

INTRODUCTION

Guest Editor's Introduction: "Everyday Nationalism in World Politics: Agents, Contexts, and Scale"

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Introduction

Few things in the world are as fascinating as people's experience of the everyday, in part because so much about everyday existence would be considered surprising or even scandalous if it were not so common. Michael Billig's (1995) landmark study of "banal nationalism" transformed the study of nationalism by exposing a myriad of ways that nationalism is a pervasively unnoticed facet of everyday life in the West, in turn spawning a broad literature devoted to uncovering the hidden reproduction of the nation through architecture, advertising, bank notes, maps, mass media, textbooks, and unwaved flags (to name a few). Building on Billig's work, the approach that has come to be known today as "everyday nationalism"¹ draws from the same intellectual well but focuses on the ways that people actively reproduce or challenge the nation through ordinary daily practices (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008). By centering analysis on agents and social practices rather than social structures, everyday nationalism bore the potential to transform again the way that scholars study nationalism and to make in-depth qualitative research useful for broader comparison and generalization (Goode and Stroup 2015).

This special issue represents an attempt to move the field of study closer to this goal by drawing together contributions that address the methods, scope, and applications of everyday nationalism as an approach. It grew out of a research workshop on "Everyday Nationalism in World Politics," which was held at the annual conference of the British International Studies Association in Bath, England, in 2018.² The goal of the workshop was to recognize the increasing thematic scope and diversity of research on everyday nationalism—in the case of the workshop, including work on citizenship and migration, peace and conflict, authoritarianism and legitimacy, and religion and belonging—while starting to tease out sets of methodological best practices. In moving from workshop to special issue, contributors were asked specifically to address one of these thematic areas, to situate the place of everyday nationalism within their respective disciplines, and to address the methods used in observing, coding, or analyzing everyday nationalist practices. The contributions to this special issue bring to light core methodological concerns, create opportunities to build bridges with other disciplines, explore the diversity of everyday nationalism, and creatively exploit the tension between banal and everyday nationalism.

Individually, the contributions to this special issue help to move everyday nationalism out of its disciplinary and methodological silos and advance it toward a broader, comparative relevance. As a collection, the articles shed light on the need to unpack the meaning and usage of "the everyday" if we are to resolve the ongoing confusion between banal nationalism and everyday nationalism. In the concluding section of this introductory essay, I argue for treating the everyday as an ensemble of characteristics concerning the nature of agents, the context for exercising agency, and the scale of observations and measurement. Doing so not only enables a clearer demarcation of banal

nationalism and everyday nationalism as approaches but facilitates their broader comparison with more episodic, contentious forms of nationalisms, as well as the official nationalisms promoted by states and regime actors. Consequently, we come closer to conceptualizing how everyday nationalism as an approach might contribute to our understanding of the topics that are the traditional focus of studies of nationalism, such as ethnic mobilization, ethnic conflict, or nation-building. Moreover, such comparisons lay the groundwork for our understanding of the intersection of nationalism with new and ongoing global challenges, such as pandemic or climate crisis.

Methodology and Scope of Everyday Nationalism

The existing scholarship on everyday nationalism sometimes seems to be unified more by method than by substantive focus, given the diversity of cases studied. Most of the literature relies on qualitative methods, primarily featuring ethnographic observation, interviews, focus groups, and social media analysis (Knott 2015). While this methodological consensus has strengthened scholars' depth of understanding of specific cases, qualitative research often limits the appeal and utility of research for producing generalizable findings that are relevant for other fields.³ The core means of addressing these limitations is to refocus analysis on social practices, such as the varieties suggested by Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008): talking, choosing, consuming, and performing the nation.⁴ While these categories certainly do not exhaust the range of social practices and significant overlap among them may exist (e.g., where "tweeting the nation" might fit into this schema remains unclear), they provide a template for identifying a common range of practices and their diversity within and among cases.

Qualitative research that relies on the observation of social practices must still reckon with the ways that practices are embedded in hierarchies of knowledge and authority (Bourdieu 2007). For scholars conducting qualitative research on everyday ethnicity or nationhood, these hierarchies inhere in the relationship between researcher and respondent and are typically encountered in terms of navigating one's positionality as insider, outsider, or both.⁵ In turn, respondents provide insight into the broader associations and power relationships that they associate with ethnic or national identification and potentially with the identities and organizations that intersect them like race (Smith 2015), religion (Stroup 2017), or domestic political regimes (Yusupova 2019).

In the first contribution to the special issue, Stroup (2020) notes that religion is an important area for investigating everyday ethnicity that remains relatively untapped. Yet in attempting to expand the study of everyday ethnicity to examine the intersection of Hui and Muslim identities, he encountered an unexpected problem in the form of "epistemic deference," or a situation in which respondents "feel that as non-academics or non-elites they lack the qualifications to provide any kind of useful information to the researcher." He ascribes this reaction to the hierarchies of power and spiritual authority that structure communities of faith, which in turn make daily practices seem profane, uninteresting, or otherwise unworthy of academic research. Of course, hierarchies of power are pervasive in ethnic as well as religious communities (and typically they overlap), and Stroup's observations highlight the influence of power relations not only between respondents and their communities but also between respondents and researchers. Asking respondents about "religion" or "ethnicity" invariably invokes those power relations, leading either to epistemic deference (with regard to religion) or sometimes to assertions of what the researcher *ought* to be studying (with regard to ethnicity). Stroup thus recommends that researchers of everyday ethnicity and religion focus on respondents' lived experience, such as "how practices have changed over the course of their lifetimes, or how their habits in present differ from their youth." In other words, the key is to remain focused on everyday practices as constituting (and contesting) ethnic boundaries rather than the specific content that fills them.

Vucetic and Hopf (2020) seek to expand the scope of everyday nationalism by building bridges with constructivist approaches to national identity in the field of International Relations. Their "Making Identity Count" (MIC) project is motivated by a similar ambition of taking qualitative

understandings of national identities and making them broadly comparable without sacrificing their interpretive epistemology. In contrast to the focus of everyday nationalism on practice theory (Bourdieu 1990; Reckwitz 2002), MIC adopts a Gramscian approach in arguing that “hegemony is more secure and stable the more deeply the discourse of national identity being propagated by the elite resonates with the masses.” In methodological terms, everyday nationalism typically starts with the ethnographic observation of microlevel social practices, while Vucetic and Hopf focus on a broad range of textual sources, reasoning that national identities are a kind of matrix (following Edensor [2002]) that imprints and configures social practices, textual sources, and material and cultural structures. A crucial advantage of this approach is that it provides a means to access historical manifestations of everyday nationalism in ways that are not available to contemporary ethnographers, for “if at least some habits of nationhood are discursive, then it stands to reason that one could recover them through some form of discourse analysis of a sample of texts that widely circulate in modern states.” MIC thus provides a means to map “the most salient identity categories available to elites and/or masses, their prevailing valences, and . . . the conditions under which some national identity claims are likely to resonate with citizens while others do not.”

The MIC approach has much to contribute to everyday nationalism, particularly in its adoption of an inductive approach to coding and analyzing textual sources. It thus represents an important step toward rendering studies of everyday nationalism generalizable and comparable, and resonates with efforts like Bonikowski's (2017) to develop quantitative ways to examine cultural repertoires. At the same time, the MIC approach further complicates the distinction between “banal” and “everyday” nationalism—a reckoning that may also be due in International Relations (Frost and Lechner 2016), where the study of everyday practices in relation to diplomacy (Pouliot 2016), political economy (Hobson and Seabrooke 2007; Adler-Nissen 2016), and conflict management (Autesserre 2014) are increasingly prevalent.

Diversity and Generalizability of Everyday Nationalism

One strength of everyday nationalism as an approach is that it complicates the notion that nations are relatively homogeneous and uniformly meaningful social categories. Knott (2015, 8) points out that everyday nationalism emerged in part as a reaction to the “overly deductive agenda” of Billig's banal nationalism, instead emphasizing human agency in relation to the structuring effects of national categories. Hence, scholars working within this approach “highlighted how far nationalism may not be a constantly salient aspect of everyday, but rather this salience is contingent and, in itself, messy” (8). Hearn and Antonsich (2018, 601) similarly criticize banal nationalism for focusing on the reproduction of singular nations while neglecting the multiple and contested forms of national belonging that are claimed on behalf of the nation. In their estimation, this limits scholars' understanding of nationalism as an “extremely dynamic and ambiguous process made of multiple, conflicting ordinary voices,” which in turn leads to static conceptions of the nation “as something out of history, something which does not adjust to the changing of people and times” (601).

Polese, Seliverstova, Kerikmae, and Cheskin (2020) focus on “the everyday” as an approach for exploring “the way national identity is lived, and produced day by day, by ordinary citizens.” Their analysis aims at the disjuncture between state-constructed national narratives and quotidian experiences, and thus shares the ambitions of Vucetic and Hopf to gauge the congruence between official discourse and everyday practices of nationhood. Their approach builds upon existing studies of everyday nationalism in post-communist contexts (Morris et al. 2018; Polese et al. 2018), adopting an ethnographic focus on food branding and consumption among Estonians and Estonia's Russian-speaking minority population. As a means for researching national attachments, nation branding (Anholt 2007) and food consumption—including “gastronationalism” (DeSoucey 2010; Ichijo 2020)—emerged separately over the last 10–15 years. However, their interaction with studies of “the everyday” has a long history, particularly with sociological examinations of the self under capitalism (de Certeau 1984; Lefebvre 1991; Highmore 2001).

Polese et al. find that Estonians and Russians make different kinds of national associations with food consumption: “While Estonians refer to the traditions by a population (a nation in a Walker Connor fashion), Russians refer to the local (land, territorial) traditions as preeminent in a sort of civic or economic nationalism.” Crucially, though these different kinds of associations represent competitive discourses, they are not mutually exclusive. As a result, nation branding efforts may not produce the intended kinds of national attachments sought by authorities, but nonetheless they may succeed in cultivating “different ways to experience national belonging” in parallel with others.

Their research is emblematic of the work on everyday nationalism in several respects. First, it demonstrates a deep commitment to contextualized observation and uncovering the significance of ordinary social practices, often in ways that are unintended by (and sometimes challenge) elite nation-builders. Second, it favors a deep understanding of a single case as a means toward producing candidate generalizations about the production and salience of national attachments in everyday life. However, like much of the everyday nationalism literature, it simultaneously insists upon the potential generalizability of the findings while resisting an agenda for systematically extending its generalizations to other cases. Moreover, the authors’ interest in demonstrating the rift between official narratives and everyday consumption perhaps misses an opportunity to consider how everyday forms of exclusion manifest in relation to consumption (e.g., in the presentation of restaurant menus or lavatory instructions exclusively in Estonian and English). Finally, it demonstrates the increasingly common practice of treating everyday nationalism and banal nationalism as interchangeable in the sense that both focus on ordinary existence.

Like Stroup, Schmoller (2020) seeks to expand the reach of everyday nationalism to consider religious identification. However, rather than evade the problem of “epistemic deference,” Schmoller engages directly with religious practices that are considered to form part of “traditional Islam” in Russia (as opposed to what might be considered “global Islam”). His analytical strategy is to examine commonalities among a diverse range of religious practices that are “so strongly blended with everyday forms of religious life and culture that they are rarely critically reflected.” Relying on several years of participant observation and ethnography, Schmoller unravels the ways that the practices that constitute “traditional Islam” permit engagement not only with specific territory but also with nonhumans (those who have passed away). A focus on religious practice thus brings a crucial perspective that everyday nationalism often lacks in connecting with a (dis)embodied past kinship.

Somewhat analogous to the way that Polese et al. identify competing national discourses in food consumption that signal different yet parallel paths to nationhood, Schmoller discovers “a vision of life in a shared space” in which “Muslims are engaged in an ongoing exchange with a multitude of human and non-human beings inhabiting their surroundings.” His work also (pointedly) resists extension beyond his chosen case. However, his analysis could be criticized for focusing perhaps too insistently on the national or religious unities that are fostered, while sidestepping their relationship to the many quotidian practices of exclusion and othering. In Schmoller’s analysis, this combination of unifying and exclusionary practices potentially emerges in the contrast between “global” and “traditional” Islam in Russia—particularly given the latter’s clear association with specific territory and even an alternative destination for religious pilgrimage. In these two articles by Polese et al. and Schmoller, then, we see both the strengths of everyday nationalism as an approach in their uncovering of the diversity of everyday practices and their contributions to ethnic, religious, or national identification, but also their difficulty in reconciling an inward focus on diverse practices with broader claims to generalizability beyond a single case.

Problematizing and Integrating Banal and Everyday nationalisms

One area in which everyday nationalism has made genuine inroads in recent years is in relation to political legitimation. Well before Gellner (1983) defined nationalism as a doctrine of political legitimacy, Renan (1994 [1882]) famously likened the nation to an everyday plebiscite. Much of the

early work on everyday nationalism questioned the value of nation building and elite-oriented approaches to nationalism, focusing particularly on the failure of nationalizing projects to mobilize or even appeal to citizens and youth (Brubaker et al. 2006; Fox 2004). More recently, scholars have begun examining the efforts of democratizing and autocratizing regimes to use banal nationalism as a source of legitimation (Goode 2020; Stewart 2020), for which everyday nationalism as an approach is ideally suited to examine the success or failure of such attempts.

Dukalskis and Lee (2020) examine the relationship between authoritarian rule and everyday nationalism in North Korea. While they treat banal and everyday nationalism as conceptually distinct, they note the problem that, “in highly repressive contexts where the state mandates its version of banal nationalism, such as in North Korea, it is difficult to disentangle it from everyday nationalism with reliable precision.” Indeed, they note that the state actively tries “to infuse its version of nationalism in everyday practices” in a variety of ways. Everyday interactions in party-state venues can diffuse more broadly in society. In turn, this diffusion of official nationalism into daily life can facilitate the state’s mobilization of the public against real or perceived foreign threats and creation of a “rally around the flag” effect.

Through interviews with North Korean emigres, Dukalskis and Lee find that a crucial element in the state’s success has been the elimination of public space for social interaction, for which “the prospect of violence coercion helped the state maintain control, and rumor and control parables amplified the state’s power in everyday interactions.” These control factors continued to exert an influence even with the emergence of black markets in the 1990s as a social sphere with limited autonomy and potential for acknowledging the state’s failure, in part because the state’s agents were both visibly present and actively interested in profiting from them. In this important sense, Dukalskis and Lee note that it is difficult to claim that the state has succeeded in producing nationalist legitimacy, as North Korean people “are not passive actors fully indoctrinated by ideology and cowed by the state apparatus.” However, their analysis indicates that the perceived lack of an autonomous social space for interactions limits the potential for drawing attention to the gap between official and everyday nationalism. Their findings thus resonate with Goode’s (2020) observation that “monopolization” succeeds as a state strategy for cultivating banal nationalism to the extent that elites accept the repetition of state-supplied symbols and narratives as a routine cost of doing business, and citizens cease to care about the routine imposition of national symbols and repertoires in their everyday interactions.

While it is almost axiomatic for scholars working on everyday nationalism to note that the state’s nationalist narratives cannot be convincingly created from scratch, most studies continue to focus on assessing the congruence between official nationalism and everyday nationalist practices rather than considering the reverse process: How do everyday nationalist practices influence official nationalism? McGlynn’s (2020) research on the Russian government’s appropriation of everyday patriotism represents a valuable first step in this direction. Her contribution examines the Russian government’s strategy of historical framing of the Ukraine crisis and conflict in Syria and its co-optation of everyday patriotism in the media to sustain the regime’s claims of a groundswell of patriotism.

In the cases McGlynn analyzes, most of the media’s examples of patriotic activities “were mundane and accessible to ordinary people, from eating domestic produce to holidaying at home,” which in turn were signposted as patriotic activities. These co-opted patriotic practices soon became commercial branding opportunities (“like attending exhibitions, wearing *vatniki* [padded jackets], and consuming salads”) that, in turn, confirmed the Kremlin’s legitimating narratives about the Soviet Union, the 1990s, or the Great Patriotic War. Hence, the strategy achieved “a sense of resonance between the top-down production of banal nationalism and (allegedly) authentic practices of everyday nationalism.” Following the writing of McGlynn’s article, it is worth noting that the Kremlin successfully expanded this strategy of co-opting everyday patriotic practices—frequently apolitical in nature and oriented around history and tradition—to mobilize support for constitutional amendments that would make it possible for Putin to remain in power until 2036.

Conclusion: What's Ahead for Everyday Nationalism?

As is evident in the contributions to this issue, most discussions of everyday nationalism tend to focus on the “national” part of the concept, though it may be time to focus more squarely on that is meant by the “everyday.” When discussing methodology, scholars substitute a variety of synonyms for “everyday” (such as “ordinary,” “quotidian,” or “informal”) rather than specifying what the term means or implies for analysis. Likewise, when discussed in conceptual terms, the primary use of the term “everyday” has been to distinguish the approach from “banal” nationalism. Yet even this distinction is not carefully made or even understood, such that the difference between banal nationalism and everyday nationalism may appear to be more a matter of emphasis than substance. The resulting temptation is to elide the difference and refer to any nationalism that does not originate with states or elites as “banal” or “everyday.” More fundamentally, this interchangeable usage reflects what Fox and Ginderachter describe as a “now-you-see-it, now-you-don’t sort of everyday nationhood, where the nation enjoys variable salience across time and space, relevant in some situations, but irrelevant in others” (2018, 547). Hence, everyday nationalism and banal nationalism appear as if they were two sides of the same coin: the nationalism we observe by way of social practices is recognized as everyday nationalism, while the pervasively unnoticed (and unobserved) nationalism that persists in the background is treated as banal nationalism.

While it is certainly the case that both approaches are closely linked at their cores, our ability to theorize the relationship between everyday nationalism and other “non-banal” forms of nationalism is limited by focusing on the differences between them at the expense of specifying their domains. Synthesizing the different meanings of the “everyday” (beyond meaning “not banal”) as generally used in the literature on everyday nationalism, one can identify three core dimensions: (1) the nature of the agents (in terms of their social status as non-elites); (2) the contexts within which they exercise agency (routine, informal interaction); and (3) the scale of observed or measured social interaction (social practices versus social structures). More broadly, this ensemble of dimensions helps to define everyday nationalism while differentiating it from banal nationalism insofar as both share a focus on non-elite actors and routine (informal) contexts, while their differences in observation and explanation arise from the focus on social structure (banal nationalism)⁶ as opposed to social practices (everyday nationalism).

Aside from facilitating an understanding of the relationship between conceptual approaches, examining banal and everyday nationalism in terms of agents, contexts, and scale makes envisioning their relationship to other varieties of nationalism possible (see table 1). For example, Vucetic and Hopf examine a combination of official and banal nationalisms to produce a composite of national identities and their changes over time. Polese et al. pointedly examine the divergence of everyday nationalism in Estonia—observed by way of varied consumption practices—from official nationalism, even as they contribute to a broader (informal) nation-building project. Dukalskis and Lee probe the intersection of banal and everyday nationalism, viewing the former as a day-to-day source of regime legitimation in North Korea while everyday nationalism emerges where social practices challenge or confirm regime-aligned social structures. By contrast, McGlynn examines how official nationalism in Russia legitimates foreign policy actions in Ukraine and Syria by way of historical framings, which are then fused with depictions of citizens’ ordinary social practices as exemplars of

Table 1. Everyday, Banal, Contentions, and Official Nationalisms

Nationalism	Banal	Everyday	Contentious	Official
Agents	Non-elites	Non-elites	Activists	State elites
Contexts	Routine (informal)	Routine (informal)	Eventful	Routine (formal)
Scale	Social structures	Social practices	Social movements	Institutions

loyal, patriotic action. Once co-opted, these social practices in turn become ways of signaling loyalty to the regime and a routine cost of doing business. They are then replicated in public discourse, classrooms, and the market, and thus serve to reproduce regime-aligned social structures.

Looking beyond this special issue, one of the most pressing challenges for everyday nationalism is to develop a clearer understanding of its relationship to contentious or eventful forms of nationalism. As one might expect from their shared focus on routine, informal contexts, banal and everyday nationalism are preoccupied with “quiet” or “settled” contexts (Bonikowski 2016) as opposed to “eventful” times that often feature waves of protest or social mobilization. Indeed, the contributions to this special issue are mainly concerned with the lack of contestation, protest, or mobilization. Scholars working in the banal nationalism tradition have long argued that there is a close relationship between banal and contentious nationalisms, and everyday social practices constitute a crucial middle ground where contestation can emerge (Jones and Merriman 2009; Hearn and Antonsich 2018). Yet establishing its relationship to nationalist mobilization remains a significant challenge for scholars working on everyday nationalism, and currently there is almost no overlap between the literatures on contentious nationalism and everyday nationalism.

Another challenge for everyday nationalism is to turn outward to engage with global phenomena rather than remaining focused on the diversity of practices within individual cases (Malešević 2019). Recent work by Michael Skey aims to update banal nationalism and everyday nationalism by pointedly engaging with globalization, migration, and other related phenomena that do not easily fit within their conceptual frameworks (Skey 2009; Skey and Antonsich 2017; Skey 2018). The current (as of this writing) global health crisis potentially provides additional clues to resolving this issue by drawing attention to the seemingly sudden emergence of nationalism in response to pandemic (Antonsich 2020; Bieber 2020). The lessons learned from examining everyday nationalism during the pandemic may prove even more valuable for understanding nationalist responses to the growing climate crisis (Conversi 2020).

Crucial to this process are the ways that the disruption of routines caused by pandemic creates demands for their restoration—that is, when the context changes from routine or settled times to eventful or “unsettled” times. For example, Goode, Stroup, and Gaufman (2020) examine social practices like wearing face masks or panic buying as responses to ontological uncertainty induced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Everyday nationalism may thus emerge in eventful contexts when “the perceived relationship between structure and routine in the process of meaning making is inverted,” and manifest in attempts to reestablish routine life: “Rather than interpreting the meaning of social practices in relation to social structure, social practices seek to affix national meanings to social structures that are in flux.” In unsettled times, the assertion of normality becomes a radical form of everyday nationalism.

Finally, the contributions to this special issue suggest that attending to the ways that everyday nationalism intersects with contentious politics and global political phenomena will also push scholars to pay greater attention to quotidian social exclusions, the diffusion of social practices, and the cross-fertilization of research in international relations and everyday nationalism. While each of the contributions adopts an inductive approach to observing and coding everyday nationalism, they proceed from a common theoretical core and a common understanding of what counts as practice. When everyday nationalism scholars make the transition from case-based observation to observing how categories of social practice are distributed across borders, they will discover that they have much to offer to emerging studies of social practices in comparative politics and international relations.

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Notes

- 1 References to “everyday nationalism” as a scholarly approach includes adjacent literatures such as “everyday ethnicity” (Brubaker et al. 2006) or “everyday nationhood” (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Skey and Antonsich 2017).
- 2 The workshop was co-organized by the author and Dr Eleanor Knott. The organizers would like to acknowledge the support of the University of Bath’s research group on Nationalism, Populism, and Radicalism for making this workshop possible.
- 3 Among area studies scholars, one sometimes encounters objections that focusing on “the everyday” is not novel. Indeed, a deeply contextualized understanding of quotidian processes is one of the hallmarks of area studies research, though it similarly does not resolve the problem of situating findings in a framework that encourages comparison.
- 4 Another approach that consciously addresses the problem of comparability and generalization is Bonikowski’s (2017) quantitative examination of cultural repertoires.
- 5 The academic literature on this dilemma is far too extensive to provide adequate treatment in this essay, but the discussion is particularly strong in anthropology, human geography, and sociology.
- 6 Duchesne (2018) draws attention to Billig’s (2017) likening of nationalism to a dominant political ideology, though the notion of a universally structuring set of principles or norms concerning the relationship between states and nations arguably is not an ideology in that it lacks a program of action, nor does it have any particular affinity for left or right. Rather, this is an exemplar of social structure.

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