ownership* of national traits for the self (Hage 2004, p.13), as demonstrated when the rioters of Cronulla assumed the imagined heroism, courage and mateship of the Anzacs *for themselves*.

For Hage, access to the national 'we' is distributed unevenly because the imagined communion is narrated in ethnic, cultural, economic, linguistic and religious terms (1998, p.48). Consequently, one's capacity to 'authentically' and 'legitimately' tap into the national 'we' bears a relationship to one's capacity to identify with these markers, which are themselves overlapping and mutually reinforcing. This uneven distribution enables some subjects to assume dominant positions within the nation over others (Hage 1998, p.48). Those who assume national traits for the self not only assume dominant (symbolic) positions with/in the nation, they also appear to *exercise* their dominant positions through powerful forms of symbolic agency. Those who 'made a stand' during the Cronulla Riots, for example, not only assumed the mythologised traits of life-savers and the Anzacs for themselves—their heroism, courage and mateship—they also adopted the *symbolic position(s)* these figures occupy in Australia, casting themselves as bona fide *defenders* of the nation as well. Like life-savers and the Anzacs, they sought to protect beach goers and to defend the beach *qua* the very nation itself.

For Hage, nationalists are inclined towards a disposition of "worrying" about the nation (2004, p.20-21), and lapsing into a paranoia that *their* privilege within the nation will be lost to others (2004, p.31). Hage refers to this dynamic as "paranoid nationalism": a territorial aggression towards the others one perceives as *not* rightfully belonging (2004, p.21-22). For Hage, paranoid nationalists are commonly described as being 'xenophobic': that is, as being characterised by thoughts and feelings that the other's difference is threatening (2003, p.88). When understood in this way, nationalists are perceived as engaging in efforts to protect themselves and the nation from difference, such as by restricting immigration and advocating for stronger border protections (of which Donald Trump's proposed 'border wall' is an example *par excellence*). For Hage, however, this 'xenophobia' can be more accurately conceptualised as 'homoiphobia': that is, as fear of the other's potential *sameness*, which can be equally threatening, if not more so (2003, p.88). In examining the role of nationalism in the conflict between Serbia and Croatia, for example, Michael Ignatieff observes that when conflict lacks the presence of concrete differences, such as language, religion and culture, that *sometimes*, "the emotions stirred up within

commonality are more violent than those aroused by pure and radical difference" (1999, p.47). Understood on Anderson and Hage's terms, this example demonstrates that *both* perceived difference *and* perceived sameness can be experienced as threatening for nationalists, insofar as both compromise the taxonomies of meaning *through which* the nation subsists, and *on which* the privileged status of nationalists is predicated.

Whether motivated by xenophobia or homoiphobia, paranoid nationalists imagine that the enforcement of the nation's borders will have a securing effect upon the taxonomies of meaning and belonging within the nation. For Hage, this border aggression reaches its apex "when the aggressive politics of the border takes over the very interior it is supposed to be protecting" (2004, p.32). This occurs because the "search for zero vulnerability produces a gaze that sees threats everywhere and ends up reproducing the very vulnerability it is supposedly trying to overcome" (Hage 2003, p.81). As a consequence, "a defensive attitude of guarding whatever good life there is left supplants the enjoyment of that good life" (2003, p.86). Here, Hage's observations resonate with Esposito's theory of 'immunity', because for Esposito, hyper-defensive attempts to protect life can, when carried too far, paradoxically end up negating or constraining that life (2012, p.61). By characterising immunity in this way, Esposito establishes "immunity" in fundamental opposition to "community" as a set of biopolitical processes that render communities "dead" (2012, p.58). As Eric Santner elaborates, for Esposito, anxious attempts to immunise social life often diminish its robustness, *intensifying* vulnerabilities so that "immunity becomes autoimmunity, self-preservation becomes a mode of mortification, [and] life drive becomes a kind of death drive" (Santner 2011, p.7).

Following Hage and Esposito, it could be said that life within the nation was compromised. These events were, after all, underpinned by paranoid discourses of immunity: by claims that the 'Australian way of life' was under attack and in *need* of defending. However, it does not necessarily follow that life was compromised *for them*; indeed, I argue the opposite: that although defence nationalists subscribe to and (re)produce narratives regarding the nation's *dis*-integration, that nevertheless, these

narratives simultaneously revitalise life within the nation *for them* insofar as they provide defence nationalists with a privileged position within the nation: that of the nation's self-ordained defenders. Put differently, *as* defence nationalists posit that the nation is under threat, they *simultaneously* posit themselves as the solution—the defence league. By doing so, they produce a communion *within* the imagined communion—a communion, moreover, that consists of the privileged, *hyper-national* subjects whose collective task it is to do the defending. Recall, for example, that the 'call to arms' that proceeded the Cronulla Riots invoked both the "Anzac spirit" and "Gallipoli" (Hayes & Kearney 2005), and that those who rioted declared the need to "Save 'Nulla" (NSW Police 2006, p.8), a highly nationalised spatial domain. By heeding these calls to defend and 'save' the nation, rioters were able to see themselves as they see life-savers and the Anzacs: that is, as figures that occupy a special place within the nation.

At the time of the Cronulla Riots, Koby Abberton, who leads the infamous, self-described "surf gang", the 'Bra Boys'10, opined that:

> The reason why it's not happening at Maroubra is because of the Bra Boys. Girls go to Cronulla, Bondi, everywhere else in Sydney and get harassed, but they come to Maroubra and nothing happens to them. I read all this stuff about kids getting harassed because they want to have a surf and I say 'are you kidding?' The beach should be for Aussie kids. But if you want to go to beaches and act tough in groups you better be able to back it up. If these fellas come out to Maroubra and start something they know it's going to be on, so they stay away (McIlveen 2005).

Here, Abberton positions his group, the Bra Boys, as defenders of their own localised domain: Maroubra Beach, after which they are named. He demonstrates that defence nationalism does not merely gather together amorphous anxieties in order to project them upon an-other (in a way that compromises the nation by constructing it as vulnerable), but instead, that defence nationalism *also* draws together and links its subjects such that a

10 For an exploration of the Bra Boys and their members, see their self-made documentary, *Bra Boys* (2007).

communion among them, and their 'turf', is formed. While "Aussie kids" and "girls" are being attacked by non-national others within the nation, "it's not happening at Maroubra...because of the Bra Boys". In this way, the paranoia of defence nationalists is productive even as it is destructive: though it may jeopardise the national community at large, it simultaneously links defence nationalists to one another and their localised domains insofar as their aggression and paranoia, and the agency they derive from it, are shared. Thus, although on Esposito's terms, discourses of immunity and community are opposed, it appears that this is not *necessarily* the case, and that indeed, discourses of immunity may serve the opposite function by actively working to *sustain* specific communities, including those of (defence) nationalists. Here, immunity does not occasion autoimmunity by default because it is the very possibility of the nation's collapse that, *in and of itself*, provides defence nationalists with a communion among themselves.

Self-extimacy and the Real

If by positing the dis-integration of the nation, defence nationalists integrate *themselves* into a communion within the communion, then the efforts of Hage's "paranoid nationalists" are the tip of the iceberg of a much larger, unconscious political community. The contours of this community—and the purpose it serves—can be highlighted in reference to the work of Lacan. As I will show, by understanding Lacan's theory of the relationship between subjectivity, the Symbolic Order, and Real, we can understand that the imagined community, which subsists in the Symbolic Order, is always-already dead—in another words, that it has always-already lapsed into autoimmunity by default. To demonstrate this, I first explore the Lacanian concepts of the Symbolic and the Real, and their relationship to subjectivity and subjecthood.

For Lacan, the Symbolic Order represents the totality of language and symbolic life.11 It is the means by which subjects conceptualise and re-present the world around them; indeed, to this extent, Symbolic Order *is* the world around them. Moreover, for Lacan, once the

11 See "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis" (Lacan 2006, p.197-268) for Lacan's extended discussion.

subject enters the Symbolic Order (by acquiring language and then speech), so too, their attempts towards conceptualising and articulating the self become *bound* to the Symbolic Order as well. It is by binding, investing, and "*alloying*" the self to categories that belong *to* the Symbolic Order—a process Lacan calls "symbolic identification" (Lacan 2011)—that subjects make positive articulations of the self *recognisable* to others.[12] As Lacan elaborates, "the symbolic provides a form into which the subject is inserted at the level of his being. It's on the basis of the signifier that the subject recognises himself as being this or that" (1993, p.179). Indeed, for the subject to represent identity of the self to the self (and others), the subject must *inhabit* language, submitting to *its* laws to gain recognition (Stavrakakis 1999, p.20). When a subject imagines themselves as a nationalist subject, as for example, an *Australian* subject, they bind themselves to the signifiers that (supposedly) represent what it means to be an Australian. That is, they invest their own presumed identity into those signifiers, such that those signifiers come to represent the identity they assume is theirs. As outlined above for example, during the Cronulla Riots, participants assumed that they were representing and embodying the signifiers of the Anzac spirit, mateship and courage, and, moreover, that these signifiers reflected them.

For Lacan, the process of representing one's self in language can never succeed and is never complete, because just as the word fails to capture the thing, and the signifier fails to capture the signified, so too, for Lacan, the Symbolic can never capture the Real. Indeed, for Lacan, the Real is that which in principle *always* escapes and exceeds language; as such, the Real is "that which resists symbolization absolutely" (Lacan 1988, p.66). What this means, is that regardless of the particular signifiers a subject invests the self into, they must fail to capture the self. In this sense, when a nationalist invests the self into the symbolic life of the nation (by forming a strong identification with the nation and national identity), they invest themselves into a symbolic life that is always-already precarious, if not dead, insofar as that symbolic life fails to gain access to the Real.

12 While the Symbolic Order reinforces the psychic formation/s inaugurated by the mirror stage, in that it allows the subject both to recognise the self and to be recognised by others, it *also* enables the subject to 'recognise' those others *by whom* one imagines oneself to be recognised, because the signifiers and categories of the Symbolic Order are shared. The Symbolic Order therefore not only provides a network through which identities are intersubjectively *verified*, but negotiated and contested as well—a point to which I soon return.

For Lacan, the failure of the Symbolic to capture the Real is not as straightforward as the failure of the signifier to capture the signified. For Lacan, the signifier not only *fails* to capture the thing it supposedly signifies; instead, it '*reaches in*' to the signified, not only inflecting the imagined *meaning* of the object, but the notion that there *is* any object at all.13 Put differently: the word not only necessarily fails to capture the thing at which it aims, it also manufactures the illusion that there *is* something distinct and meaningful in and world at which to aim in the first instance. To illustrate this point, Lacan takes an everyday example, asking the reader to imagine two ceramic toilets (2006, p.416). As Lacan observes, although both objects are produced at the same factory, each comes to acquire a different meaning *after* signifiers—in this case, gendered toilet signs—are attached (2006, p.416). In Lacan's example, the signifier both *creates* difference between the objects while simultaneously reinforcing the belief that distinct objects exist *a priori*. The community of the nation is therefore "imagined" *not only* to the extent, as per Anderson, that "members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them" (1991, p.6); it is also imaged insofar as it is the symbolic fiction that *is* the nation that creates the illusion that there *really is* a nation and corresponding community there to begin with.

While the Symbolic Order ostensibly provides a pathway towards the realisation of identity—by allowing one to articulate a *national* identity, an Anzac identity, or any identity at all—the failure of the Symbolic to capture the Real traumatically forecloses the possibility of arriving at the destination the Symbolic promises: that of a final, stable identity, or what Lacan calls the 'I that I take myself to be'. While the Symbolic permits the individual subject to exist *conceptually*, insofar as it necessarily fails to capture the Real, it also simultaneously prohibits the manifestation of an 'I' that can subsist or insist entirely on its *own* (that is, *as one*). This is because in order to represent the 'I' both to the my-self and to others, 'I' must draw on the Symbolic Order; 'I' therefore depend on and indeed cannot exist *without* the Symbolic Order, which is outside of myself. This dependence undermines identity—which is (a) *pure difference*—because, as Judith Butler articulates, '*I*'

13 See "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious" (Lacan 2006, p.412-441) for Lacan's extended discussion.

must “make myself substitutable in order to make myself recognisable” (2005, p.37). In other words, to be recognised and recognisable, I must be intelligible, and to be intelligible, I must translate and transpose myself in(to) a language that does not belong exclusively to me, and indeed, precedes me (Butler 1997 & 2005). In short, I must *name* myself in the language of another (Santner 2011, p.72). Applied in relation to nationalism, the failure of the Symbolic to capture the Real means that the nation can never capture the nationalist, or the nationalist's presumed identity, because the signifiers the nation provides can never transcend the gap between the Symbolic and the Real. Stated in the language of Hage and Esposito, the irreducible gap between the Symbolic and the Real means that the community of the nation, and the means of conceptualising oneself it provides, is always-already compromised to begin with: that it has always-already lapsed into an autoimmunity.

For Butler, the subject's reliance on the Symbolic Order results in an ontological precarity *to* the Symbolic Order which is dual-sided (1997). The first aspect, is that to “persist in one's own being”, one must *submit* to the terms of the Symbolic Order; to do so, however, is to limit oneself to a life articulated through “a world of others that is fundamentally not one's own” (Butler 1997, p.28). This means that while the Symbolic Order enables the subject to articulate an existence, it also simultaneously undermines the pure 'me-ness' of that existence, because the language through which 'I' articulate my-self does not belong fundamentally to me, but instead to the Other, to whom 'I' become subordinate and therefore precarious (Butler 1997, p.28). The second aspect of Symbolic precarity relates to the Lacanian subject's *alloying* of self to signifier. On the one hand, subjects depend on signifiers to represent the self to the self; but on the other hand, signifiers are precarious: fluid, and liable to change. When subjects alloy self to signifier, they therefore become beholden to *that* signifier and *its* flux and capacity to change. This is why Butler maintains that subjects become “passionately attached” to their *own subordination*, as it is only *through* the unstable categories and terms of language that the self becomes legible (1997, p.28).

The 'legibility' of the self comes at a price. The subject's submission to the Symbolic Order

means that her or his activities are never entirely her or his own, but that they instead belong to the Symbolic Order. When defence nationalists substantiate their imagined national identities through embodied performances during the Cronulla Riots, for example, they effectively re-inscribe their reliance on the Symbolic Order and the contingent, precarious world it (re-)produces. When affinities for national spatialities and past-times are invoked as being indicative of belonging to the nation, then these affinities, and the experiences, memories, emotions and affects associated with them, are *ascribed* national meaning through the *retroactive* effect of signification. Through this retroactivity, *personal* identifications that supposedly come to the subject from the 'inside'—including, for ethnic nationalists, from within the body—are revealed as coming from the 'outside' (from the Symbolic Order). Lacan refers to this phenomenon as "extimacy": a process whereby an inner alterity eventuates through the unwitting introduction of the outside to the inside (2013). The result of this extimacy is that the subject is liable to become alienated from the very self and body in which one's identity is supposedly 'found' and confined.

For Butler, rather than dissuading the subject from submitting to the Symbolic Order, the failure of the self to manifest perfectly only prompts further submission, because "the subject pursues subordination at the promise of existence" (1997, p.20-21). Here, Butler's phrase, "the subject pursues", is misleading to the extent that it masks the notion that both the subject's submission and pursuit are indirect (or in psychoanalytic terms, unconscious). A subject could not say, for example, "*I will not submit to the Symbolic*", for the "I" that this sentence postulates, *in its centrality*, denotes an already subjected, subordinated subject, who, through the manifested presence of intersubjectivity, has already come to assume the existence of a fixed underlying self. In other words, for a subject to be *seeking* or *avoiding* subordination, a fundamental subordination must already have occurred.

On my reading of Butler, the above paradox as to why subjects pursue subordination can be understood in Lacanian terms, in that Butler's concepts of 'subordination', 'precarity' and 'passionate attachment' can all be understood in relation to the Lacanian concept of

symbolic identification.14 As articulated above, for Lacan, symbolic identification is the mechanism by which subjects become passionately attached to the particular signifier(s) through which the self is articulated; given signifiers are unstable, symbolic identification is *also* the mechanism by which subjects become alienated, subordinate and precarious *to particular signifiers* (to those through which the self is articulated). For Lacan, 'identification', 'subordination', 'precarity' and 'passionate attachment' are therefore inseparable, as it is *through* the process of symbolic identification that subjects come to both love and loathe the signifiers to which they are attached, and by which they are both enlivened and deadened. As these signifiers are the means by which identities both form and ultimately *de*-form, they are a source of immunity and autoimmunity—a means of defending oneself by positively articulating one's self, that, ultimately, turns back on itself and dis-integrates.

A Lacanian framework acutely highlights what is at stake for nationally dominant subjects who attempt to maintain there dominance. Whereas for Hage, dominant subjects become paranoid that they will lose their privileged positions within the nation, my thesis is that subjects are also anxious they will lose what that dominance assists in providing them: *mastery of the self.* Contrary to Hage then, what is at stake for nationalists is not *merely* the maintenance of a specific national order which is *perceived* as being favourable by the nationalist. So too, the illusion the social order provides is at stake: namely, that of a stable national self. Understood in these terms, Hage's 'homoiphobia', or fear of the other's sameness, can be more accurately re-framed as the obverse: *as a fear of the self's otherness*; that is, fear of the *autoimmunity* of the self. Whereas Hage and Ignatieff maintain that it is the threatening sameness of the other that motivates nationalist aggression, I maintain that this particular defence nationalist anxiety can be attributed to a more fundamental betrayal: that of the Symbolic Order, which promises a place for the 'I'—albeit a conditional one—and by so doing, promises that there is *actually* a stable 'I' for whom a place can be allocated in the first instance. However, as outlined above, this promise cannot ultimately be kept, because no absolute, final articulation of difference between self

14 As outlined in detail by Lacan in his 1961-62 seminars, *Identification* (2011).

and other can ever be made, despite the subject's efforts to organise (national) life around the presumed existence of radical, essential differences. Following Lacan, then, the very assertions of dominance made by symbolically dominant subjects inevitably undercut the precise identities they aim to substantiate, because the 'gap' between the self and subject is irreducible and emerges irrespective of one's symbolic position among other subjects. This means that even as nationalists assume *dominant* positions within the nation, that *in and by so doing*, they (re)assert their subordination and vulnerability to the Symbolic Order. However, subjects who encounter this void as the gap re-emerges do not necessarily experience the realisation, 'oh no! The other is taking my place!' (as in both xenophobia and homoiphobia), but rather, the realisation 'oh no! I am not the same as myself!' This encounter with the self's otherness amounts to the Lacanian subject's realisation that 'I' am not the 'I that I took myself to be', nor was I ever, nor will I ever be.

Although the gap between the Symbolic and the Real is irreducible, it is my contention that defence nationalists attempt to externalise and displace *their* vulnerability to the Symbolic Order onto the nation, so that it is the *nation*, and not the nationalist, that is perceived as being under threat. If through their subsequent 'defence' of the nation, defence nationalists effectuate their own, unconscious psychic defence, then their project ought not be deemed a failure simply because the ostensible object of defence becomes compromised. Indeed, if symbolic 'life' within the nation is always-already dead to begin with, then perhaps defence nationalism is a means of recuperating and salvaging *something*, if itself only temporarily, from an always-already dead-space.

Conclusion: An Imagined Immunity

Defence leagues and defence nationalists can be distinguished from other forms of nationalism, because unlike other nationalist groups, defence leagues are not *primarily* concerned with realising their ostensible political projects (such as fortifying national borders, halting immigration and preserving so-called national values), but are instead focused on constructing and enjoying *themselves* as the privileged national subjects who get to *do* the defending. That is, they are most concerned with (en)acting, embodying and

enjoying their perceived identities as hyper-national subjects: privileged, (self-)ordained defenders of the nation who enjoy an imagined immunity from the nation's perils therein. Paradoxically, this enjoyment means that that which threatens the nation fortifies the defence nationalist, as the more the nation is perceived as threatened, the more the nationalist's imagined role within it is secure. Indeed, the more the nation is imperilled, the more the nationalist can purport to defend the nation, and so too, by virtue of this, the underlying fantasy that they *really are* a privileged national subject can appear substantiated.

Through their attempts to 'defend' the nation, defence nationalists ultimately seek to resuscitate a life *of* and *in* the nation that is and was always-already dead to begin with (insofar as the Symbolic must always fail to capture the Real). I have argued that although the paranoid attempts of defence nationalists to defend the nation may *appear* only to further jeopardise the nation, that their efforts may serve to recuperate the fantasy space of the nation and the stable identities it promises. Indeed, by positing the nation as a lost object, nationalists *gain* the nation as an object that *can* be 'found': that is, they gain it as an object that *could* be realised through their defence of it.

As the 'communion' of defence nationalists is only engendered as a retroactive effect of the nation's imagined collapse, defence nationalism can be understood as providing its subjects with an *imagined immunity* to its own 'cause' (the collapse of the imagined communion). Contrary to Hage, nationalists are therefore not always motivated by the paranoia that they will lose their already-existing enjoyment within the nation; rather, it is *through* the very idea that their enjoyment has *already* been lost—and their attempts to recover it—that *jouissance* is discovered.

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