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EVERYDAY NATIONALISM

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Review

Everyday nationalism as a sub-field refocuses attention on the 'masses' and human agency within nationalism studies to consider the role and relevance of the everyday, and relevance of the lived experience of nationalism. Everyday nationalism focuses, in particular, on the agency of ordinary people, as opposed to elites, as the co-constituents, participants and consumers of national symbols, rituals and identities.

The everyday nationalism approach builds on Billig's (1995) work on banal nationalism but diverts in its focus on human agency, to understand the meaning and experiences of nationhood from the perspective of those on the ground. The everyday nationalism approach therefore seeks to offer an empirical lens for Hobsbawm's (1992,10) affirmation to consider the dual aspects of nationalism, which are 'constructed essentially from above' *and* 'which cannot be understood unless also analyzed from below', conceived by Hobsbawm as the 'assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people'.

Banal nationalism vs everyday nationalism

Billig distinguished between banal and 'hot' forms of nationalism, to argue for considering the taken-for-grantedness of nationalism and national



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symbols, to consider the 'banal reproduction' of nationalism in established nations (Billig 1995, 38). Crucially, Billig shifted attention from the 'traditional concern' of nationalism studies with the 'historical origins', in other words the emergence of the phenomenon of nations and nationalism (Antonsich 2015; Edensor 2002; Skey 2009). Rather, Billig and others such as Edensor (2002), have sought to unpack how nationalism was reproduced and represented through everyday life and popular culture.

Everyday nationalism follows from this focus on the everyday as the 'domain of enquiry' (Fox & Miller-Idriss 2008a, 557). However everyday nationalism scholars are critical that work by Billig and Edensor, and nationalism studies more generally, overlooks human agency (Antonsich 2015; Thompson 2001). As Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008a, 537) argue, even if there is a 'consensus' that nationalism needs to be conceived, not as an elite phenomenon, but as something engaged in by ordinary people, who themselves, in the study of nationalism, 'have been curiously missing'.

This aligns with research on national identity. This research critiques how far scholarship has historically been 'unreflexive' in focusing on elites and propagating assumptions about national discourses (Condor 2010b, 194). Moreover, historically, approaches to nationalism have focused on the state and top-down perspectives, at the expense of the bottom-up whether in terms of civil society (Eriksen 1993) or the self (Cohen 1996; Hearn 2007). By contrast, studies of national identity concerned with the bottom-up are interested in how national identity is talked about, experienced and given meaning in different ways by the ordinary people it affects (Condor 2010b; de Cillia, Reisigl & Wodak 1999; McCrone & Bechhofer 2015).

Secondly, scholars of everyday nationalism criticise the overly deductive agenda of banal nationalism which has led to an assumption that nationhood is always being reproduced as a 'pervasively relevant social category' (Brubaker et al. 2006, 363; Fox & Miller-Idriss 2008a). Rather, everyday nationalism focuses on human agency and nationhood to critique the extent to which the nation and nationhood are consistently salient, or present, in everyday life, and coterminous with nationalism (Fenton 2007; Fox & Miller-Idriss 2008a). Again, everyday nationalism scholarship is aligned with the broader research on national identity

which has sought to reduce the analytical distance between researcher and researched, which has been typical of historical studies of nations and nationalism (Hester and Housley 2002).

The everyday in everyday nationalism

While scholars emphasise the need to consider the everyday expressions, experiences and negotiations of ethnicity and nationalism, there is some debate concerning the meaning of *everyday*. For some, following Billig, the everyday is synonymous with the ‘mundane details’ and ‘quotidian realms’ of ‘social interaction, habits, routines and practical knowledge’ which have been neglected by existing analysis (Edensor 2002, 17). Thus Edensor (2002, 187) wants to understand familiar expressions of national culture, and sources of identification, and at the same time how threats to that which is mundane ‘can result in panic and a sense of threat’. Similarly Surak (2012, 181) in her analysis of Japanese tea practices, shows that the taken-for-grantedness of everyday practices can also demonstrate the differentiation that exists vis-à-vis these practices and the nation, as a signifier not only that those participating are Japanese but a signifier too of ‘what *kind* of Japanese that person is’. These approaches conceive of the everyday as a space in which to observe how the nation is expressed through banal and mundane practices.

By contrast, Jones and Merriman argue that concepts of everyday and banal are not synonymous; everyday life is both a ‘place of banal and mundane processes’ but ‘may also incorporate a variety of hotter “differences and conflicts” that affect people’s lives on a habitual basis’ (Jones & Merriman 2009, 166). Using the case study of street name conflicts in Wales, they show the level of contestation that can exist in everyday life concerning everyday symbols of the nation. Thus, Jones and Merriman argue for moving beyond the dichotomous ideas of ‘hot’ and ‘banal’ nationalism, to unpack the discourses and practices of nationhood, and how they are ‘reproduced in everyday contexts’ in ways that may blur the banal-hot spectrum (Jones & Merriman 2009, 165).

Brubaker et al. (2006) and Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008a, 554) place a different emphasis on the role of the everyday in everyday nationalism, where everyday life is object of analysis. Rather than assuming the 'nation pervades everyday life' (Fox & Miller-Idriss 2008a, 554), as Billig argues, the everyday nationalism focus is on 'vernacular understanding' by observing the role of ethnic and national categories in 'everyday encounters, practical categories, commonsense knowledge, cult idioms, cognitive schemas, mental maps' (Brubaker et al. 2006, 9, 6-7).

Methods of everyday nationalism

As everyday nationalism scholars emphasise, everyday life is the empirical 'domain of enquiry' alongside human agency (Fox & Miller-Idriss 2008a, 557). As Skey (2011, 117) argues, this domain must be studied 'more systematically', and more directly, 'to better understand why nationhood matters'. This approach has, therefore, specific methodological implications for the kinds of data that are collected and how these data are collected, to capture the 'active construction' of nationalism (Mann & Fenton 2009, 518).

Ethnographic observation is the most common way of studying everyday nationalism by allowing for a deep and rich observation of the practices of ethnicity in everyday life (Surak 2012; Goode & Stroup 2015, 724; Hearn 2007), in their 'naturally occurring' as opposed to reconstructed settings (Hester & Housley 2002, 7). Other qualitative research methods include interviews (Fenton 2007), focus groups/group interviews (de Cillia, Reisigl & Wodak 1999; Skey 2011), and social media analysis. These methods help to capture insights into these ethnic practices, such as how individuals relate to everyday nationalism in relation to national identity and other social identities, and interweave everyday nationalism with these other forms of identity, personal experiences and 'sense of self' (Hearn 2007, 658; Mann & Fenton 2009; Cohen 1996).

However, as Goode and Stroup (2015) point out, interviews involve a different interaction with interlocutors, and precisely non-'naturalistic' interaction (Hester & Housley 2002, 7). Thus, by contrast to ethnographic

participant observation of everyday life, in interview settings interlocutors may be 'more likely to adopt, try out, or simulate positions' during an interview scenario 'that would not ordinarily be available in daily social settings' (Goode & Stroup 2015, 727). Thus, in conducting interviews to collect data on everyday nationalism, researchers need to be attentive to their impact on what is being researched, for example how they are flagging the nation via questioning, which likely does not reflect everyday life or everyday experiences of the nation.

Objects of analysis in everyday nationalism

Aside from emphasising a preference for the ethnographic method in studies of everyday nationalism, scholars of the field consider the role and sentiments of ordinary people in everyday life. This follows from Brubaker and Cooper's (2000) critique that studies of identity are too often focused on 'categories of analysis' constructed from above, as opposed to 'categories of practice', constructed from below by being embedded in the everyday life of ethnicity and nationalism. As Skey (2011) argues, this analysis is grounded in a micro-sociological understanding of ethnicity, by building the analysis out of micro-level perspectives.

Skey (2011) focuses on five different dimensions through which to observe everyday practices and experiences of nationhood: spatial, temporal, cultural, political and self/other. Spatially, Skey argues for observing how the nation is expressed, and experienced, in terms of territory. Temporally, Skey (2011, 33) argues for observing the nation through how it is articulated through daily rituals and when a sense of national "'difference" overrides other factors'. Culturally, Skey (2011, 11) argues for observing how the nation is expressed through observing the taken-for-granted symbolic systems of everyday life. Politically, it is the organisational dimension, observing what maintains national movements. Lastly, the self/other dimension focuses on the 'different traits and values' that people 'embody [...] realising and concretising the image of nation in a world of nations'. As Skey (2011, 12) argues, this provides an analytical framework for conceiving the contingency and dynamism of the nation 'in relation to the everyday practices of social actors', as well as a framework

for conceiving *how* the nation can be observed in everyday terms via these dimensions.

By contrast, Fox & Miller-Idriss (2008a) focus more on the *practices* of everyday nationalism. They observe how the nation is contested, subverted and negotiated in everyday life, by framing the practices in an active sense via 'four modalities': talking, choosing, performing and consuming. Fox and Miller-Idriss conceive *talking* (539-40) in terms of how individuals talk '*about*' the nation, signalling what the nation means to them, and talk '*with*' the nation, to observe the points at which the nation 'comes to matter in certain ways at particular times for different people'. In *choosing* the nation (544), they argue for observing how individuals make 'national choices', for example in terms of schooling. This should account also for institutional incentives for these choices, such as quotas, and how individuals make 'choices national'. They argue these choices can be 'important occasions for the enactment and reproduction of national sensibilities' and junctures for when the nation can 'become an experientially salient frame' for decision-making. In *performing* the nation (545-546), Fox and Miller-Idriss examine the collective rituals, and their symbolic meaning, in 'everyday (and not-so-everyday) life'. Following their emphasis on human agency, they (2008a, 546) argue for observing not elite symbols since individuals are not only 'consumers of national meanings', but – through daily interaction and reproduction – also the 'contingent producers' of daily meanings. Lastly, in terms of *consuming* the nation (549), Fox and Miller-Idriss argue for observing the nation through 'mundane tastes and preferences', such as how 'national products and projects are received and consumed' within society. These approaches, from Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008a) and Skey (2011), therefore offer a useful way to approach everyday nationalism research, by indicating different elements of the everyday for observing nationalism and nationhood.

Critiques of everyday nationalism

Several criticisms have been made of everyday nationalism. First, Smith (2010, 84) argues that 'ordinary people' is an overly homogenous category

that overlooks the different status and class of groups within this category. In response, everyday nationalism scholars indicate they are interested in the multiplicity, rather than simplicity or homogeneity, of experiences of nationalism (Jones & Merriman 2009; Antonsich 2015).

Second, scholars argue that everyday nationalism is ahistorical by focusing on the contemporary aspects of nationalism, while neglecting, if not rejecting, the 'causal-historical methodology' of previous nationalism scholarship (Smith 2008, 567). The contribution then, of everyday nationalism as elaborated below, is different to previous nationalism scholarship, by its concern not with ethnogenesis but with a context-sensitive exploration and analysis of how 'ethnonational idioms' are 'enacted and invoked by ordinary people in the routine contexts of their everyday lives' (Fox & Miller-Idriss 2008b, 574). However, the context-sensitive and specific approach of everyday nationalism also potentially may 'limit the appeal and utility of the approach' (Goode & Stroup 2015, 725), in particular among scholars who conceive of this as too 'micro-analytical and descriptive' as opposed to furthering 'causal and sociohistorical' scholarship on nationalism (Smith 2008, 567).

Third, by focusing on human agency, this approach may overlook the pre-existing institutional restrictions, such as organisations and ideologies, which shape and constrain 'social action'; essentially, human agents 'have to work in a world that already exists' (Malešević 2013, 130). Everyday nationalism does not, however, necessarily deny this in seeking to overcome the lack of engagement with 'masses' and human agency, to further understanding of the 'extraordinarily complex dialectic' between the top-down (i.e. elites and structures) and bottom-up processes and agents (de Cillia, Reisigl & Wodak 1999, 153).

Contributions of everyday nationalism

Aside from these criticisms, everyday nationalism offers important contributions, and future research potential, for nationalism scholarship within sociology and geography, and even political science. Empirically, scholars using the everyday nationalism have produced a variety of

findings that question pre-existing assumptions about ethnicity and nationalism. Brubaker et al. (2006) find that ethnicity is only intermittently, as opposed to pervasively, salient in everyday life, demonstrating the difference between the political realm, where ethnicity and nationhood might be consistently flagged, and everyday life. Skey's (2011) findings point to the messiness, contradictions and inconsistencies of ethnicity in everyday life which should be a crucial, rather than ignored, part of studying nationalism and ethnicity. Heterogeneity, then, is a crucial finding of the everyday nationalism approach which recognises the 'varied ways' identities are understood and given meaning in everyday life, and the varied salience these have for agents (Condor 2010a, 540). This research, however, predominantly deals with cases in Western (e.g. Britain) and post-Communist Europe (Romania), the exception being Surak's (2012) research in Japan; the everyday nationalism approach would therefore be well utilised in studying nationalism more globally outside of these contexts.

Conceptually, therefore, everyday nationalism has contributed a vital perspective to nationalism studies in emphasising how existing nationalism scholarship has overlooked human agency and, in so doing, has treated nations 'as if' they exist 'beyond social relations' (Thompson 2001). By focusing on human agency, everyday nationalism has also emphasised the contingency and messiness of nationalism in everyday life, by highlighting the inconsistencies and contradictions in how nationalism and nationhood are expressed and experienced in everyday life (Jones & Merriman 2009; Skey 2011).

In this way, the largest contribution and empirical finding of everyday nationalism has been to challenge the assumption about whether nationalism matters in everyday life (cf. Billig 1995). Rather, by demonstrating the 'weakness of popular nationalist mobilization and the absence of ethnic tension in everyday life' (Brubaker et al. 2006, 5), everyday nationalism scholars have highlighted how far nationalism may *not* be a constantly salient aspect of everyday, but rather this salience is contingent and, in itself, messy (Fox & Miller-Idriss 2008a). Everyday nationalism therefore does not offer an answer about the origins of nationalism, or a parsimonious explanation of the role, relevance and

meaning of nationalism for the 'masses' and in everyday life, but rather argues for an ongoing debate concerning these aspects, recognising there may be different explanations across time and space.

Annotated bibliography

M. ANTONSICH, 'The 'everyday' of banal nationalism - ordinary people's views on Italy and Italian', in: *Political Geography* (2015).

This article argues that theories of banal nationalism have tended to overlook human agency. Rather the article situates the understanding of national identity in Italy in everyday terms to argue that nation is conceived as differentiated and fragmented.

M. BILLIG, *Banal nationalism* (London, 1995).

This book introduces Billig's infamous theory of banal nationalism, which tries to shift focus from extreme and 'hot' expressions of nationalism to consider how the nation is taken-for-granted and flagged through routine symbols in everyday life.

R. BRUBAKER & F. COOPER, 'Beyond identity', in: *Theory and Society*, 29/1 (2000) 1-47.

This article criticises existing social analyses of identity which they argue are too ambiguous to offer conceptual clarity on the meaning and significance of identity. They draw attention to a distinction between identity as a category of analysis and identity as a category of practice, to allow for an understanding of how identity can be constructed in essentialist ways.

R. BRUBAKER, M. FEISCHMIDT, J. FOX & F. GRANCEA, *Nationalist politics and everyday ethnicity in a Transylvaniana town* (Princeton, 2006).

This book tries to unpack how ethnicity and nationhood are experienced, enacted, and understood in everyday life based on immersive fieldwork in Cluj, an ethnically mixed Hungarian-Romanian town in Transylvania, Romania. The book challenges assumptions about the role of ethnicity in everyday life by arguing that ethnicity is not a constant, or salient, part of everyday life and social relations.

A.P. COHEN, 'Personal nationalism: a Scottish view of some rites, rights, and wrongs', in: *American Ethnologist*, 23/4 (1996) 802-815.

This article considers the association between nationalism and personal identity. The article uses the case of Scotland and Scottish nationalism to look at how nationhood is conceptually related to personal and political rights.

S. CONDOR, 'Devolution and national identity: the rules of English (dis)engagement', in: *Nations and Nationalism*, 16/3 (2010) 525-543.

This article considers the relationship between nationalism and devolution in the UK, and in particular why there has not been a backlash of English nationalism to devolution within the UK, as might be expected. The article argues that English identity is not considered a legitimate form of political voice within England.

S. CONDOR, 'Pride and Prejudice: identity management in English people's talk about "this country"', in: *Discourse and Society*, 11/2 (2010) 175-205.

This article considers how xenophobia and nationalism are associated in the British context, where talking about the nation was associated with a lack of legitimacy because of its association with race and xenophobia.

R. DE CILLIA, M. REISIGL & R. WODAK, 'The discursive construction of national identities', in: *Discourse and Society*, 10/2 (1999).

This article analyses the discursive construction of national identities, using the case study of Austria. The article considers which discursive strategies and linguistic devices are used to construct a sense of national sameness, uniqueness and difference to other national collectives.

T. EDENSOR, *National identity, popular culture and everyday life* (Oxford, 2002).

In this book, Edensor uses the concept of a matrix of shared resources that people draw upon to realise their senses of national identity. He identifies a broad range of resources that make up this matrix, including the material, performative and representative. In a chapter focusing on modes of performance, Edensor considers not only large-scale national ceremonies, but also more popular and everyday forms of performance, including those in sport.

T. ERIKSEN, 'Formal and informal nationalism', in: *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 16/1 (1993) 1-25.

This article considers nationalism as a dual phenomenon between formal and informal nationalism. While formal nationalism is connected to the nation-state, informal nationalism is associated with civil society and collective events, such as ritual celebrations and international sports competitions. The article uses empirical material from nationalist ideologies in two poly-ethnic nations, the twin-island state of Trinidad and Tobago and Mauritius.

S. FENTON, 'Indifference towards national identity: what young adults think about being English and British', in: *Nations and Nationalism*, 13/2 (2007) 321-339.

This article argues that national identity should be distinguished from nationalism, examining British and English national identity. The article finds that identification with national membership does not guarantee enthusiasm towards the nation and is not an indicator of nationalism, nor of nationalist sentiment.

J.E. FOX & C. MILLER-IDRISS, 'Everyday nationhood', in: *Ethnicities*, 8/4 (2008) 536-563.

This article argues that macro-analytical approaches to the study of nationalism fail to engage with the meaning and salience of nationhood in the everyday by focusing only on nationalism in terms of the state, elites and the origins of nationalism. This article argues for an empirical approach to the relationship between nationalism and everyday life, going beyond banal nationalism, by observing, rather than assuming, the role of nationalism in everyday life.

J.E. FOX & C. MILLER-IDRISS, 'The "here and now" of everyday nationhood', in: *Ethnicities*, 8/4 (2008) 573-576.

The authors respond to Smith's critique (in the same issue), to argue that the every nationalism approach is concerned not with causal-historical understanding of nationalism, but with a deeper context-specific and micro-level understanding of the meaning and experience of nationalism in everyday life.

J.P. GOODE & D.R. STROUP, 'Everyday nationalism: constructivism for the masses', in: *Social Science Quarterly*, 96/3 (2015) 717-739.

From the perspective of political science, this article argues for improving constructivist understandings of nationalism and ethnic politics by using

the approach of everyday nationalism and, thus, grounding understandings of ethnicity in political science in rich, qualitative and ethnographic observation.

J. HEARN, 'National identity: banal, personal and embedded', in: *Nations and Nationalism*, 13/4 (2007) 657-674.

This article examines the relationship between personal and social dimensions of national identity. The article uses ethnographic data from the merger of a Scottish and English bank to consider how ideas of Scottishness and Scotland are related to personal conceptions of nationalism and nationhood.

S. HESTER & W. HOUSLEY (eds.), *Language, interaction and national identity: studies in the social organisation of national identity in talk-in-interaction* (Aldershot, 2002).

This edited book argues that existing research on national identity has been conducted at an analytical distance from those who experience the lived reality of national identity talk. The chapters therefore try to situate national identity in terms of how national identity is talked about, and interacted with, by those who are talking about, and experiencing it, for themselves.

E.J. HOBSBAWM, *Nations and nationalism since 1780: programme, myth, reality* (Cambridge, 1992).

This book offers a modernist perspective on the phenomenon of nationalism, from 1780 to the present, updated in light of the fall of Communism in eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union, and considers whether nationalism has passed its apex.

R. JONES & P. MERRIMAN, 'Hot, banal and everyday nationalism: bilingual road signs in Wales', in: *Political Geography*, 28/3 (2009) 164-173.

This article argues that Billig's theory of banal nationalism reinforced an unwarranted separation of the banal and hot processes that reproduce nationalism. Rather, the authors argue that everyday nationalism can bring these concepts together in more complex and contingent ways. The authors use the case study of the debate in Wales about bilingual road signs (1967-75).

S. MALEŠEVIĆ, *Nation-states and nationalisms: organization ideology and solidarity* (Cambridge, 2013).

The book provides an in-depth analysis of the processes involved in the emergence, formation, expansion and transformation of nation-states and nationalisms in terms of the contemporary relevance of these concepts.

R. MANN & S. FENTON, 'The personal contexts of national sentiments', in: *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 35/4 (2009) 517-534.

This article considers how attitudes to the nation can be reinforced by experiences and events at the personal level. The article focuses on 'white English' individuals to investigate how self-understandings and personal experiences inform a particular orientation towards nation, place and the country.

D. MCCRONE & F. BECHHOFFER, *Understanding national identity* (Cambridge, 2015).

This book argues that literature has focused on nations and nationalism, as opposed to offering an evidence-based approach to studying and understanding national identity. Focusing primarily on England and Scotland, using data gathered over the last twenty years, the book analyses how far national identity matters, how far national identity is analogous or

different to nationality and citizenship, the content and boundaries of national identity and the relationship of national identity to politics.

M. SKEY, *National belonging and everyday life* (Basingstoke, 2011).

This book focuses on understanding why individuals take nations for granted and how, why, for whom, nations and national identities matter. The article argues for considering national identities from the perspective of ethnic majorities in the case of Britain.

M. SKEY, 'The national in everyday life: a critical engagement with Michael Billig's thesis of banal nationalism', in: *The Sociological Review*, 57/2 (2009) 331-346.

This article critically assesses the contribution of Billig to the study of banal and everyday nationalism.

A. SMITH, 'The limits of everyday nationhood', in: *Ethnicities*, 8/4 (2008) 563-573.

In a response to Fox and Miller-Idriss's original piece on everyday nationalism, this article offers a critical engagement with their contribution and the everyday nationalism approach, arguing that everyday nationalism is ahistorical and ethno-centric, focusing on description rather than causal analysis.

A.D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (Cambridge - Malden, 2010).

A critical review of the main approaches to understanding nationalism.

K. SURAK, *Making tea, making Japan: cultural nationalism in practice* (Stanford, 2012).

This book puts forward a novel approach to the study of cultural nationalism through an analysis of the tea ceremony in Japan, showing how the cultural nationalism of the intellectuals and the meanings they attach to certain practices is imparted through the teaching and enactment of ritual practices.

K. SURAK, 'Nation-work: a praxeology of making and maintaining nations', in: *European Journal of Sociology*, 53/2 (2012) 171-204.

A summary of Surak's book *Making tea, making Japan: cultural nationalism in practice* (2012).

A. THOMPSON, 'Nations, national identities and human agency: putting people back into nations', in: *The Sociological Review*, 49/1 (2001) 18-32.

This article argues for more consideration of human agency in theories of national identity.

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