

CCIG talk at Open University, 10 December 2009 at 2.00pm
Working Group on Insecurity, Fear and Risk

Imagining community without nationalism: risky thinking in times of terror

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How might we imagine community in non-nationalist ways? This talk will explore this question through an investigation of critical responses to the events of 11 September 2001, including Judith Butler's essay, 'Violence, Mourning, Politics' published in *Precarious Life*; Cindy Weber's series of films, 'I am American'; and post 9/11 novels including Mohsin Hamid's, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. The presentation will address what might be involved in imagining community in ways that don't insist on the nationalist baggage of commonality, homogeneity or unity, and in the challenge of resisting 'heightened nationalism'. (Butler, 2004) It will suggest that this task must begin by interrogating the concept of 'imagining', and paying attention to how different ideas of time underpin our political imaginaries. Whilst critical theorists of nationalism demonstrate that 'homogenous empty time' is central to the imagining of the nation (Anderson, 1991) and political geographers have extended this work by showing how linear ideas of time underpin the 'imaginary geographies' of the War on Terror (Gregory, 2004), this talk will address the question of how *different* understandings of time might open up alternative possibilities for conceiving of being-together. This is important because we need to be aware of the way in which modes of critique risk becoming co-opted by nationalism, or borrowing from the same conceptual tools that have made the rhetoric of the War on Terror possible. Finally, it is suggested that feminist critiques and postcolonial literatures offer some significant openings for thinking community differently, and treating the political as 'heterotemporal'. (Hutchings, 2008).

Angharad Closs Stephens is Lecturer in Human Geography at Durham University and studied for her PhD in International Relations with R. B. J. Walker at Keele University. Her research work focuses on contemporary ideas of 'community without unity', paying attention to how various understandings of time enable different political imaginaries. She has recently published in *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, is co-editor (with N.Vaughan-Williams) of *Terrorism and the Politics of Response* (Routledge, 2008) and is co-convenor of the BISA Poststructural Politics Working Group. (a.c.stephens@durham.ac.uk)